

## AN INTERVIEW: Clark Kerr

*Clark Kerr served as chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, from 1952 to 1958, and president of the University of California from 1958 to 1967. He presided over the launching of three new UC campuses—Irvine, San Diego and Santa Cruz—and is generally regarded as the principal architect of the California Master Plan for Higher Education. The interviewer is Patrick M. Callan, president of National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.*

**Patrick Callan:** As you think about the situation the state of California faced in 1960 and what we're looking at in the 1990s, what seem to be some of the differences and some of the similarities?

**Clark Kerr:** I think one of the biggest differences is that in 1960 we were a very prosperous economy nationwide and particularly in California. In the 1990s, we've had this prolonged nationwide recession, and California is in considerably worse shape than the rest of the country. I'd say that's really the biggest difference.

In terms of similarities, we are facing another tidal wave of students about as large or maybe even larger than the 1960s.

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Proportionately, it's not nearly as large, but there's another tidal wave coming. Now, in the 1960s we also had the problem of the tidal wave of students, but we didn't have the problem of lack of resources. In the 1990s, and looking ahead, we will have both the tidal wave and a problem of resources, so it's much more difficult.

**PC:** As you look at the financial resources versus

the student tidal wave that's coming, do you see this as a short-term, recession-related issue that we'll naturally pull ourselves out of, or as a long-term problem?

**CK:** I see it as a long-term or at least a medium-range set of problems, at least to the year 2010. The big question mark is going to be, how much will productivity recover? In the 1960s we were increasing productivity nationally at the rate of three percent per year, which is an enormous rate. It doubled productivity every 25 years. Then we went down to two percent, then one percent, and some years we went down

to zero.

Now, if the economy could pull back to increasing productivity by two percent a year—not the three percent of the 1960s, that was unusual, but around two percent—then I think we would have the resources to take care of what we envisioned in the Master Plan for Higher Education.

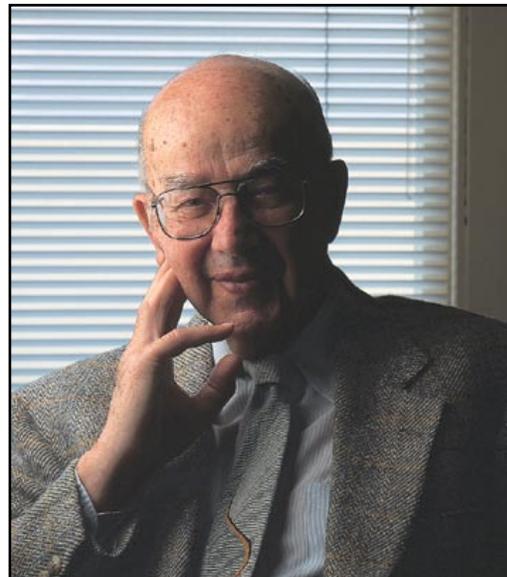
However, there are now more competitors for these additional resources than there were then. We have an aging population, we have a whole generation of young people, and we need to take care of them, and lots of other things coming in, too. But with a two percent annual productivity increase, I think it's a do-able situation. At the one percent growth rate of the 1980s, it might not be do-able. At three percent, we'd be in clover.

**PC:** Turning to the Master Plan, what do you think was essential about it? If we have difficult times in the 1990s and the first decade of the next century, what should we try most to preserve?

**CK:** The big thing of the Master Plan was to agree on some reasonably clear-cut differentiation of function. That was intended to make possible universal access for high school graduates and people who were otherwise qualified, to greatly increase the supply of people in the essential occupations of business managers and engineers and teachers and so forth. And, at the same time, to carry on professional-level training of the highest quality and research of the highest quality.

Through this differentiation of function, the community colleges had a reasonably clear assignment, and the state colleges had a clearer assignment than they chose to effectuate.

The state colleges were really assigned to take care of the polytechnic needs of modern industrial society—the need for production engineers, production managers, and so forth. The demand for these people has been expanding faster than the need for universal access or the



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need for high-level research or professional training. Rather than follow that assignment, however, the state colleges and universities chose to pursue the Holy Grail of the Ph.D. I think they would have been much better off if they'd accepted their polytechnic assignment at that time than going in the direction they did.

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Anyway, the effect was to provide more opportunity in an increasingly egalitarian society, to have more polytechnic training in a society that is more and more a polytechnic society, and then, third, to have basic research and professional training, all done well by having different segments concentrate on different parts of it.

And I might say that, for a while at least, California was offering more equality of opportunity than any place else in the world. I think we could argue that with the University of California, Caltech, Stanford and USC, we were offering as high a quality of basic research and professional training as any part of the world, too. The one place where we fell down somewhat, and where the Japanese and Germans were moving ahead fast, was in the polytechnic area.

**PC: How important is the accessibility of the system? Some suggest that the way to deal with the financial pressures is for California higher education simply to serve a smaller percentage of the population than it has in the past.**

**CK:** I think that would be a mistake in the long run. I think there's an obligation to the polity, to the political society, to give people, whether they want to take advantage of it or not, some chance to move up in society, which these days really means getting something more than a high school education.

