

MEMORIAL REMARKS FOR PRESIDENT EMERITUS CLARK KERR
President Robert C. Dynes
February 20, 2004
UC Berkeley

Thank you, Chancellor Berdahl, and good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a tremendous honor to be here and to pay tribute to a man who, more than any other individual, defined the central role of the public research university in the 20th century United States.

I have been asked to speak this afternoon specifically about Clark Kerr's contributions to higher education and to the University of California system. And, I've been asked to do so in five minutes or less. As a physicist, I would have to say that is a little like delivering an entire quantum mechanics course in five minutes or less!

Dr. Kerr's contributions do not simply reside at some remote location deep in our memories. His contributions are all around us, even today.

The University of California today is the leading public university in America. Many would claim it is America's leading university, period, and I am one of those who proudly makes that claim. Clark Kerr played a vital role in bringing us to this point. It would be hard to overstate his influence and impact.

As the United States emerged from World War II, a new mandate was taking shape for America's universities:

The GI Bill formed one piece of the mandate. Our universities were to become institutions serving very large numbers of people – ensuring that more people than ever before, from all walks of life, would have access to a college education.

The federal research enterprise formed a second piece of the mandate. President Roosevelt's science adviser, Vannevar Bush, had outlined a new paradigm in which universities would play the lead role in American research and development efforts. Universities now had an opportunity to become the nation's true centers of innovation. And while it may not have been fully understood then, economic development would follow that innovation.

And thirdly, public universities such as the University of California were to retain their original land-grant mission, serving the practical needs of the society around them.

It was Clark Kerr, as chancellor of UC Berkeley from 1952 to 1958 and as president of the UC system from 1958 to 1967, who provided the leadership to make the University of California **the model** for how a public university could meet this new mandate and thereby play a larger role in American life than ever before.

As near as I can tell, Clark Kerr was able to grasp the various pieces of the mandate, which truly were disparate pieces at the time; bring them together in a coherent vision; and work with the faculty and the rest of the UC community to make it a reality.

As a result, the Kerr era truly was an academic golden age for the University of California. UC Berkeley, long one of the nation's leading universities, for the first time in 1964 was named the "best balanced distinguished university in the country" in a ranking by the American Council on Education.

The Kerr era also was an era of growth – and of sensible planning for that growth. Three new UC campuses – at San Diego, Irvine, and Santa Cruz – were developed under Dr. Kerr's leadership. They all became centers of major academic accomplishment, and they were the last UC campuses to be built for 40 years.

And finally, the Kerr era was an era of new promise for California and its people. Dr. Kerr took the lead in developing a Master Plan for Higher Education that guaranteed – for the first time anywhere on the planet, as far as we can tell – a high-quality college education to all high school graduates who sought one. A bold stroke for educational opportunity!

These things that Clark Kerr worked so hard to achieve for the University of California of his day are the things we value most about the University of California today. Academic excellence and accessibility truly are his enduring legacies.

And the manifestations of these two things are, literally, all around us today – in our students, in our faculty and staff, in our graduates, and in this university's deep, daily impact on the health, economy, social welfare, and cultural fabric of California.

As our state faces a new era of budget cuts and enrollment reductions, I think it is worthwhile to recall the era of Clark Kerr and reflect on the things a society can accomplish when it makes public higher education a priority. We have the greatest of foundations to build upon here in California; today, we need to make sure we do not let that foundation crumble.

In closing, let me say that Clark Kerr faced his share of challenges, and his leadership was tested many times. What he brought consistently to those challenges were his generosity, his humanity, his commitment to principle, and his vision – always his vision for helping people resolve their differences peacefully and for making the University of California an even better place.

I believe the legacy of Clark Kerr continues to call out to us. It calls on us to meet the highest standards of institutional excellence and personal conduct. It calls on us to anticipate the future and to prepare for it with bold ideas and resolute optimism. And it calls on us to work, always, to create a better community and better selves.

Thank you very much.