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By Sheldon Rothblatt (Editor)
Foreword by Varthan Gregorian
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This reflective work on Clark Kerr, his times, his historical significance, his legacy, and the fate of his accomplishments during the past half-century is especially to be welcomed, on four counts:

After a lifetime of recurrent adulation and vilification, the appreciation of Kerr's historical accomplishments has solidified into the appropriate view that he was the most creative and outstanding leader of higher education in the 20th century.

The editor, Sheldon Rothblatt, is the ideal person to bring together this current assessment – most eminent historian of higher education, career-long citizen of Kerr's University of California, and friend and confidant of Kerr over several decades.

The contributors, who will be identified in this essay, are outstanding scholars and thinkers, knowledgeable about Kerr and his work and the recent history of higher education generally. Rothblatt's selection of this cast guaranteed that the scope of the book is international, not parochial.

There are tangible historical signs – and much hysterical dread – that Kerr's world, as enunciated in *The Uses of the University* (1963) and embodied in the California Master Plan for Higher Education, is endangered, perhaps crumbling, over the past decades under the weight of adverse historical forces. It is most important to address and evaluate the historical evidence as well as the significance of that evidence, 50 years later. This book makes many contributions to unraveling the questions posed by the unhappy diagnosis.

1 Recapitulation

The volume defies simple summary, so I present a very general overview, then take up some selected themes. In an appreciative Foreword, Vartan Gregorian

places Kerr's intellectual and institutional innovations in historical context, reviews his stormy history in the University of California, and assesses his crowning achievements in striking a balance between democratization of access and maintenance of academic excellence.

The first chapter is Rothblatt's remarkably sensitive exploration of the many Clark Kerrs inhering in that exceptionally complex man. His account ranges through Kerr's personal character, values, scholarly preoccupations, philosophical outlook, interpersonal style, and organizational skills. Especially illuminating is his account of the tension between Kerr the modern-bureaucratic-rational-managerial-multiversity man and Kerr the romantic devotee to the traditional collegiate community – a tension never resolved by Kerr himself.

Two excellent chapters follow: Arthur Levine's first-hand account of the accomplishments of the Carnegie Commission and Council, which Clark Kerr led and engineered for nearly 15 years (1957–1980) after he was discharged from the University of California, and Patrick Callan's superb account of the accomplishments of California's Master Plan for Higher Education, its historical travails, and (in Callan's estimation) the systematic and definitive undermining of its principle of universal access to higher education, now in "disarray" (p. 80).

At this juncture the scene shifts from California to higher education in other parts of the world, selectively comparing diverse adaptations and responses to the conditions of the 1950s and 1960s and, in some cases, their subsequent trajectories. For Chapter 4, David Breneman and Paul Lingenfelter interviewed 10 educational leaders and scholars from almost as many states in the United States and found a similar pattern: The Master Plan for California made noise throughout the nation, but local cultural, institutional, and political forces guaranteed that the states in question established systemwide coordination machinery remarkable for its variability and its differences form the California solution.

Chapters 5–7 are European in orientation. Michael Shattock contrasts the Master Plan with the famous Robbins Committee report in the United Kingdom in 1965 and traces the ad hoc adaptations of British higher education in the context of an extremely competitive history among different classes of institutions. Guy Neave, in a complex historical analysis, demonstrates the heavy hand of values tracing to the French Revolution as well as the unchallenged supremacy of the state-administrative apparatus and the power of privileged institutions in both initiating and blunting reforms. And finally, Thorsten Nybom, the independent-minded Swedish scholar, develops a strongly worded, extremely pessimistic diagnosis of the "disintegration" of European higher education (concentrating on Sweden and Germany) in the past 40 years, driven mainly by its subordination to political goals and processes.

Chapter 8, by Ted Tapper and David Palfreyman, is on the University of California campus at Santa Cruz, Clark Kerr's special dream (and equally special disappointment) of implanting a thoroughly collegiate campus in the University of California system (inspired by visions of Oxbridge and Swarthmore and to a lesser extent by the 4-year liberal arts colleges in general). The great preoccupation of the authors (as was Kerr's) is with the forces external and internal to the campus that defeated this model, although they hesitate to use the word "failure" and acknowledge the continuing vitality of that campus in the University of California system. I will make a more extended comment on Santa Cruz later.