Now, if that doesn't pay people economically, they won't necessarily do it. But I think we have to provide this sense that there's an opportunity to go to college if you want to and if you think it's going to pay for you. Also, to operate as a citizen and as a consumer in the modern society takes a lot more skill than it once did. People are advantaged in the conduct of their lives by having education beyond high school, and not just in terms of getting jobs.

The expanding part of the labor force has been in the areas of technical training, administrative positions, professional positions, scientific positions. That's been going up all over the world. In countries like the United States, Sweden and Germany, 30 percent of the employed population is in these high-level skilled areas. And that's going to go up, not down.

I think there will be a need and a demand for higher education and higher levels of education across the board, for political and economic interests both. So I don't think we should shut down opportunity. I think it's much more important to make good use of our resources and not just say we're going to add more of what we're already doing and

make it a problem about money alone. I think it's a question of some more money, but also much better use of the resources we have.

At the present time we have so many inefficiencies. The senior year in high school is a goof-off year, a year out of your life. We have an awful lot of duplication among our institutions of higher education in what they supply. We allow people to drag on their undergraduate careers five and six years. Ph.D.s six, eight, twelve or more years. I also think inefficiency is caused by the flight from teaching. I don't think the flight from teaching has done very much to increase the quality of research in the United States, but it certainly has reduced the use of faculty talent on the training side.

So I would say, keep the doors open. If people don't think it's going to pay them to walk through those doors, they won't do it. We should say we are going to keep those doors open, particularly with new minorities coming along, and we aren't going to finance this entirely with new funds, we're going to finance it very substantially by better use of our existing resources.

**PC: So it sounds like you are saying we have a lot of self-searching to do before we start turning away students.**

**CK:** But more before we start saying, "If you don't give us more resources, we won't take any more students." Before we say that, I think we have to explore very thoroughly whether we're making the best use of the resources we have, and I do not think we can prove that.

**PC: So the reduction of opportunity is the last resort.**

**CK:** Right. I'm not saying everybody is going to use that opportunity.

**PC: No, and that's never happened in the past either.**

**CK:** It's never happened in the past. But I just think it's very important for domestic tranquility for us to keep the doors open. I just think it would be disastrous, particularly at this stage of demographic change in California and the nation, to say, all of a sudden, we're going to close doors to opportunities which were open for the population as it was composed in times past, but they're not open to the new population.

**PC: It also sounded like you were saying that at least a substantial portion of the resources to meet these new needs are already in the system, and we have to find them and use them better.**

**CK:** Yes, I must say as a broad generalization that we ought to be able to find within higher education at least a third of the necessary additional resources

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by better utilization over the next several years. Now, that's a broad generalization, but I think one could give some reasons why it's not an impossible figure.

**PC: Someone said it was a set of civic values in the state at large and inside the higher education community—a shared concern about the future—that was the necessary condition that made the Master Plan possible.**

CK: Yes.

**PC: How do you assess the health of those values today?**

CK: Well, at that time I think we had more concern about the future than we do now. We were looking further ahead. At the present time, I think there's too much of a tendency to look at it year by year. In the Master Plan, we

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were planning ahead to the year 2000.

And we weren't that far off in estimating what was necessary and what we had to accomplish to make it possible.

I think then we were looking on a longer-term basis.

The state and the nation and higher education were less fractionalized than they are today; there

was more of a sense of common concern. American society has become so much more fractionalized in all parts of it in the intervening years. Not only right and left, but by gender and by ethnic and racial status and so forth. We were looking longer term, we were looking more broadly at the overall public welfare, and we were a more united people.

It was a period, also, of a certain amount of optimism, and that optimism was a kind of grease to the wheel. We thought things were getting better, they were going to keep on getting better. What we were doing we could accomplish it together. It was not a zero-sum game, it was a game where all of us were going to benefit.

Now I have more of a sense of pessimism about the future. Can we accomplish what we'd like to accomplish? Really, in the '60s, it was much more a feeling that if we want to do it, then we can do it. And now there's more doubt. And that's disabling.

**PC: So the longer-term perspective, the sense of the common good, and some sense of optimism—those are the preconditions that allowed us to carve out that solution in the 1960s. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but are you suggesting that those are probably some of the preconditions we'll need to rediscover?**

CK: If we can, yes. If we can. When you grew up and matured in the United States during the period I did, you saw that we overcame a great depression, the worst depression in American history. We met the challenge of Hitler in World

War II. We went through a period of the greatest prosperity the United States has ever known. We did for 45 years stand off the challenge of Communism, not only on our behalf but on behalf of all the free world.

So out of that background there was a feeling of, well, if you make up your mind to do it, you can do it. And that encourages you to go ahead and take your chances and do your thinking. But for generations that haven't had the same experience of success with the American system, it becomes a little tougher for them to grasp it. It doesn't mean it's less necessary, it just becomes a little tougher. ♦