BONARO WILKINSON OVERSTREET:
HER SIGNIFICANCE IN ADULT EDUCATION

DISSERTATION

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By

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The purpose of this study was to determine Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet's significance and development as a leader in adult education. This study provided information on her life, her individual and collaborative contributions with Harry Overstreet in adult education, and her interest in poetry.

Data were collected using online database searching; review of published, unpublished, and informal documents of Bonaro Overstreet; and correspondence and interviews with professional colleagues, employers, and personal acquaintances. Interviews were conducted with current authorities in the field of adult education for informational purposes.

Bonaro Overstreet did not influence or alter the course of adult education as a field of study. Her strength was in her role of practitioner and contributor to research, theory, and professional development of the adult education field. She broadened the depth of adult education as an advocate of knowing oneself and acting responsibly in the context of democratic responsibility.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many authors are difficult to place in the adult education history of America, and Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet is no exception. Her life spanned the transitions adult education encountered as it evolved into its current position within academic and nonacademic institutions. For Overstreet writing and lecturing were intensely personal and individual processes of adult education. Through her nonfiction publications, both individual and collaborative with Harry Overstreet, Bonaro Overstreet portrayed adult education as a continuous, mutual interrelationship between the learner and the educator. Many life encounters are of a complex and diversified nature and should be acknowledged in the learning process. This was recognized and utilized in this author's writing and lecture methodologies for adult learning. Overstreet's publications and discussions suggest that her philosophy involved the need for adult learning to remain continuous over the lifespan as a means to ensure democracy through the maintenance of an open mind. In an interview with the Washington Post in 1956, Overstreet described herself and
her husband Harry as "middlemen and itinerant lecturers."\(^1\)

The miles they traveled to lecture accounted for their itinerancy. They regarded themselves as intermediaries between scholars and scientists, who used jargon, and laymen, who needed to know what the scholars and scientists were saying, but who also were looking for emotional significance in life.

These descriptive words were the impetus behind Bonaro Overstreet's nonfiction, for woven into her publications, which have served to inform and enrich generations of readers, is the personality and perspective of the author who wrote them.

**Purpose of the Study**

This dissertation focused on Bonaro Overstreet's significance as evidenced in her published and unpublished works and on her significance and development as a leader in adult education in the United States. The significance of Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet as a leader would be indicated in the extent to which she influenced and changed the direction of adult education in America.

**Significance of the Study**

In many adult education graduate programs, an introductory history course documents the pioneers and

leaders in the field. In these history courses, there is no history of female educators of adults. It would appear that, within the field, female educators are forgotten figures. Few women are mentioned in the historical documentation of adult education yet through the pages of the *Journal of Adult Education*, contributions by women were published in articles. Bonaro Overstreet was one of the many women involved in adult education during the twentieth century who published in the *Journal*.

The adult education movement embraced a multitude of human concerns held by millions of people across the United States and abroad. Under its umbrella were public and private agencies, special organizations, museums, galleries, schools, libraries, societies, associations and forums with purposes ranging from the acquisition of personal knowledge, to entertainment, to vocational enhancement. Within the movement, many unrecognized women contributed in the exchange of ideas and experiences which affected American life and changed the course of adult education in America. This study recognizes the involvement of women in the field, to the extent that it concentrates on one woman and her contributions to adult learning and on how she influenced the course of adult education in America.

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Limitations

Data for this study were collected using online database searching for sources connected to Bonaro Wilkinson and Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet, and for identification of published, unpublished and informal documents of Bonaro Overstreet. Correspondence was conducted with the Kellogg Project at Syracuse University for archival information, with her publishers (Norton and Harper) for personal and publication information, and with current authorities in the field of adult education: Alexander Charters, Cyril Houle, Waynne James, Malcolm Knowles, Burton Kreitlow and Judith Koloski, Executive Director of the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education. Telephone interviews were conducted with Alexander Charters, Waynne James and Malcolm Knowles to gather subjective professional information on Overstreet and her husband, and their personal involvement with the adult education movement. Correspondence and telephone interviews were conducted with the associations and employers Bonaro Overstreet had been associated with, including: The Woman's Faculty Club of the University of California, Carneige Corporation of New York, Freedom House, Keuka College, United Press International, New York Times Syndicate, National Features Syndicate, Save-the-Children Federation, McCall's Corporation, National Parent Teacher Association, National Audubon Society, Save the
Redwoods Society, Phi Beta Kappa, American Society of Industrial Security, National Press Club, United Press International Club, Kern County Union High School, Bakersfield Community College (formerly Kern County Junior College), Arts Guild of New York, Extension Divisions at the University of Michigan and University of California, Leadership Development Education Division at the University of California at Los Angeles, American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, and the Division of Continuing Education at the University of Virginia.

For academic and alumni information, telephone interviews were conducted with the University of California at Berkeley and Columbia University. Personal acquaintances of Bonaro Overstreet were interviewed for personal information. These included: Talmage Bandy, Nancy Graham, Grace Paricer, Jean Overstreet, and Yvonne Rappaport. Identified published and nonpublished works were reviewed for personal and professional information.