The final chapter is a revealing essay by David Gardner, one of Kerr's successors as president of the University of California system. Among all the authors, Gardner knew Kerr longest and best. One of the chapter's engaging features is his assessment of Kerr in the contexts of three notable earlier presidents: Gilman (1872–1875), Wheeler (1899–1919), and Sproul (1930–1958). The most circumstantial of these is Sproul, under whom Kerr served (and rankled). Gardner develops a most fair-minded comparison and contrast between Sproul and Kerr as leaders. One of his most penetrating insights – in the context of his (Gardner's) general admiration – is that Kerr, with his "natural inclinations" toward scholarship, shyness, and privacy, inadvertently "let slip" the solid support, even love of the University on the part of external political constituencies that Sproul had captivated with his public, hail-fellow-well-met style.

That erosion disadvantaged Kerr as political crises began to engulf the University in the 1960s. I would add to this another point, to which Gardner alludes and which I noticed as a young faculty member in the 1960s: With the development of a systemwide office, the establishment of new campuses, the decentralization of the Academic Senate and the library system, and the imposition of the quarter system as a common academic calendar, numbers of the Berkeley faculty experienced alienation, disaffection, and antagonism toward Kerr for downgrading Berkeley's special flagship status. (In 1965, one embittered faculty member remarked to me, only a little bit in jest, that the Free Speech Movement would never have happened if University of California, Los Angeles, had not been given independent status in the first place!) Gardner's "Postscript" (pp. 231–236) – based on Kerr's experience in the 1960s and his own in the South African divestment crisis of the 1980s – on the proper involvement (better, noninvolvement) of universities vis-à-vis larger political enterprises in society is a model, if frequently violated, statement of right principles.

2 Fathoming Kerr the Man

Because this volume focuses on Kerr's historical place, many of the authors said something about him as a human being. Some knew him very well and were fascinated by the man. In reading the book, I was struck immediately by how diverse their descriptions were. I decided, as a little exercise, to direct my attention to this feature and listed the descriptive nouns and adjectives that accumulated as I read along. Nouns applied to him reveal that he was an idealist, realist, moralist, pluralist, pragmatist, meritocrat, hard-headed rationalist, true academic, scholar by temperament, old-fashioned humanist, good listener, ascetic, self-starter, and keen fighter.

The adjectives were even more mystifying. Kerr appeared to have a personality that was at once self-disciplined, self-effacing, isolated, reserved, soft-spoken, reluctant socially, shy, reluctant to put himself forward, understated, deliberative, easily approachable, analytical, learned, forward looking, farsighted, innovative, never trendy, full of energy, devoted to work, prompt, courageous, sensitive, shrewd, resolute, decent, honest, generous, humorous, nimble, and indestructible. As another of Kerr's colleagues and friends, I could add even more to the lists (such as diplomatic, persuasive, thoughtful, and kind).

What to make of this collective character sketch? Most of the words are adulatory, but one would expect that from this list of appreciative scholars in such a book. (Ronald Reagan and J. Edgar Hoover would produce another, demonic list.) Beyond that positive effect, however, one has to ask whether Kerr could possibly have been all these things and manifested all these facets. Unreasonable as it might seem, it struck me that one could document *every one* of the descriptors with supportive empirical evidence (some of the authors do), even though the list as a whole contains contradictories. Kerr himself was a "man of many sides" (Rothblatt, p. 39). One of his great strengths as a leader was his extraordinary range of outlooks, talents, and skills. All attempts to pigeonhole him flounder.

3 The Travels of the Master Plan

One special theme recurs in many of the volume's essays. It can be expressed in the form of a question: "Why wasn't the remarkable Master Plan in California emulated in other higher-education systems?" All the non-California authors address that chapter explicitly, and some others pick up the theme. (The authors of Chapter 8 express the question in reverse when they ask why Oxbridge could not be emulated in Santa Cruz.) I was so taken with this preoccupation that I

asked Rothblatt whether he asked his authors to consider the question, and he assured me he did not. The general answer to the question is that the Master Plan did not travel well and a lot of good analysis goes into the historical reasons for this "non-happening," different in the diverse historical settings.

