

CHAPTER FOUR

THE OVERSTREETS DURING THE WAR YEARS

In 1939 Hitler's troops marched into Poland and the possibilities of the total collapse of democratic ideals and of freedom loving nations was very real. The quick victories of Fascist armies over an unprepared western Europe staggered and depressed the intellectual minds of the world. The very concept of "freedom" for both nations and individuals was in danger of being wiped from the globe. This demanded courage and leaders who would shore up the courage for the terrible conflict ahead. In England, Churchill was providing a new kind of leadership and asking people to find the strength "to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime." This was May 13, 1940 when Churchill, age 66 took charge of the war effort saying, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat."¹

In America, leaders were also trying to marshal support to help defend the democratic values. The Overstreets, as strong anti-fascists, contributed to this leadership and tried to help define America's values. One of the Overstreets' popular lectures of the period was entitled "America's Role in a World of Chaos." In a statement typical of the era, Harry Overstreet wrote "It's been a good life – and right now I am determined that the Nazi hoodlums shall not spoil it for those who come after me."²

They recognized the importance of adult education in providing adult leadership for the nation. During these years Harry and Bonaro became Research Associates for the American Association for Adult Education (AAACE), and together they wrote Leaders for Adult Education. Harry became President of the AAACE, continued as Trustee of Town Hall, joined the writers' group of The Committee To Defend America By Aiding the Allies and wrote Our Free Minds. Bonaro blossomed out with five inspiring books: Brave Enough For Life, American Reasons, Courage For Crisis, Freedom's People, and How To Stay Alive As Long As You Live. She became a popular figure nationally due to a page she wrote each weekend for a liberal newspaper called PM, and for her regular contributions and a column in the National Parent-Teachers Association monthly magazine.

The Overstreets' Easy Transition to Full-time Adult Educators

From the time of Harry Overstreet's retirement from CCNY in June of 1939, the Overstreets considered themselves to be full-time adult educators. In answer to an inquiry about

his becoming an adult educator, Harry explained that during the 1930s while carrying the full-time load of his regular work at the College he had increased his outside work in adult education to where it had become, almost without his intending it, a second full-time occupation. Thus, when he retired from the one occupation, he simply continued full-time with the second.³

One interesting opportunity came within little more than six weeks after Harry's retirement. The Overstreets were asked by the Board of the American Association for Adult Education to become Research Associates. They received a letter from Morse Cartwright, the Executive Director of the Association, indicating that "we should be very glad indeed if you would undertake a study of the professional education of teachers and leaders for various types of adult education."⁴ This study culminated in the book, Leaders For Adult Education
The AAAE Study and the Resultant Book

The Overstreets believed that one of the chief characteristics of a democracy was the latitude allowed for leadership. In a democracy, people are permitted to go their own way politically, vocationally, and intellectually and to find their own leaders. This allows many different leaders to exert social influence. But Harry and Bonaro believed it was vital to develop leaders who are skilled in promoting democratic principles and attitudes. They believed that educators are trained to integrate individual rights with social rights and progress with stability. And educational leadership for adults was as important as that for children.⁵ The undertaking was one of a series of studies issued by the AAAE in the social significance of adult education in the United States. A number of studies had already been published covering such areas as forums, museums, the public library, health education, motion pictures, and adult education councils among others. The AAAE believed it was important to tackle the problem of training individuals to be effective educational leaders of adults. The fear was that "leadership training in adult education was well-nigh nonexistent."⁶

For more than a year the Overstreets traveled throughout the country studying the selection, training and employment of leaders in the field of adult education. Contrary to the assumption at the beginning that very little training existed, their travels revealed a more optimistic picture. Their findings encouraged them to believe that there was a vigor and ingenuity in the field of adult education that was resulting in some effective leadership training

“characteristic of educators but using methods geared toward adult problems and adult psychology.”⁷

Leaders For Adult Education was presented in two major parts. The first part described the necessary qualities of the adult education leader as seen by the authors. The second part involved the scope of leadership they found throughout the country, together with the various methods being utilized for the training of these professional leaders. The Overstreets believed that one of the blessings of the adult education movement was that it did not begin as the cherished offspring of any institution or governmental agency. This is partially what contributed to its vitality and allowed it to develop in many different ways and to experiment with many different kinds of leader training.

They found that adult leaders were not limited to professional teachers but could be lawyers, doctors, factory foremen, businessmen, social workers, and so on. An effective teacher of adults has to be acceptable to adults and usually is “if he knows his job and has worked at it out in the world.” The ideal adult educator was a person who not only knew his subject well, and went on learning more about it, but was one who also went beyond the general training in the field of pedagogy. He or she must be both a “specialist” in a particular field with specialized and accurate knowledge of that field and also a “generalist” capable of seeing relationships and of thinking of people in terms of the full range of their wants and powers. The excellent adult educator sees facts, ideas, events and persons in their larger settings and shows the linkages between past and present and present and future; between one institution and another; between one place and another; between one idea and another. Moreover, the Overstreets were of the opinion that adult education leaders must have a firm “sense of community” which meant that they must have an understanding of the human resources of the community in which they were operating. They found that often the adult education leader was neither teacher nor discussion leaders but was the organizer and administrator. This person, too, must be a specialist-generalist because he not only sets a direction for the organization or institution but also must be knowledgeable about and responsive to the needs, concerns, and economics of the community.

The Overstreets summarized the four major qualities an adult leader must have as 1) he must himself want to go on learning; 2) he must have expertness in a particular area; 3) he must have a sense of relationships beyond his narrow specialization; and 4) he must have a sense of community which gives him the power to think and act “in terms of the real problems and resources of real

places where real people live.”⁸ Many of the other traits of the adult educator were too elusive to define specifically, but one absolute requirement, according to the Overstreets, was “a basic respect for human beings.” Many leaders theoretically respect others, but in practice they are very cautious in respecting the intelligence and maturity of other adults. Too often they try to keep discussion going in the “right” direction. To the Overstreets, this kind of “pretense” at free and open discussion was a “crime against the human spirit” and was counterproductive to the concept of adult education.

The Overstreets found that many of the adult educators with whom they spoke had acquired their skills by a trial-and-error on-the-job process. However, even those who were successful recognized a need for training to be set up to provide future leaders with the insights and skills which characterized the outstandingly successful leaders who had gained them by haphazard experience. Many organizations were involved in adult education (such as corporations, hospitals, prisons, associations such as the P.T.A. and League of Women Voters) that did not think of themselves as educational institutions.⁹ Harry and Bonaro looked at dozens of these organizations as well as formal educational institutions to learn the training methods they used. They found many different methods used in many different settings including conferences, summer sessions, staff meetings, internships and specific in-service training programs. The most flexible instrument they found for training adult leaders was the “course” itself, because it could be brief and highly specific or it could cover a wide range of interests. The most prevalent technique utilized was that of class participation through discussion.