Basic Information

Throughout Bonaro Overstreet's publications, poetry, and nonfiction, the common theme of democratic preservation is present. In both her writings and lectures, Overstreet used her own experiences and perspectives to enhance learning—conveyed through thoughts, feelings, humor and personal life. Her style was one which limited her individual and collaborative nonfiction to a singular
focused topic of learning so that each book in and of itself was an adult education course, where she served as both the author and the educator.

This dissertation is focused on Bonaro Overstreet and her significance as evidenced in published and unpublished works, both individual and collaborative, with Harry Overstreet, and her significance and development as a leader in adult education. The significance of Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet as a leader would be indicated in the extent to which she influenced and changed the direction of adult education in America.
CHAPTER II

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF LIFE

For this research much of Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet's life was reconstructed through interviews with her family, neighbors, and personal acquaintances and personal experiences recorded in her publications. The youngest of three children, Overstreet, was born October 30, 1902 in Geyersville, California to Edward and Margaret Elizabeth Bonar Wilkinson. Edward Wilkinson was a native of England and immigrated to America from North Vancouver, Canada in 1897 to settle in Geyersville—as a cobbler initially and later as a farmer. Margaret Bonar Wilkinson was a native of Canada, and like all traditional women, cooked, scrubbed, sewed, and cared for her three children. She also worked in the orchards and the vineyards. Overstreet's brother became a minister, and her sister became very involved in Women's Clubs in California. Growing up on a farm in the fruit-producing section of California, Overstreet frequently assisted in the harvesting of plums, peaches, and grapes that were the source of the family's income. For the entire family, harvest season was a continuous time of hard labor in the orchards and the vineyards for weeks on end. Life for the Wilkinson family was difficult because finances depended...
upon seasonal production.

Overstreet received her elementary and secondary education at public schools in Geyersville. She was described by family as a quiet, intense, well behaved child who was very interested in reading and writing.

During her childhood, Overstreet developed habits, equated with the self, that would provide personal comfort and assist her throughout her life in handling new situations. Overstreet used the comfort of habits as resources when she encountered stress or demands in public life. One such habit she remarked upon was to retreat into books or poetry to avoid stressful situations. Later on, as an adult, through self-examination which resulted in a better understanding of herself, Overstreet attributed much of her psychological and social maturity to her development as a child. The habits and beliefs rooted in the early years expressed her inner nature and were utilized in adulthood as inner resources during times of stress:

... for our characters and personalities as these impinge on the lives of other people are chiefly the sum total of our habitual behavior and habitual attitudes.¹

Due to the family's lifestyle, entertainment was scarce, and the Wilkinson children relied upon one another for amusement. One such source of amusement, Overstreet

recalled, was with a pair of horseshoe magnets her father brought home. As children, she and her brother and sister spent many rainy afternoons during winter entertained by playing with the magnets. Overstreet was continually amazed each time at the ability of the magnet to breathe life into metal objects and stand them apart from the rest of the inert mass of steel. This ability to stand apart from the mass was something she would ponder and discuss in her writing as it related to people and the ability to influence the human mind, as the magnet would influence the course of the steel objects.

Margaret Wilkinson was a strong role model in her daughter's life with her impact recalled as early as age ten or eleven. From her mother, Overstreet believed she inherited the ability to link oneself to the human race through a combination of affection and a high level of discrimination,

As a child, I used to watch and wonder about my mother's method in these affairs. Rarely did she argue with people. Never was she on bad terms with any neighbor—not even with those few who specialized in hurt feelings. But somehow or other, she chose what people would be in her presence; and she did so, not by criticism nor admonishment, but by rewarding what was best in them with so warm an approval, so cordial and genuine an interest that they simply came back for more.²

In reflection, Overstreet felt that her mother's talent

was that of assisting people to avoid loneliness by cultivating in themselves that which was uniquely their own. She encouraged within each individual an intrinsic special sense of goodness which was uniquely his own,

This code I learned from her has done more, I think, than any other single thing to make me feel at home with the human race. For it has worked to release me, where judgements upon people are to be made, from both sentiment optimism and romantic pessimism.

Overstreet emphasized, through her nonfiction, that her mother served as both mentor and teacher as she learned through role example about life. On one such occasion, she recounted a conversation she overheard between a neighbor and her mother. The neighbor had cautioned Mrs. Wilkinson about the reputation of a woman whom she had befriended:

To my small listening ears it sounded formidable. I hoped my mother would be warned. But she met her critic's stern gaze with her own artfully innocent eyes and replied, "Oh . . . then she'll be known by keeping company with me, won't she, as much as I'll be known by keeping company with her?" The sheer simplicity of it made me let out my held breath with surprise. This was something that had to be thought about. I slid out of the room and wandered down the lane through the orchard, pondering the curious ways of grownups, and kicking a round white pebble ahead of me as I went.