Here is my three-sided reading of this complex issue of institutional diffusion (or transfer, or convergence). First, in the crucial period of the late 1950s and 1960s, the higher-education systems of the rich democracies faced a series of *similar* if not identical problems:

- a tremendous pressure to *expand* capacity and access, dictated by changing demographics and pressures to increase access from classes and groups previously denied;
- the corresponding need to generate additional *resources* to sustain expansion;
- the need to contain the *competition* (both for finances and status) among different classes of higher-education institutions;
- the need to sustain and/or augment *excellence* in research and training, both as a means of continuing academic traditions and as a means of improving the performance of nations in an increasingly competitive economic and political world;
- the need to *regulate* and *coordinate* the entire enterprise of higher education;
- the need to secure a level of *autonomy* for institutions of higher education in relation to the state and other political forces.

The Master Plan for California was a dramatic, all-at-once, concentrated answer to *all* these imperatives, and that answer is a large part of its genius. (Rothblatt, Callan, and Gardner together give us a convincing narrative of this story.) Because many other states and countries were facing similar exigencies, this historic accomplishment would seem to have lent itself to diffusion and adoption by others.

Second, as many contributors commented, outsiders everywhere *took notice* of California's stroke, sometimes studied it, and perhaps envied it. This attention reached its climax in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report on California education in 1990. After all, the Master Plan was a creature of supreme political and institutional accomplishment, an instrument both comprehensive and simple, a personal coup for its leader, and a product esthetic in its drama and elegance.

Yet, third, the Master Plan was scarcely emulated institutionally outside California's boundaries. In an evident exaggeration, Nybom says he found "almost no indications" that Clark Kerr "played even a minor role in the sometimes major changes in higher education policy that took place in many European countries during this period" (p. 164). Author after author details how national,

regional, and local pride was a deterrent to adopting ("The Empire State does its own thing," p. 89), and how cultural traditions, established bureaucracies, entrenched interests of existing parties, and the blow-by-blow of national and local politics combined to react uniquely – and in a non-California way – to all the common problems and to the availability of an exciting outside model.

A knowledgeable comparative social scientist might well ask "Why all the fuss about institutional emulation?" By now we know that it rarely happens, despite the scholarly traditions of "cultural diffusion" in anthropology and societal "convergence" of developing societies in modernization theory (Kerr was identified as a proponent of the latter in his own studies of industrialization). Ask any student of the spread of technology, trade union models, civil service systems, and social movements, to say nothing of democracy, and you will get a historically informed account of resistance, local adaption, and ad hoc political and cultural fashioning. In all events, the national and international history of the Master Plan is yet another confirmation of this principle.

4 The Santa Cruz Enigma

A few additional comments can be made on the "reverse" case of the importation of the collegiate experiment as the University of California, Santa Cruz. The extreme fascination with that campus was determined by several historical circumstances. First, its creation was such a dramatic gesture, a sharp deviation from the juggernaut of gigantic bureaucracy that had long since transformed American university life (and an apparent negation of the multiversity idea). Second, the experiment was Kerr's special darling; that fact added salience. Third, and subsequent to its establishment, it became a visible symbol of the apparently out-of-control counterculture of the late 1960s and 1970s; the public reaction this evoked was dichotomous – enthusiasm and horror. Finally, and most important, Santa Cruz symbolized to many the great, enduring romance that both modernity and postmodernity have had with *Gemeinschaft*, the hope of return to community in a world that has destroyed community. In the case of higher education, that romance has been with the idealized notion of the college with its high commitments, devoted faculty, simple community, and civilized consensual-collegial (not bureaucratized) governance.