There were several programs they found particularly impressive. One of the best was the one led by Lyman Bryson at Columbia University’s Teachers College. What made these courses unique was the range and interplay of ideas between students and staff and the way in which students tried to work out the implications and opportunities of their own jobs. A course in the history and philosophy of adult education was companioned by a course in techniques, which surveyed all of the communicative arts. There was also a course in community analysis and one in administration and supervision.¹⁰

Another successful program was the Harvard University Summer Session which incorporated many extracurricular activities for students enrolled in official adult education courses. After classes the students went to lectures or panels or concerts and studied the successful and unsuccessful techniques of the man or woman on the platform. The next day in

class they talked over what they had seen and then tried out the various techniques. The program became so successful that adult education courses were abolished from the summer curriculum and were incorporated into the academic program of the regular school year.

Because of the book's scope, the authors at times seemed to grope to define the adult education movement. Nevertheless, the book has been recognized as significant by later adult educators because of its attempt to determine the qualities that distinguish effective leaders of adults and the types of training programs most likely to prepare them. J. Roby Kidd found a number of the Overstreets' findings of importance, especially those dealing with "the different kind of learning competence" needed by both the teacher and the administrator and the four qualities essential to leadership.¹¹ In his book, Towards a History of Adult Education, Stubblefield noted that in this "small but important book. . . the Overstreets recognized that adult educators had a social role that transcended their institutional function, for the American society itself had a stake in this new endeavor. Adult educators were mediators between the forces of social change and the forces of social conservatism."¹² Cyril Houle also cited the book in discussing the importance of studying adult leaders.¹³

It is a useful book in terms of understanding the relationship of the Overstreets to the adult education movement. The book revealed the Overstreets as unabashedly missionaries for adult education. Both the study and the writing of the book reaffirmed for them the correctness of their decision to devote their efforts to the furtherance of adult education. As Harry wrote to Morse Cartwright in March of 1940:

Working upon it (the book) is an experience both delightful and tantalizing – the latter because we feel how much more there is to be done than we can possibly do; the former because our own minds are being continually stimulated by our contacts with workers in the field. I had no idea how exciting would prove this effort to pull together the many convictions regarding adult education leadership that have developed out of the many experiments of many people.¹⁴

Bertrand Russell, CCNY and the Furor in New York City

Although Harry had left CCNY and was happily pursuing his role of adult educator as a Research Associate for the AAAE, he was, of course, interested in who would be chosen as his replacement as head of the philosophy department at the institution where he had spent twenty-eight years. He was extremely proud that during his tenure the philosophy department had

become highly prominent in academic circles. Irving Howe wrote that the years between world wars “City College took on a legendary character” and no small part of that was the strength of the philosophy department.¹⁵

After an extensive search the choice was none other than one of the most eminent of all living philosophers, Bertrand Russell who accepted the position. This delighted both Harry and Bonaro. For Harry it was an affirmation of the importance of CCNY and for Bonaro it was a welcome addition because of the profound influence some of Russell's books had on her when she was a young college student. Bonaro wrote “Russell’s A Free Man’s Worship will always stand as one of the liberating events of my mental experience.”¹⁶ She had felt as though he was talking directly to her when he spoke of all mankind as being fellow sufferers and actors in the same tragedy – the long march before we vanished from sight. We all had little time, therefore none of us should be the cause of suffering but should be ready with encouragement for each other. She wrote “Russell told me how and why, be the universe good or bad or indifferent, I must throw in my lot with my own species.”¹⁷

Unfortunately, Russell’s appointment caused a stir of protest in some New York government agencies because, although Russell was world renowned as a mathematician and philosopher, he was also an “expounder of views upon social and political questions that often astounded and shocked his contemporaries. In particular, he held views on the relations between men and women [that]. . . are rarely expressed so lucidly and frankly.”¹⁸

Bishop William Manning of New York found Russell’s views offensive and exerted his powerful influence as widely as possible. Soon there were volatile arguments at the Board of Education and City Council meetings which posed an embarrassing crisis involving academic freedom for Mayor LaGuardia. A taxpayer’s suit brought about a court action that found Russell unfit to teach. Two thousand students at CCNY left classes to protest and there was a rally at Carnegie Hall. Harry phoned friends and wrote letters supporting both Russell’s appointment and the academic freedom of the university to make faculty appointments. John Dewey (who shared very few of Russell’s philosophical views) wrote a letter to LaGuardia expressing shock at the Mayor’s refusal to allow an appeal. On the other hand, the New York Times succumbed to pressure and expressed the view that Russell ought to have withdrawn voluntarily. It was not the

finest moment for either Mayor LaGuardia or for a newspaper that was supposed to uphold rights guaranteed by the first amendment.

Russell broke his silence in a letter to the Times in which he reminded them that the essence of a democracy sometimes meant people had to endure opinions other than their own. He wrote, “If it is once admitted that there are opinions toward which tolerance need not extend, the whole basis of toleration is destroyed.”¹⁹

The attacks on Russell were a great disappointment to Harry Overstreet who had spent a lifetime defending the principles of academic freedom and had championed the concept of open discussion on all issues. On May 29, 1940, he wrote to Russell that he had been highly elated when he learned that Russell was to be his successor. He wrote, “It seemed to me that the honor to the College was a signal one. When the barrage of narrow-minded fanaticism was let loose at you, I was profoundly shocked.”²⁰

Bertrand Russell’s reply on June 6, 1940 was equally gracious:

Thank you very much for your kind letter. I have not much hope of ultimately being permitted to lecture at C.C.N.Y., particularly in view of the skillful direction of mass hysteria into anti-liberal channels, which is a tour-de-force, as Hitler can hardly be regarded as Liberal.

The war overshadows everything at this moment, and one’s personal fate seems a matter of little moment.

Yours gratefully,
/s/ Bertrand Russell²¹

Overstreet was to remain disappointed. Nearly thirty years earlier he had fought for academic freedom and won in the case of Morris Cohen. Now in 1940 he fought for academic freedom in the case of Bertrand Russell and lost.

Russell went on to write a 440 page philosophical tome entitled An Inquiry Into Meaning and Truth. In the preface he stated with classical restraint “This book would have formed the substance of my lectures at the College of the City of New York, if my appointment there had not be annulled.”²² It should also be noted that in 1950, Bertrand Russell was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Harry Overstreet As President of AAAE (1940-41)

During this period of transition from college professor to full-time adult educator, and while engaged in the study of adult education leadership for the AAAE, Harry received a message which further validated his decision to devote his remaining years to adult education. In

March of 1940 Morse Cartwright wrote to Harry that the nominating committee had voted unanimously to place his name at the head of the slate to be presented in May for election as President of the Association.²³ In receiving the news, Harry wrote to Cartwright that he was deeply grateful for the honor because “there is no other body to which I feel linked by so many hands of interest and purpose as to the body of adult educators throughout the country. They more than any other, are the people with whom I feel myself a fellow worker in a perplexed age in a perplexed world.”²⁴ In May, at the national conference of the association, Harry was installed as president and gave the presidential address at the annual banquet. Although the presidency of the association was largely that of a figure head with responsibility for chairing the association’s board meetings and the sessions of the annual conference, it also led to even more frequent participation in state and local adult education conferences and workshops throughout the nation.

