

# John B. Turner

For compassionate people, compassion is an active word. It requires not simply an inner lament for the suffering of another, not simply a heart that recoils at injustice, not simply the hope for a brighter day for everyone. Compassion requires doing. Dr. John Turner is a compassionate man. He is a doer.

The nature of the challenge has never inhibited his drive to prevail. In his college days at Morehouse, he relished the positions on the football team that, common sense would say, he was too small to play. Playing guard and tackle, he went nose-to-nose with the big men, never flinching. Answering his country's call during World War II, he became an officer and a pilot in an Air Force not receptive to people of color.

As John was finishing his doctorate in social work at Case Western Reserve University, a buddy from Morehouse days, Leo Jackson, decided John's beautiful voice could make them both rich. Jackson became John's agent and, armed with recordings of John singing, landed a contract with a major record company. All they had to do now was travel the country to promote the recordings. Here, Jackson ran into an insurmountable obstacle: John's compassion.

For John, the potential for money and fame that lay before him paled in comparison to his burning desire to work for a better life for others. Social work was what he wanted to do.

Armed with his Ph.D., John joined the faculty of the School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western and, at the same time, was director of Welfare Federation Field Service in Cleveland.

Leo Jackson remained his friend. "We talked a lot about community issues," he recalls. "I didn't realize how much of what he felt I was absorbing. Reluctantly, I became an advocate. Next thing I knew, John had talked me into running for the Cleveland city council. I had had no interest in politics, but John's influence was too great to resist. And now I've served for 17 years as an appeals court judge and

was recently able to write one of the major decisions regarding the rights of children. I would never have been in that position but for John."

Over the years, John served as a consultant to the Urban League, won the Grace Coyle Award from Case Western for his contributions to the social work profession and to the communities in which he has lived and worked, was president of the National Conference on Social Welfare, and became dean of the Case Western school where he taught.

In 1974, he came to Carolina's School of Social Work as a William R. Kenan Jr. Professor and in 1981 became dean. He has specialized in the design and evaluation of programs in social services, community development, and the black minority. He founded the National Child Welfare Leadership Center. Under his leadership, the School of Social Work, from which he will retire this fall, has received millions of dollars to support specific research projects and has been assured of funding for a new building. He is the 1992 winner of the Council of Social Work Education's Significant Lifetime Achievement Award.

Not long ago, Dean Turner chaired a task force on violent crime and drug abuse appointed by the mayors of Chapel Hill and Carrboro. As a member of that task force, Melvin Hurston, associate director of the UNC Hospitals, recalls that John "taught me that compassion moves us to help with the distress of others. He became my mentor in this."

By his demonstrated compassion, he has been a mentor to us all.