Nineteen Eighty (Not Nineteen Eighty-Four!)

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Remember 1938—the siege of Barcelona, the Anschluss, Munich? That was not long ago. A baby born that year became a voter this year. He also could have become a father. His son will become a voter in 1980, which will be much sooner than his parents think. Let us consider some of the developments in adult education that are both desirable and possible between now and then, assuming no major war and no major depression.

By 1980 the population of the United States will have reached 250 million, with 100 million under 20, 75 million between 20 and 45, 50 million between 45 and 65, and 25 million over 65. Life expectancy will be about 80. In terms of 1959 (when the dollar really amounted to something) the national income will be in the neighborhood of one trillion.

The American nation will become an educating nation. The number of pupils in high school and college could be double that of 1959. In all the professions and in most of the vocations, it will be taken for granted that competent people study continually to keep up with ever-faster developments.

The American nation will become an urban nation. Farm families will undoubtedly be considerably fewer than they were in 1959, with farm production up one-third over that year. Many cities will have fused; with much of the United States covered by strip cities, or interurbia. Regardless of place or occupation, the American people will have become urban in their thinking, tastes, and habits.

The American people have become increasingly world-minded. They have good reasons to be. The United States must get many

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essential raw materials from abroad. By 1980, five million Americans will work in other countries, and another ten million will travel abroad each year. Probably five million people from other countries will come to the United States each year for study or inspection.

In the United States mass communications will continue to grow in amount and coverage. There will be many more television and radio stations than in 1959. Every major university, many colleges, and many public school systems will have non-commercial television stations. It will be possible to receive live television broadcasts from every major center in the world all over the country, and the scenes of Moscow, Peiping, Rio, Cairo, and Calcutta will be familiar to the citizens of Bangor and Boise. Libraries, organizations, and homes will have developed collections of cheap, simple-to-play magnetic tapes of plays, operas, documentaries, and exhibits.

The American people will have a new conception of the universe. Just as expeditions from many lands explored Antarctica during the International Geophysical Year in 1958-59, so will expeditions from many lands now be on the moon. From television broadcasts, the American people will have gazed upon the earth from out there. They will have toured the landscapes of the moon, looked at the galaxies naked of our filming atmosphere. Their sons and daughters will be planning serious careers of exploration to other planets.

Those coming into maturity in 1980 may well be called the first modern generation; the first fully to grasp and accept the implications of the movements that began with what is called the Renaissance. In 1980 people are at home with complexity. They take change for granted. They have been educated for it. They will continue to educate themselves for it. They will educate their children to continue to educate themselves for it.

Continue to educate themselves; that is the key. By 1980 admittedly fewer of the older people will be doing so, although somewhat more of the middle-aged and considerably more of the young adults will be continuing their self-education, but all the schooling of young people will likely be designed to have them keep on educating themselves. It is predictable that the public attitude toward education will have markedly changed. Instead of being regarded as education in itself, formal schooling will be regarded as an initiation into education. And adult education, while still many things, will be regarded importantly as the real education of highly prepared, highly effective people. Even the words will change. More and more, “continuing”
education will be used. Perhaps in another generation all adjectives will be dropped, and education will mean the life-long process.

If such a change in attitude and conception comes about it will be through the adult generations. In the writer's opinion it can take place in no other way. If adults do not grasp the idea of continuing education for themselves, they can not instill it in their children; if their children's conception of education is static, their "education" will be quickly out-of-date, no matter how excellent their schooling. But this is not clear to many people, in fact, it is contrary to the popular thinking, even among educators.

The change can come about through cooperative efforts between leading adult educators and leaders in other areas of national life. What this amounts to is the discovery by many leaders in the areas of action that education is too important to leave to the educators, and the discovery by many educators that action is too important to leave to men of affairs. Specialists in many fields have also discovered that they needed to know more than their specialties, and lay people needed to know more about their specialties.

The crystal ball indicates that developments during the next two decades in education about education will move rapidly.

Universities, public schools, libraries, and other educational agencies, beginning with their own trustees, administrators, faculty, and staff members will develop the thesis that continuing education is not just for the other fellow, but is also for themselves, because of their heavy responsibilities.

The logic here is that because they have greater responsibilities, therefore, they are more in need of continuing education. One of their responsibilities is to inculcate the concept and establish the practice of continuing education, not by precept, but by example.