Typical of these functions was an Adult Education Workshop conducted at Claremont College (California) during the 1940 summer session. As reported in the daily paper, H. A. Overstreet “gave a spirited plea for a development of community consciousness through the adult education program.” He talked of the forces that were turning this country into an “urban jungle” – a land of strangers. He said “Adult education is a great movement for recapturing values of community life, to work out our problems together and to gain the enhancement of individual life which America means.”²⁵ Also on the program were David MacKaye, director of adult education at San Jose who spoke on “The Relation of Adult Education to the American School System,” and Bonaro, who spoke of leadership in the adult education movement.

In December, there was a three-day adult education conference in Springfield, Massachusetts with the timely theme of “Adult Education and National Defense.” Topics included such areas as “America’s Stake in the Present Conflict,” “Toward National Unity,” and attempts to grapple with such issues as “Are We Destroying Democracy In Our Efforts To Defend It?” There were dozens of participating speakers including Morse Cartwright, Lyman Bryson, Governor George Aiken of Vermont (later a U.S. Senator), Malcolm Knowles (then associated with the Y.M.C.A. in Boston), and E. M. Corbett, Director of the Canadian Association of Adult Education. Bonaro led some discussion groups on “Leadership Discovery

and Training,” and it was left for Harry to provide the conference summation at the end of the session.

The Overstreets’ enormous activity as lecturers continued throughout Harry’s year as President of AAAE. In many respects, they were now both in greater demand than ever before. The Adult Education Councils in metropolitan areas such as Chicago, Los Angeles and New York scheduled them for lectures in their regions. In addition, Harry continued in his role as a Trustee at Town Hall where both he and Bonaro assumed the additional responsibility of directing leadership forums and workshops.

Increasingly during this period Harry was invited to speak on the subject of national preparedness and defense. On December 12, 1940, he was one of the guest speakers on NBC’s “America’s Town Meeting of the Air.” The subject was “What Are We Preparing to Defend?” Harry was the opening speaker and very forcefully indicated “what we were *not* preparing to defend.” Uppermost on that list was “social discrimination:

I mean the denial of the Negro of the full rights of a human being; and I mean it particularly at this time when Jim Crowism is threatening to be the law of the army. . . . How can we, without utter contempt for our own hypocrisy, ask any human being to defend a country that treats him with contempt?”²⁶

He attacked the Ku Klux Klan, corrupt political machines and the “perpetuation of poverty in the midst of plenty.” Then he outlined the great democratic traditions we must act out for “to defend democracy we must act out democracy!” This included extending and enriching all educational opportunities “from infancy to adulthood.”²⁷

Early in 1941 Harry became a member of the writers’ group on the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies.²⁸ Among his fellow members were the poet Stephen Vincent Benet, historian Henry Steele Commager, publisher Norman Cousins, playwright Robert Sherwood, and such diverse writers as Carl Carmer, Clifton Fadiman, Henry Canby, and Rex Stout. The chairman was newspaper editor William Allen White. The committee was a group that early on recognized the dangers of Nazi power and American procrastination. Its purpose was to attempt to influence the American public to throw America’s resources and moral force into the conflict on the side of England and the Allies. The writers’ group recognized the dangers in the policy but this was certainly preferable to the shortsightedness of isolationist thinking which also had its followers.

The Committee issued a two-page letter addressed “To the Writers of America” which stated their belief that it was the duty of writers “to inform the people” by every means available of the dangers to the “survival of our institutions.” The publication asked people to write letters to local papers in support of the Lend-Lease Bill and similar measures which may follow, and to write articles for release to papers, journals, and college publications on related subjects with which they were most familiar.²⁹ Many advertisements were placed throughout the country with the most direct language possible – “Stop Hitler Now!”³⁰

The Overstreets and Their Principles

There were many recurring themes in the lectures and books of the Overstreets. One of the basic values they shared was the importance of the democratic process and the responsibility of the adult citizen to make it work. The focus on adult education was not an end in itself but a powerful tool to help fight poverty and discrimination of every type. Civil rights was an issue wherever they spoke long before it became a national issue in the 1960s. It was unacceptable to attack Hitler and Mussolini and Franco and accept intolerance at home. The Overstreets believed we must all try harder to live up to our ideals.

Racism in the United States was always a concern of the Overstreets and Harry often took the stand that the anti-Negro attitudes of the military establishment was immoral and an affront to democratic beliefs. This stand was not only in published articles but also in personal letters to legislators and others who had some influence in changing policies. He wrote a short letter questioning policy on August 26, 1942 to Mildred McAfee, President of Wellesley College and head of the WAVES, an organization of women in the Naval Reserves:

Must the Navy keep up its notoriously illiberal racial policy?
Many of us had hoped that in the WAVES a new policy might be established. I know that your own mind must be dead set against anything that perpetuates injustice. . . and I am sure you must want every war organization -- your own included -- to be completely free of the anti-democracy of race discrimination.³¹

Harry received a letter in reply on August 31 from President McAfee.

Off the record, I do of course deplore the Navy policy in regard to Negro officers. It is my understanding, though I find it in no official document, that Negroes are not admitted to officers' training schools although an occasional Negro has been admitted to Annapolis. . . I am writing this letter to you unofficially so that I can say that I know the matter is under consideration and that the whole question of racial

standing in the Navy is not being ignored. . . though I cannot send you as optimistic a message as I wish I might.³²

The war years brought much of Harry's thinking on racial problems to a head. Always opposed to intolerance, it became increasingly evident to him that democratic war aims were so much verbiage unless black people were given equal opportunity to share in the wealth of this nation. He became increasingly outspoken on the subject and published two articles in 1944 in The Saturday Review of Literature: "Images and the Negro" and "Negro Writer As Spokesman." These ideas were expanded on in the following year in "Racial Attitudes of the 'Liberal' North," "Dark Man's Burden," and "Mind of the Negro: Notes on the Effect of Environment Upon Intelligence" – all published in The Saturday Review.

The articles were well received in liberal circles. Among the many letters sent to the Saturday Review was one from Professor Alain Locke who was head of the Department of Philosophy at Howard University and who was described in the anthology, Black Voices, as "a major force and figure in the development of modern Negro American literature and culture."³³ Locke wrote to Saturday Review editor Norman Cousins:

. . . They are most timely and constructive, calculated, I think, to precipitate the increasing liberal concern of writers and artists who have wanted to do justice to the Negro and Negro subject-matter but have not seen quite clearly the objectives these articles set up for them.³⁴

Another letter to Norman Cousins came from William M. Cooper who was the Director of Summer and Extension Study at Hampton Institute in Virginia:

The two articles by Dr. H. A. Overstreet . . . constitute a very significant and timely contribution to our national and world problem of "racial conflict . . .