At the beginning, the campus institutionalized the collegiate principle in a variety of ways. Residential colleges with provosts were established; required integrated courses were offered by the colleges; faculty appointments (and their budgets and evaluations for advancement) were split between the colleges and a Boards of Study (Santa Cruz language, borrowed from Cambridge University,

for a discipline-based department); faculty interaction with undergraduates was encouraged in various ways; and letter grades were abandoned in favor of faculty evaluations in qualitative essays. A pioneering and somewhat defiant "Santa Cruz culture" crystallized in the early years and generated both local self-congratulation and outside fascination (see Tapper and Palfreyman, pp. 189–190).

Yet that exciting experiment was nestled in an environment that proved hostile and, in the end, fatal. Most basically, it was embedded in a *system* of nine campuses, all of which were fundamentally committed to first-class research above all. This system was the arena for budget allocation, for politics of growth, and for status competition. Santa Cruz administration and faculty, however committed to the Santa Cruz ideal, could not resist the competitive pressure for graduate programs and graduate students, research centers, and funds for all of these. Pressures to produce research grew, and the tensions among faculty and between the research-oriented Boards and the teaching-oriented colleges erupted into periodic conflicts, most dramatically in cases of split recommendations for tenure.

As student vocationalism returned in the 1970s, pressure to restore letter grading mounted and was in fact adopted as an option. I myself experienced this pressure in a remote way. When I was director of the University of California Education Abroad Program for the United Kingdom/Ireland in the last 1970s, I was responsible for "placing" California students in various universities in the British Isles. More than once I received requests from admissions officers of those universities to translate Santa Cruz students' evaluative essays into grade point averages!

Student vocationalism, plus active hostility of parents to the counterculture, contributed to a season of decline in applications and resulted in a brief arrangement whereby some students who enrolled in Santa Cruz were guaranteed transfer to Berkeley after 2 years (an experiment tainting the campus with a humiliating community-college image). Such were the forces that led to the end of the uneasy marriage between Boards and the Colleges, the hollowing out of the latter, and the movement of Santa Cruz toward the model of a "normal campus," with, however, some tangible echoes of the exciting experimental past.

5 The Travails of the Master Plan

Those authors who commented on the long-term fate of the Master Plan were uniformly gloomy. Rothblatt summarized the "prominent if not universal opinion" that "the state's public institutions are not able to keep the promise of a place in higher education for all those willing and able to benefit from it" (p. 28). Gregorian pronounced the plan "no longer efficient and effective" (p. x). Callan

asserted "a growing mismatch between institutional priorities and the needs of the state" (p. 82).

What are the specifics of these general judgments? In the early 1990s, I wrote an essay (Smelser 1993) that discussed some "structural vulnerabilities of the Master Plan." Among these I stressed difficulties of coordination and governance, increasing costs, ambiguities of mission, and internal competitive forces. However, I focused conspicuously on the issue of "short-changing egalitarianism" and concentrated on the low transfer rates into the University and the struggles to diversify – very salient issues at that time.

All these themes returned with a vengeance in this volume. To cite the "reasons" for the Master Plan's current outdatedness, I list those itemized by Callan, who treated the topic most thoroughly and with the greatest passion. These include:

- the end of "universal access" of high school graduates, traceable mainly to taxpayer revolts, increasing population, increasing numbers of non-traditional students, competition from other demands on the state budget (welfare, health, K-12 education, prisons) that short-changed higher education; the failure to provide additional educational capacity; and savage budget cutting in the early 21st century. All these produced a diminution of places relative to qualified students.
- continued inadequacy of the transfer function.
- neglect of governance, culminating in the state's abolition of the California Postsecondary Education Commission in 2011.

Callan's conclusion, like mine 20 years earlier, is that "the egalitarian commitments of the plan ... were ... to prove the most fragile" (p. 79). In pondering this conclusion, one wonders exactly where to assign responsibility. Callan refers to "rigidities" and "lack of adaptive capacity" of the Master Plan, but in fact most of the consequences cited stem from the state's reluctance to take into account its demographics and economics and thus to fail to support and expand the system and to hack away at it during increasingly rough budgetary times. In the end, it is perhaps more accurate to say that California has failed the Master Plan than to say that the Master Plan has failed California.

References

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