

THE THOMAS JEFFERSON AWARD TO JAMES PEACOCK
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

April 1995

There are times in the life of any human institution which demand greatness. Thomas Jefferson gave us that at the birth of our nation through his political acuity, his sense of public service, and his universal brilliance. We have been the beneficiaries of greatness in our time and in our place by our friend and colleague, James Peacock, and we honor him today with the 1995 Thomas Jefferson Award.

Peacock graduated magna cum laude with high honors in psychology from Duke and from Harvard with a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology. He overcame that burden of the former to become one of our truly outstanding scholars, gaining international acclaim in social anthropology. He has research interests in East Asia and his first book, Rites of Modernization: Symbolic and Social Aspects of Indonesian Proletarian Drama, in 1968 has been hailed as a modern classic. His focus has been on Indonesia but he has extended his interests to North Carolina and the American South publishing with Ruel Tyson, Pilgrims of Paradox: Calvinism and Experience Among Primitive Baptists in the American South, in 1989. His importance to his profession becomes clear when it is noted that members of the American Anthropological Society chose him to be their president from 1993 to 1995. He has served as visiting professor at Princeton and Yale and on leave for a year with a Guggenheim Fellowship and Kenan Leave at All Souls College at Oxford. He is Vice President of the American Society for the Study of Religion and is the recipient of the 1995 Mahatma Ghandi Award of the College of William and Mary.

Jim Peacock has been a leader devoted to the University in ways and to a degree that few have. He served as faculty chair of Anthropology from 1975 to 1980 and again in 1991 when he was elected Chair of the Faculty. That election was timely in the life of the University and continues to be so. It was Peacock who breathed life into the Executive Committee of the Faculty Council and with it created a faculty-based agent of action and means for change. It was his Executive Committee that became adviser to the Administration on budgets and planning, which took up the cause of salary inequities, and which brought the Faculty into the land use plan.

It was Peacock who devoted himself tirelessly to his Faculty and to his university and set a standard of leadership that will inspire those who follow. Peacock was a bridge builder helping calm the passions evoked by the Black Cultural Center through quiet persuasion and rapport. He reached out to the staff and they rewarded him with the first Employee Forum Community Award for improvement in Faculty-Staff relations.

It was Peacock's Executive Committee and Peacock's leadership that opened a new chapter in faculty involvement, the direct approach to the General Assembly. It was a time for help and a time for leadership, and he was there. He was there to cajole and explain: on excellence and continuance, on the realities of competition and salary, and above all, on the importance of the University. He was there and still is, our leading advocate to a public that has much to hear.

We have the honor now of honoring Jim Peacock with the Jefferson Award. His playing field may be smaller than Mr. Jefferson's, but it has the same parts -- political acuity, public service and brilliance.

Thomas J. Meyer