Dr. Overstreet seems to be on sound ground when he bases his discussion and recommendations on the premises (1) that race prejudice is not based upon truth or reason, but rather upon certain images and stereotypes; (2) that the images or stereotypes which form the basis for present day prejudice against Negroes are generally inaccurate and unfair.³⁵

Exercising his belief that open discussion of opposing views is a mature approach to problem solving, Harry engaged in an epistolary philosophic debate in the Fall of 1942 with one of his former students, Sidney Hook, who by then was a well-known Professor of Philosophy at New York University and one of the foremost authorities on Marxism. Hook, in an article in The Humanist, had been critical of democratic philosophers such as Overstreet participating in a conference with "theological primitives" who, according to Hook had

accused the liberals of being “responsible for totalitarianism” and who were guilty of “clerical fascism.” Overstreet wrote to Hook that he felt he was “unduly emotional” about the issue and stressed his own belief in the importance of free and open discussion. He wrote, in part:

How in the name of humanistic reasonableness are we to get anywhere in this cock-eyed world if we start by refusing to listen to people with whose metaphysical or theological views we don’t agree? . . . I find that I can listen to three days of theological talk . . . and come out even more strongly anti-hierarchic and anti-fascist than ever.³⁶

And, in a letter to John Dewey about the conference, he sounded the same note when he stated that what he liked about the Conference was “the courage to bring together men of the most divergent views – even about fundamentals – and let them fight it out. There’s something good and American about that.”³⁷

Hook replied to Overstreet’s letter that while he believed that Harry as an individual did not take “theological primitivism lying down” there were many in the conference that did. He argued that it was impossible to “make an intellectual synthesis of philosophies that are worlds apart on every fundamental issue” and hoped that he could convince Overstreet that the work of the Conference was “a threat to almost everything you have stood for since the days when, as a student in your class, I heard you talk on Socrates, Galileo, Bruno and the consequences of absolutism in thought, ethics, and politics.” Hook particularly was offended by Mortimer Adler’s attack on humanists and pragmatists.³⁸

Overstreet was asked by the editor of The Humanist, for his “reaction to Sidney Hook’s discussion of the Second Conference.”³⁹ In his response Harry reiterated the position he stated in his letter to Sidney Hook. “I am thoroughly in accord with Sidney in his criticism of the theologians he selects for castigation. But I am wholly out of accord with him in his attitude toward the Conference.” For the liberals to have followed Hook’s advice and “to gather our skirts about us and depart from the meeting” would have been “the height of illiberality.” However, he too shared Hook’s appraisal of Mortimer Adler. “Not even I knew that he could make such a vulgar ass of himself,” he had typed. But the carbon shows that Harry then crossed out “vulgar ass” and replaced it with the less emotional, “an exhibition of himself.”⁴⁰

In another letter to Hook, Harry wrote that he believed that the “talking out differences of view is a good in itself. I’m going to keep on believing that until some damned American

Fascist sends me to a concentration camp.”⁴¹ The belief in open discussion as one of the strengths of American democracy was an important value to Harry Overstreet throughout his life.

In March of 1943, Harry became an active member of the American Resettlement Committee for Uprooted European Jewry, and spoke at many meetings on its behalf as well as helping to find jobs for those who had fled fascism. Fighting anti-semitism was a particularly important cause to Harry. From the moment he had set foot in CCNY, Harry had been involved in fighting anti-Semitism. In a memo Harry wrote:

. . . the student body at City College was overwhelmingly Jewish. Also, it was overwhelmingly made up of students who came from homes where poverty was a day by day experience. I know something of what individual students suffered during the depression, and I felt a strong loyalty to them for their effort to get an education.⁴²

Both Harry and Bonaro energetically fought anti-Semitism and welcomed opportunities to encourage others to do so.

At the Laurelton Long Island Jewish Center on December 18, 1940, Bonaro was introduced as not only the “wife of that beloved teacher and speaker, Professor Harry Overstreet,” but as one who had “achieved an enviable reputation in her own right in the fields of adult education and personal psychology.” Bonaro spoke on the topic, “Democracy as a Personal Experience.” Some of the points she emphasized were that above all else, democracy is a basic conviction of the worth of human beings. Sadly too many of our democratic pretensions have existed in words rather than in habits of action. She felt it important to do all that could be done to help the Jews who were being forced from their homes by Nazism. She said we needed to begin to create new institutions – “outstandingly those we call adult educational. . . to exert the social influence that citizens of a democracy must acquire and exert if their participation in society is to be more than a polite fiction.”⁴³

Bonaro often spoke on “The Art of Gracious Living,” and on this subject noted that “You can’t be gracious on special occasions – it’s impossible to have one set of manners for important people and another for the unimportant folk – for both will recognize the fact.” She said that “graciousness consists in making as accurate responses as one can to other human beings in very specific situations in life.”⁴⁴ One example of both Bonaro’s own graciousness and her belief that one’s actions should support one’s convictions took place in December of 1940. She had taken

over the payments of the mortgage on the family farm in Geyserville, and the deed provided that after the death of her parents, she would own the farm. Harry had often written and spoken on the evils of absentee ownership and Bonaro was in complete agreement with him. In a letter to family attorney, John Condit, in California she wrote "I distinctly do not believe in absentee ownership either inside a family or outside – my husband and I now feel that the only sensible thing to do is simply to deed the farm straight across to my brother."⁴⁵ And so, as graciously as possible, the farm was given away as a Christmas present.

Lectures and Articles

Even during the years of the war the lecture schedules for both Harry and Bonaro continued to be heavy. There were many instances in which their schedules placed them in different cities and regions. Harry and Bonaro exchanged letters from hotels in one part of the country to hotels in another part. Whenever possible they arranged to work in the same cities or to meet for a few days' rest and enjoyment as they criss-crossed the country. They often exchanged ideas on their writings and lectures in their letters to one another as well as describing their adventures and new found friends.⁴⁶

More than ever the subject matter of their lectures varied widely. No one ever accused the Overstreets of limiting their audiences by speaking on only one topic. For instance, in October of 1940, Bonaro spoke on the characteristics of poetry to students at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. "The poet discovers meanings below the surface" she said. "He must give to the reader's mind concrete images to take the place of the abstract." She noted that the poet must have language to match his experience and this language must get across more than what is on the surface.⁴⁷

Her next lecture was entitled "Ways of Psychological Self-Help." Among other lecture topics during this period were "The Place of the Arts in Everyday life," "Being an Individual in Today's World," "The Enjoyment of Poetry," "A Personal Philosophy for Adults," and "Educating the Community for Democracy."

Harry also was busy lecturing throughout the country during this period, and he too lectured on a wide range of topics. Many dealt with the role of adult education in the community and nation. Included were such topics as "The Role of Adult Education in a Democracy," "Ways in which Ideas Become Actions," and "New Ways of Educating Adults for what Lies Ahead."

