

Epilogue

What will the world be like in a hundred years? This is a question often answered by science-fiction writers. For as dramatic as the changes have been over the last ten decades, the next century will undoubtedly place us politically, socially, and technologically far beyond any conceived fiction.

Though nothing is certain, we do know that education has always been a prerequisite for evolving societies. As a result of this, numeracy beyond arithmetic will be essential for the average person and the growth of any future society which that person inhabits. Yet if fundamental changes do not occur in American education, we will continue to grow into a more polarized society. We will be a nation dangerously divided into know and know-nots, into understand and understand-nots, into knowing-how-to-learn and knowing-how-to-learn-nots.

We must fully appreciate that we no longer live in simple times. We do not engage in barter and few of us live off the land. Roman soldiers were paid in salt for their service; well into the eighteenth century, tobacco served as money; British coal workers were partly paid in beer until the late nineteenth century. But we live in a different era and ascribe to a different mind-set today. In the world of the “global village,” each person who shares in a participatory government takes on universal responsibilities. This is the first time in history that so many have the potential to be heard. Yet no democratic society can exist without an educated population.

The approaching new century will place greater academic demands upon each American, if we wish to continue living in a free society with a first-rate life-style. We cannot afford to allow the educational chasm between the members of our society to grow wider. If we do, future generations may inhabit a bizarre world, characterized by enormous technological sophistication with ever increasing mass illiteracy—a “brown age,” if you will. Such is the possibility if we continue issuing university degrees to adults who are fearful of seventh-grade arithmetic.

No society can fully mature without recognizing that each of its members are unique, and hence have different talents to contribute for the growth of the collective culture. If we succeed in making education relevant, if we embrace the whole person in learning, if education truly becomes universal, then the next century will be better for all of us.