
PROLOGUE

'Ole Miss' Raiding Party Counts Coup in Oklahoma

Only in the world of fishermen is it fashionable to talk about the big one that got away. In academic circles, we prefer to shy away from anything that hints of rejection. Occasionally, however, one of the University's shooting stars captures such a major prize at another institution that all you can say is "Bravo!" Such was the case a few weeks ago when a bunch of Mississippi raiders came to town and went away with a new chancellor named R. Gerald Turner.

No one was really surprised. Since Turner came to OU from Pepperdine five years ago, first as the executive assistant to President William S. Banowsky and later vice president for executive affairs, it was only a matter of time until some other university discovered that he was presidential material. Apparently the 13-member College Board that governs Mississippi's system of higher education felt that Turner at 38 had waited long enough to become one of the youngest major university presidents in the country.

The job which Turner performed for Banowsky could not have been better preparation for a presidency. Given the difficult role of right-hand man, Turner worked most often behind the scenes, fielding requests and complaints, smoothing ruffled feathers and mediating between the special interest groups at work on two large campuses — faculty, students, regents, administrators — he even played liaison in the delicate area of intercollegiate athletics.

Turner is nobody's "yes" man, but he has a way of saying "no" that leaves all parties with their sensitivities intact, probably because his own personal integrity is never in doubt. In a day in which "nice guy" often is considered faint praise, Turner has managed to return that description to respectability.

A birthright Texan — from the un-

likely town of New Boston — Turner earned a B.A. in psychology from Abilene Christian University and a M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. Perhaps his years in California helped offset this early training, but during each of the last five football seasons, he has demonstrated his adaptability at the OU/Texas game by sitting on the correct side of the Cotton Bowl and somehow managing to remain seated when the UT band broke into "The Eyes of Texas, etc., etc." By comparison, transporting his Southwestern brand of drive and practicality to the Old South will be no challenge at all.

Located at Oxford with a medical center campus at Jackson, the University of Mississippi is a school long on tradition, whose alumni take their alma mater involvement seriously. The major issues at "Ole Miss" — declining enrollments and the absence of a viable private funding program — should present more opportunity than problem for the new chancellor. Turner's rapport with students is excellent, and his career at OU has coincided with one of the most successful fund-raising programs in America.

As is the case whenever a new chief executive is chosen from outside an institution, the Mississippians were eager to know all about this fellow from Oklahoma. The hometown newspaper dispatched a reporter to discover the "real" Gerald Turner, while "Ole Miss" administrators flooded the OU switchboard with calls to their counterparts in Norman for tips on working with their new boss.

The reporter seemed to echo the incredulity of several of the callers when he finally asked, "You all seem to like him, but doesn't he have any faults?"

After a moment's thought, his source replied, "Well, after all, he isn't a saint, so I'm sure he has faults. I just don't know what they are."

-CJB