When lecturing at prominent conferences and events and during their travels in 1940-41 as Research Associates looking at the many different adult education efforts, the Overstreets were often interviewed by local newspaper reporters. At one such interview at the Boston Center for Adult Education, a number of interesting observations were made by the reporter for the Christian Science Monitor. The Overstreets were quoted as saying, "Adults are coming to realize that it is impossible to prepare in childhood to meet the problems presented later by a world that is constantly changing – hence the need for adult education." The reporter stated that it was quite accurate to attribute that sentence to *both*, "for each of these distinguished educational authorities has a way of sharing a sentence with each other so that in the end it belongs to both."⁴⁸ The astute reporter had recognized the extraordinarily close personal and working relationship of the Overstreets.

During this interview, as in most others, the Overstreets were enthusiastic about the great growth in the adult education movement. Harry said, "You might call it a folk movement." He went on to say that although there was a need for greater adult leadership training, the fact that many of the teachers came without experience or training in the teaching of adults did not mean they were without promise. What these leaders did bring – enthusiasm and vigor -- was of primary importance. The reporter saw those traits in the Overstreets.

A look at a few of the many institutions and organizations with which Harry and Bonaro were involved gives some indication of the versatility and quality of their presentations. The 1940-41 season of the Ford Hall Forum of Boston, Massachusetts had a distinguished series of guest speakers every Sunday evening. These speakers included Bertrand Russell, Will Durant, Max Lerner, Archibald MacLeish, Vincent Sheean, John Erskine, and Harry A. Overstreet – in short, some of the most brilliant minds of the period and certainly among the finest of lecturers.⁴⁹ In February of 1941 Bonaro opened up a ten week series of public forums in Des Moines, Iowa. The theme was "What's Right with America?" From May 12 to May 29 in 1941 Harry and Bonaro directed the Town Hall Leadership School. There were six courses taught by such people as Sir Norman Angell, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1933; Herbert Agar, Editor of the Louisville Journal and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for American History; and George Denny, Jr., President of Town Hall. Two of the courses, "Men and Ideas," and "Discussion Methods and Techniques" were taught by the Overstreets. Prior to the Leadership School there was a

conference and the opening speech was by Harry on “Next Steps in Adult Education for Democracy.”⁵⁰

Although they were both working very hard, there were also times of levity and of affection. Harry, always quick to give credit where it was due, recognized Bonaro’s great contribution to the success of the Town Hall series. He had written letters of appreciation to the eminent people who had participated and he felt she deserved thanks as well. A letter to “Mrs. Harry A. Overstreet” on the official Town Hall letterhead is a case in point. The letter, written on June 5, 1941, reads in part:

I have written to a number of the lecturers indicating our keen satisfaction with their work. May I add now my expression of co-directorial satisfaction at the work which you did for us, both in “Men and Ideas,” and in the “Techniques of Discussion.” In all my long existence I have never come across a person more capable in the handling of both ideas and men, and your techniques have the admirable fitness of long practice. You have all that it takes, and even though I must speak with solemn formality, as a co-director, may I congratulate myself upon having had the honor of being hitched up with you?

With cordial and affectionate greetings,

/s/ Harry A. Overstreet, Director⁵¹

Surely such a letter deserves to be preserved in the archives with the great love letters of our time.

Another well known organization with which the Overstreets had a long term professional relationship was the famous Chautauqua (N. Y.) Institution. It was going strong during this time and Harry and Bonaro played significant parts in its summer sessions. For example, Harry gave a series of five lectures between August 18-22, 1941 while Bonaro conducted the Contemporary Trends series during the same period. In December, Harry spoke at the Cooper Union Forum on “Everett Dean Martin and Adult Education.”

Although making the necessary arrangements to meet their heavy lecture schedule was always a chore it became increasingly difficult. Travel arrangements during wartime were often haphazard and where they had previously liked to travel between speaking engagements by automobile, because of gasoline rationing they were now normally going by train. The logistic planning of moving from town to town was often complicated, but the Overstreets took this with typical good humor. In a letter to Dr. Robert Sutherland of the Hogg Foundation, Harry wrote “In

a sense, while we did want to have the car with us, we are rather relieved that the decision has thus been taken out of our hands; for the future of driving is, at best, now, an uncertain quantity.”⁵²

Harry’s confidence in Bonaro’s ability and in his freedom to make commitments for her was evident in the same letter. He wrote that there would be an evening on which Bonaro would be free in Denton, Texas, and that she would be happy to give a lecture that night. “If you wish to plan such a meeting,” he wrote, “won’t you feel free to do so and to assign her whatever topic you wish.” This says quite a lot both about the ability of the Overstreets to be flexible in meeting the needs of their audiences and in their ability to make decisions for one another.

An invitation to speak at the University of Texas in March of 1942 led to an innovation in lecturing. Harry and Bonaro were listed not only for lectures but also for a dialogue under the heading, “Educating Our Minds and Our Emotions: A Personal View of War-Time Living.” The idea for this presentation came to Robert L. Sutherland of the Hogg Foundation at the University of Texas. Sutherland had often enjoyed lengthy discussions with the Overstreets and had been impressed with how much they seemed to enjoy talking to each other. He decided that he would like the audience to hear the Overstreets discuss their personal views of how to deal with problems in personal and family living during war-time. The Dialogue came on the evening of St. Patrick’s Day, 1942. In the afternoon, Harry and Bonaro both lectured separately – Harry on “New Ways of Educating Adults,” and Bonaro on “A Personal Philosophy For Adults.” The brochure advertising the evening noted that they were “Two of the nation’s most distinguished lecturers” and quoted from a New York University statement about Bonaro: “We have about ten lecturers each semester. Although all of them are outstanding in their fields, Mrs. Overstreet has been the most popular of them all.”⁵³

The dialogue turned out to be a great success. However, it did not occur to the Overstreets at that time to use the method on a regular basis. They occasionally did appear together on the platform, but usually Harry talked first about the philosophical approach to a subject for about half an hour and then Bonaro talked for a similar period giving a poetic approach. They did not use the dialogue method regularly until three years later.

Harry’s ability to “commonize knowledge” -- putting difficult ideas into terms that could be understood and used by people – was recognized by others. In May of 1942, Harry was

invited to attend a meeting of the East and West Association by its President, Nobel Prize winner, Pearl Buck. She noted that the war was forcing the United State into a “new intimacy with countries we have never known well before.” The purpose of the meeting was to make plans for preparing people to accept these new contacts “as sources of strength” and “to help teachers in other countries to prepare for their contact with us.”⁵⁴ Other members of the Association included Lin Yutang, John Dewey, Henry Luce, Margaret Mead and Morse Cartwright.