The logic can be extended, first to parents in their own lives. Since they have primary responsibility for their children, in the interests of their children's education they should continue their own education. The logic can be extended to the community.

Education will come to be regarded as not only a life-long process, but also a life-wide occurrence. Most people now think of education as being not only terminal in time, but also specialized in function and having been assigned to the schools, therefore ignorable by most other institutions and agencies. When both of these compartments begin to break down, adults concerned with the education of the young will begin to examine the educative affects of all influences,
and to consider how these can be turned to serve rather than to defeat their purposes.

This, conceivably, will be one of the main forces in the remarkable drive for community and regional planning and development which is already getting in orbit as well as being a major impetus in the changes that are coming in the commercial media of mass communications.

Adult educators are becoming full partners in education with the leaders in all of the major social groups—government, business, labor, agriculture, the professions and the vocations.

A logic will be working here too. The first step is to realize that even to keep up with developments in their own fields, adults must keep on learning. The second step is the realization that to be effective, adults—particularly those with heavy responsibilities—need to know more than their specialties. Adult educators can help here. The third step will be the realization that in a free society all institutions and agencies have both a responsibility for, and a stake in the welfare of, the individual on the one hand and the nation on the other. This is the level on which adult educators have made and can make their greatest contribution.

What is emerging is the concept of the educative society, all of whose members and institutions are concerned with what they are doing to help individuals become the best they are capable of, and what they are doing to help the nation fulfill its promise and its destiny.

Adult education will play a key role in reorienting formal schooling to the conception of initiation for continuing education; also in changing the conception of adult education. One aspect of this is the professionalization of adult education. Knowledge of the psychology of adult learning is advancing rapidly. Soon as much will be known about the several stages of adulthood as was known about the several stages of childhood in 1950, which was a good bit. Professors of adult education now are familiar and respected figures. In their work they avail themselves of all the human resources of the university, and the several parts of the university call upon them in their relationships with adult clientele. Other specially trained adult education specialists are increasingly to be found in public schools, community colleges, libraries, government, corporations, unions, the professions, and other voluntary organizations.

Each educational institution and agency plays its role, but one other agency and its role should be noted particularly—the library.
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It is an instrument for all the purposes of other institutions and agencies. It is also an institution in its own right in the community. It is close to the people; it is there to help them; it is also an active and skillful agent to promote the cause which it exemplifies—education for individual fulfillment on the one hand and the general welfare of society on the other.

All institutions and agencies together present wide opportunities for individual adults in the several stages of their maturity—25 to 35, 35 to 50, 50 to 65, and 65 plus.

In continuing education both the personal communications and the mass media of communications will likely be used much more effectively than now. Between 1903 and 1950, the ability to drive an automobile spread from practically nobody to practically everybody. From 1920 to 1950 the ability to make a public speech spread from very few to very many. Since 1950, the ability to engage in disciplined discussion as one among equals has spread from very few to many, and the time will come when it is as much taken for granted as is literacy.

Many institutions and organizations using many methods and media are helping to bring about the world-mindedness of the American people and the Copernican revolution in their attitude toward the cosmos. It is predicted that within the next twenty years there will be: first, programs to prepare adults for work or travel in other countries, and the reciprocal use of visitors from other countries to gain an understanding of their nations and their ways. Second, ways will be invented for relating personal study and discussion and the mass media.

The obstacles are many to these rosy and exciting possibilities. One is the prevailing public attitude, which is shared by most educators, that adult education is a kind of seedy activity, concerned with remedying deficiencies, making up lacks, earning more money, or painting figurines.

A second is the poor cooperation, or worse, between cooperative extension and general extension in universities; between universities and other adult educational institutions and agencies.

A third is the way the different agencies in adult education are developing their educational relationships with powerful social and professional groups without pattern at best and with jealous rivalry at worst, and to cater to the narrow interests of social groups.

And then there is scarcity of money, of course. But the money
exists. It is a question of how to release it. And this, basically, is a question of values. The American people have achieved an unparalleled range of choice. For most the question is not to get enough to live, but to decide the kind of life they want to live. As our goods increase, so do attempts to induce us to spend them, not for our own purposes, but for other people's purposes. These attempts become more skillful, and will continue to become so.

At the core is the question, What is the good life? As was said long ago, "What is honored in a country is cultivated there."