An indication of how the meeting went is portrayed in a letter from Pearl Buck to Harry on July 31, 1942, part of which states

I think that few of those present really understood the purpose of the meeting. The outlook was perhaps naturally academic because most of the men there were sequestered in the academic world, and did not comprehend any other. I lived in that academic world long enough, at one time of my life, to understand it.

Of all those who spoke, it seemed to me that you, more than any other, did understand the necessity for “commonizing” knowledge, not just through the so-called adult education techniques, but by bringing the common world into the academic world and translating the knowledge of the academic world into terms that can make it of use to people. The professors need to be humanized as much as everyday folk need the stores of knowledge which are guarded so jealously. It seemed to me you saw this.⁵⁵

In the letter, Pearl Buck asked Harry to meet with her to talk over practical ways to “help carry through this idea of basic understanding among everyday people of both sides of the world.” She stated that organizations as such are of no importance or use unless they help “to bring about that for which they were created,” and that this particular “humanistic movement” can be successful only if “people who believe in the idea will help to bring it about, each in his own field.”⁵⁶

Harry’s stature as an intellectual with remarkable communication skills was evident by the invitations he received to discuss serious matters to national audiences. One such case was on October 25, 1942, when Harry appeared on a radio program for the “American Forum of the Air” which was broadcast coast-to-coast from the Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. for the Mutual Broadcasting System. The subject was “How Can We Best Use Our Conscripted Youth?” and the other participants were Congressman Jennings Randolph of West Virginia;

Congressman Emanuel Celler of New York; Warren Atherton of the American Legion; and Frederick J. Libby of the National Council for the Prevention of War. They discussed whether the 18-19 year old youths subject to the draft should be trained in colleges or in the armed services and whether universal military training should be compulsive after the war. Theodore Granick of the American Forum was the moderator and although they used the panel methodology, Harry Overstreet was probably not given any credit on the program as the panel's innovator.⁵⁷

The year 1944 was another vintage year for lectures, for there were well over 100 scheduled in fifteen states and Canada.⁵⁸ This is even more remarkable when we recall that this was still a war year and travel was still restrictive.

By 1944 Bonaro's versatility on the platform was well known and she was often invited to speak on a variety of topics to the same audience. An example of this is seen by her schedule for three days in January in Austin, Texas. She spoke twice each day discussing a total of six different topics: "The Place of Philosophy in Personality Adjustment," "Interpreting Life Through Literature," "Courage for Crisis," "Developing The Creative Spirit," "The Art of Gracious Living," and "A Psychologist Looks at Literature."⁵⁹

Harry also exhibited a versatility in lecture topics. Much of this was due to his wide interest in areas of national concern. He had displayed an interest in the field of public recreation for many years with both articles and lectures. Thus it was not out of the ordinary in November of 1944, that Harry gave the principal address at the Tenth Annual Chicago Recreation Conference. A letter from the Chairmen after the event stated:

. . . 1100 people came to the Luncheon to hear you, and most of the additional 300 we had to turn away came back to sit in the balcony and in the adjoining West Room [of the Hotel Sherman]. The stimulating and challenging address that you gave. . . will prove, we know, a real inspiration and a challenge for our recreation thinking and action here in Chicago.⁶⁰

In December, Bonaro was made an advisory editor of the National Parent-Teacher Magazine. In addition, one of her poems, "A Great Caring" was used as the theme of the organization for the year's Founders Day celebration. A quote from the poem is

I do not ask of any man alive
That he know all the answers. I only ask
A great caring – an honest and humble caring
About what happens to human beings and their hopes

And that I ask of myself as much as another.⁶¹

Those five lines were quoted by Eleanor Roosevelt, in her syndicated column, “My Day,” as five lines she did not want to forget. She also mentioned that she was a “devotee of Bonaro Overstreet’s poems.”⁶²

As the war neared its end, the Overstreets continued to lecture widely through the country. There were talks given by both throughout New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Texas, and from September through December, more than seventy-five individual talks to groups in Michigan alone. Typical of the new topics was one called, “The Returning Soldier,” given by Bonaro in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The emphasis of the talk was the problem facing this country as the servicemen readjusted to civilian life.

An Innovational Method of Lecturing: The Colloquy

In the fall of 1945 the Overstreets went to the University of Michigan to teach courses for the Extension Service. When they arrived they were surprised to learn that the director, Everett Soop, wanted them to teach the same classes. He did not care how they did it; whether they divided the hour of a class into halves or took alternate sessions or whatever. They decided that doing it separately wouldn’t be much fun and so decided to teach as a “team.” Bonaro said they “plunged into it as an experiment” and liked it so much they decided to continue using it on the lecture platform.⁶³ They began to use the dialogue method more and more frequently during the ensuing years. The Overstreet came to be thought of more and more as “team lecturers.”

The method the Overstreets used in planning a team-lecture or “colloquy” involved their working together in the outlining and amplification of the subject so there would not be any noticeable division of subject matter between them. They had, of course, a fully agreed upon philosophy regarding the subject matter to be discussed. Harry usually introduced the major topics unless Bonaro had previous associations with the audience and thus extended a first greeting. Both of them contributed ideas to each of the topics and sub-topics and illustrations. Bonaro usually summarized and used poetry or other quotations for an ending that seemed to fit⁶⁴

In a letter responding to a questioner about how they planned a colloquy, Bonaro wrote:

Preparation consists less of getting ready for this or that specific lecture than of thinking around and around the subjects we want to talk about until we have far more possible material for each than we can use on any given occasion. What we actually use, then, is often left to the judgment of the moment – and

neither of us is likely to be thrown off base by the other's suddenly getting hold of an idea or an illustration that may change the whole lecture in some surprising way.⁶⁵

The Overstreets particularly liked the freedom and flexibility the method gave them. While one was speaking the other could be both listening and watching the audience. This allowed the listener to add to any point he felt hadn't been adequately covered or to give an illustration that increased understanding. Sometimes extensive changes were made on the platform from what they had planned in advance. Bonaro gave a description of such a case:

. . . we actually shifted the whole plan of the lecture after the first point, building it as we went into something we had never thought of before. It was exciting fun for us – good solid mental fun – and the outcome was good: a lecture good enough that we will probably use it in various forms again. I don't think anyone in the audience would have suspected that what each of us said was as much of a surprise to the other as to anyone else; but there is something warmly gratifying about this sort of experience when it happens.⁶⁶

The Overstreets never deliberately took a chance on it happening, however, because they believed they owed an audience a solid job and thus always went prepared knowing the body of material they meant to cover and which points would give structure to the material. They had a genuine feeling of comradeship, mutual respect and common purpose which enabled either one of them to speak freely and comfortably in saying, "We" feel or believe this point or that.

Books

The war years were a severe challenge to those whose life long faith was in the concept of the strength of democratic action. German storm troopers were marching across western Europe and many said that Germany was "just a nation of hoodlums," but as Harry Overstreet pointed out, "hoodlumism is not confined to Europe" and we needed to find and correct the grave defects in our own social patterns "if we are not to go in similar ways."⁶⁷ Harry wrote Our Free Minds in 1941 as a wake-up call to the nation to defend the American credo so boldly stated in the Declaration of Independence. We needed to challenge Hitler and his followers in their arrogance. Their "only freedom . . . is to torture helpless people."⁶⁸

For Bonaro the war years spurred many books in both poetry and prose. Between 1941 and 1945 she authored Brave Enough For Life, American Reasons, Courage For Crisis, How to Stay Alive As Long As You Live, and Freedom's People. For more than two years her weekly page in the liberal newspaper PM made her a well-known literary figure. Her friend and fellow

board member on Freedom House, Senator Margaret Chase Smith, said of her, “she could write like an angel.”⁶⁹

Harry’s book Our Free Minds provided a psychological defense of American democracy, which, in his view was that ideals are as necessary and as important as military defense. He wrote of the old values we need to keep, new values we need to create, and old habits we need to reject. The book stressed the fact that as a nation we must examine our weaknesses – we must “get a new grip on truth – truth in business, truth in law, truth in politics, truth in education.” The big problem was to awaken the dormant American.

Of specific reference to the subject of adult education was a chapter entitled, “Building a New Tradition of Learning,” and, indeed, the concepts permeated a large part of the book. Overstreet said “we shall have to change the little red schoolhouse into the big community schoolhouse.” Harry continued to say that it was important to build a tradition of education as a process that would become more significant as we got older. He offered as a slogan for adoption, “A Community-Wide School For Every Community.”

In addition to the ideas involving adult education, Overstreet offered some new ideas for economic equality, and designs for community development. His was a classic liberal philosophy by any definition. The final chapter was entitled, “What A Nation Can Rightly Be,” and he plainly saw the impending conflict with “the rising power of barbarism.” He concluded that the purpose of our free minds was to build a free world, and this, he said, we shall do.⁷⁰

The book received generally good reviews. The New York Times’ review of March 23, 1941 stated

. . .the general value of this excellent book lies in its general liberalism and stimulating vigor . . .Dr. Overstreet’s chapter on the use of words is especially crisp and hard-hitting – he cites, among other things, ten different definitions given by his students of that carelessly used term, “liberal.”⁷¹

This chapter on words stemmed in large part from an article Harry had written for the Journal of Adult Education in January 1938, entitled, “Where Words Go Forth To Battle.”

As previously noted, it was during the war years that Bonaro’s writings took on a special significance and popularity. Not that all the books, articles, poems, and essays were specifically about the war, but in those dark, anxious days, her personal philosophy and ultimate faith in the democratic process struck a popular chord with a large segment of the reading public. This

reaffirmation was not provided in simplistic or jingoistic terms all too common during wartime, but the writings dealt with ideas coupled with poetically charged language. The book, Brave Enough For Life was published in 1941, and it was a comfort to many who sought hope for the future. There was warmth in reviewing the experiences “that has given me confidence in people.” She wrote of the great thoughts provided by our spiritual ancestors – Socrates, Euripides, Aristotle, Epictetus, St. Francis, Erasmus, John Locke, and Jane Addams, to name a few. However, the book was not only a praise of the past, but also of the possibilities of the present and the future. “Great people have lived in the past. Great people are alive now,” was the message of hope for other Americans. Indeed, there was something splendid in the thought that we were part of a generation that was given the great task of solving the problems of both fascism and hunger. Our job “in this time of danger” was not “to hate intensely and kill effectively,” but

. . . to shape a world dedicated (to). . . the religious hypothesis of spiritual brotherhood; the political hypothesis that free men can govern themselves; the scientific hypothesis that truth can be found and is worth the finding; and the hypothesis of the social sciences – that human behavior is, in part at least, a product of environment.⁷²

Certainly in this great expectation for the future, the concept of adult education would play a significant role. Bonaro viewed the adult education movement as

. . . an unfenced many-sided effort to create situations in which the twentieth century American will have a chance to prove himself an independent and courageous free man worthy to raise issues that concern the every day welfare and happiness of himself, his neighbors, his countrymen, and beyond these, the living millions of the world.⁷³

The chapter on adult education was titled, “Fellow Workers.” Bonaro outlined some of the personal attractions of the adult education effort. She noted that, “it forces me to keep alive my interest in the whole human enterprise.” Another special charm of the movement is that “there are no precedents in adult education that are too sacred to be violated” and “adult education is a movement that cuts across all the rigid lines of modern specialization.”⁷⁴ She mentioned the great variety of occupational fields that contribute to the adult education movement: ministers, librarians, county agricultural agents, social workers, doctors, businessmen, journalists, architects, mechanics – in fact, an endless variety. The mark of this vast fellowship is not just training in “present source of income, but simply the will to create

within our present society situations that will keep adult minds and spirits alive in their own possibilities and the problems of the world.” And to keep within the thesis of the book, there was the observation that adult education contributes to both democratic principles and the democratic process.

From a historical and philosophical standpoint, adult education is a link with the great minds of all ages who devoted themselves to the social and educational problems of their time. Here again Bonaro introduced the spiritual ancestors that were referred to earlier – Socrates, Erasmus, John Locke and Jane Addams. To these were added the names of the great educational leaders – Johann Pestalozzi, Horace Mann, Mary Lyon, Alice Freeman Palmer, and, of course, Bishop Grundtvig of Denmark, “father of the folk schools that have played so vital a part in the culture of modern Scandinavia – and of every country, indeed, of our own.” Adult education, in short, belongs to a long and honorable tradition. For adult education, Bonaro’s poetic words were a call for even greater action in a war torn world. Adult education was described as “both an act of faith and a reason for faith.” For many in the field these were words that established a sense of fellowship in the adult education field. There were other people out there who were involved in the same effort – “fellow workers, fellow hoppers, fellow carers about a free way of life.”

Bonaro’s personal popularity attained great prominence nationally with her long wartime inspired poems that were originally written for Freedom House, then dramatized for radio on the “Voice of Freedom” program and then published in the New York newspaper, PM. It was a different style of poetry from her earlier work. They were dramatic poetic monologues. It came about without planning. Sitting at her typewriter one day working on an article, she found herself typing a long narrative poem that began with the phrase “A soldier I met on a train said . . .” and continued to give his compelling and coherent reason for joining the army in every day yet poetic language. It was her vivid recollection of an actual conversation, and she said the poem almost “wrote itself.” It was shown to Herbert Agar, President of the “Fight For Freedom Committee,” who immediately asked if she could write other poems in a similar vein which the committee could use for radio dramatization. Bonaro wrote six long poems (all dramatic monologues) which were presented as radio dramatizations throughout the country and later were published in book form under the title American Reasons.⁷⁵

Dorothy Norman, who was an editor of the New York Post heard them on the radio and thought they could form the basis for an excellent series. When she was unable to place them in her paper, she unselfishly referred the idea to one of the editors of PM, Bill McCleery. Thus began a nearly two year writing stint in which Bonaro would deal in poetry with important issues facing the nation. This gave her the opportunity to engage in poetic adult education which would not only reach a large national audience through the newspaper but would also result in requests by organizations to publish reprints for distribution to their memberships.

PM, which was one of the most interesting of all newspaper experiments, made its debut in New York City on July 18, 1940. It was a 32 page newspaper without a line of advertising, partially on the theory that newspapers inevitably slanted their viewpoints so as not to affront major advertisers. For generations critics such as George Seldes had pointed out that newspapers were reluctant to take stands that were contrary to the best interests of tobacco companies, distilleries, local department stores, auto manufacturers, and others.

The major backer of PM was Marshall Field III and it was the brainchild of Ralph Ingersoll who had worked closely with Henry Luce and had been Vice-president and General Manager of Time, Inc. He is often also given credit for conceiving Life Magazine, in its time the most popular of all picture magazines.

PM was, without a doubt, a liberal newspaper. Its prospectus read in part: "We are against people who push other people around. . .whether they flourish in this country or abroad. We are against fraud and deceit and greed and cruelty and we will seek to expose their practitioners. . .We are Americans and we prefer democracy to any other principle of government."⁷⁶

John Tebbell wrote in The Compact History of American Newspapers:

Few papers have ever been launched with such a distinguished staff, and such promising prospects. Few, too, have ever lived up to their promise as well. Yet PM was, in the end, a failure. (Although it had) outstanding art work, superlative departments, good writing, excellent editorials and investigative reporting, it also suffered from inadequate news coverage.⁷⁷

Among the "superlative departments" of the paper was a full page in the weekend edition that was given over totally to Bonaro Overstreet. She wrote a full page consisting of prose and a long poem from December 27, 1942 to September, 1945.

The stint with PM, while extremely popular, was also very taxing to Bonaro with her many other commitments, and after eighteen months, she voluntarily discontinued the column for a short period before she responded to the request to continue again. The poems continued to be extremely popular, with many, many requests for reprinting and broadcasting received for a considerable time even after the column was discontinued. Typical of the reactions was a letter from Tech. Sgt. H. Donald Spatz of the Headquarters Third Service Command, Baltimore, Maryland. The poems from American Reasons had been read on radio stations around Baltimore. Spatz wrote that, “we feel that this fine writing should not be confined to this territory alone, and we would like to use it on other WAC recruiting broadcasts throughout the Third Service Command, comprising the states of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. If you grant us permission to read your works, we shall be everlastingly grateful.”⁸⁴

From Hampton Institute, a black college in Virginia, the director of the Division of Summer and Extension Study wrote that “‘A Yank Who Wants To Stay Over There’ is one of the most effective pieces of writing I have ever read. It goes straight to the point without offending.”⁸⁵

A book which emanated from Bonaro’s lectures was Courage For Crisis, published in 1943. The title was provided by the leader of a Texas conference of social workers where Bonaro was asked to speak. He met her in the lobby of the hotel when she arrived at the conference and told her that the committee had taken the liberty of changing the subject and title of her lecture for that evening. Thus, for a few hours in her hotel room, Bonaro grappled with the subject of “Courage For Crisis.” The crisis of the time was obviously that of the war and the fears were those that are bred by war, “but what fears bred the war itself? Deeper, I believe, than the crisis of war is a crisis of character.”⁸⁶ And so she prepared her lecture that was to grow eventually into a book.

What the book called for is a faith in the great traditions that have always been part of the country’s character – “the Hebrew-Christian religious tradition, made one with the democratic political tradition.”

The preface of the book pointed out that because of the war there was good reason for fear, yet “we can prevent our fears from getting the better of us.” It is a book that plumbs the many resourceful and psychological ways people can manage to cope with the everyday problems

of the war and thus the individual helps to make the courage that he needs. This was a popular book that went through a number of printings.

The book was reviewed by Preston Bradley in the New York Herald Tribune “Book Week.” He wrote

For years I have tried to be a sort of specialist in courage . . . I thought I was fairly well-grounded in the subject. But never by anyone, at any time or anywhere have I met the thought of courage presented as Mrs. Overstreet does, so adequately and brilliantly.”⁸⁷

Late in 1945, Bonaro collected material from a series of articles she had written for the National Parent-Teacher Association’s The PTA Magazine and a small book was published with the title, How To Stay Alive As Long As You Live. The book, as the title implies, is an exploration of the “problem of age from a psychological angle.” One of the problems she discussed in detail is using “the past without being enslaved by it.” In the end, Bonaro proposed four great principles needed to stay young in spirit:

The mind that is *actively* engaged with its world will be more likely to stay young than the mind that slumps into inertia or that tries to avoid issues or risks.

A generous mind will stay young longer than an ungenerous one.

A mind that looks forward to the future will keep its youth better than a mind that looks habitually toward the past.

A mind that lives with spacious ideas is more likely to keep its youth than one that lives with narrow ideas.

The summation was that “he who lends himself to life remains alive.”⁸⁸

In 1945 Bonaro published a short inspirational book entitled Freedom’s People with the challenging subtitle of “How We Qualify For A Democratic Society.” It received enthusiastic reviews from many including Rabbi Joshua Liebman of the Temple Israel in Boston. Liebman, the noted author of Peace of Mind, called it a “superb piece of psychological and philosophical analysis of the human prerequisites for a free society. . . I am certain that this book is going to make a great contribution to democratic thinking in our time.”⁸⁹

The book probed such problems as the nature of democracy and freedom and asked questions involving the types of distortion that we should emphasize as products of freedom in a

free society. She stressed such ideas as the inability to become a democratic people until we put into every day practice the ideals mentioned in the Bill of Rights.

Bonaro recognized the risks and dangers in speaking out for freedom. She wrote that “throughout history, the surest and easiest way to get into trouble has been to speak up firmly for the rights of man.” She said there is a courage of the battlefield and there was reason to feel that Americans certainly have what it takes to defend their way of life against a “perverted tyranny.” What was also needed is the civilian courage to encourage reforms in society, to not be afraid to be called a “nigger-lover,” to provide an influence with the firm belief that the individual can make a difference in the course of events. “Freedom is an adventure that asks us to grow up – and it rewards us with a chance to go on growing to the end of our lives.”⁹⁰

The years of the war were very focused years for America and for freedom loving people throughout the world. There was no debate as to who the enemy was, the vicious nature of the enemy, or the dire consequences of defeat by the axis powers. Faced with this crisis, America was as unified as it has rarely been in its history and emerged from it as perhaps the strongest nation in the world. The primary contribution of the Overstreets during this period was to use their impressive personal abilities to keep reminding us both what we were fighting for and that an unfinished agenda remained with huge responsibilities to be faced in the postwar world. Adult education continued to remain a high priority for them as an important way to help meet future expectations. They were eager to focus on ways in which they could contribute to the facing of the many challenges ahead.

NOTES

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