This simplicity of philosophy and deed was characteristic of Margaret Wilkinson. The principles and values she exhibited as a role model for the young and impressionable child remained with Overstreet throughout her

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3Ibid., p.51.

4Ibid., p.53.
life.

At the onset of adolescence, Overstreet developed a passion for poetry which blossomed over the years and culminated in both her first and last publications as collections of poetry. During adolescence, Overstreet became aware of her inner self—a self with a need to soar that was released through the expression of verse. It was at this time, Overstreet found a stanza from Browning that would remain as one of her favorites, to be copied into the flyleaves of her books and recounted over her life in times of demand when inner assurance was called upon:

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.⁵

During adolescence, Overstreet admitted to being a shy, awkward normal teenage girl who was not entirely at ease with her public self. Immersion into poetry was of great comfort to her when she thought it important to appear sophisticated.

Poetry allowed Overstreet to approach all people with the desire to discover, enjoy, and support in them those traits that link them to the human tradition of intelligence. Poetry assisted her in overcoming the

embarrassment of youth and with acceptance of the fact that to be naive was not a matter that should convey humiliation.

When Overstreet graduated from her hometown high school, she represented one third of the graduating senior class. She received a scholarship to the University of California, where she majored in English and minored in Astronomy. Upon entering the University of California at Berkeley in 1920, she was one of approximately three thousand freshmen and a little overwhelmed at the magnitude of college life.

As Overstreet met other students, the sensation of being overwhelmed resolved. Although she worked part-time to defray college expenses, she found time for hiking, late night debates about the problems of the universe, and the exploration of new ideas and issues presented through various classes. At this time, she was unsure that she would ever feel comfortable among all the areas of knowledge and doubt which existed in the beliefs, truths, and untruths present in the universe. Conflicting beliefs about the mores of society and the total scheme of life opened scores of questions to be answered.

By the time her sophomore year had begun, Overstreet found that Geyersville and the world she had been raised in seemed far away. Although she returned home for vacations, she no longer felt she belonged to that insulated community. Overstreet felt she could not communicate with neighbors
about the fascinating questions which plagued her as a result of reading philosophy, psychology, poetry, and current novels and by a climate of disillusionment and changing standards present on the college campus.

From her mother, Overstreet had learned to find answers to questions by seeking those persons knowledgeable about the subject under scrutiny. She also gained an innate sense of privacy that discouraged her from sharing in discussions of personal intimate affairs. Therefore, while at college, she did not encounter the acute personal problem of sexuality experienced by many of her friends. What she did experience, however, was the problem of people "who put themselves so far outside any conventional pattern of morality I had ever known that I could not decide how I should feel about them."6 This was, for Overstreet, a major problem of abstract perplexity and one she felt she could not discuss with anyone.

While still in college, one part-time job of a clerical nature broadened Overstreet's experience in the recognition and validation of fear in herself. She worked for a woman executive and began each work day after receiving instructions that followed a predictable pattern. After little guidance, she embarked upon tasks that involved little time and, with the remaining time, she was advised to

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occupy herself with whatever she viewed as necessary.

In theory, such latitude of decision-making and autonomy should have encouraged Overstreet, as an employee, to be incredibly productive. In practice, it induced frustration and resentment within her person as she was uncertain of herself in the presence of other staff members. A reluctance to request additional assistance from her employer complicated the situation.

The situation culminated as Overstreet's sense of incompetence increased. Her emotions ran parallel with her own sense of ignorance and resulted in sleepless nights and anxious days, as she created problems for other people to solve. Resignation from the job brought relief along with a sense of having failed through ignorance. Drawing on the philosophy shared by her mother, Overstreet came to realize that most people seem reluctant to share of themselves and enjoy other people for fear that, in their capacity for enjoyment, they may appear unsophisticated and be branded as naive.

During her senior year Overstreet was scheduled for her one and only intercollegiate debate. For months she had saved to buy a new dress for the occasion and did purchase material and a pattern to sew one. During this time, she was working at the Roberta Tea Shop as a waitress and, due to class and work schedules, she realized she would not have the time to make the much-desired dress.
About one week before the debate Overstreet returned from study in the library to her rented room and found one of her fellow waitresses cutting out the pattern and material for her dress. This act of kindness changed this woman from acquaintance to friend, as it allowed Overstreet the chance to know her as she had not known her before this act.

After that, the two women would walk to the library together after work, drop in on one another to chat, or go hiking together. The friendship blossomed—not out of obligation, but rather out of kindness that was basic within each of them but had not had the occasion to be noticed before.

In 1925, Overstreet graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California at Berkeley. She received her teacher’s certificate the following year and taught at Kern County Union High School in Bakersfield, California from 1926 to 1929. Overstreet pursued graduate studies in psychology at Columbia University in New York City in 1929 and 1930. She received her master’s degree in psychology from Columbia University in 1931. According to a professional colleague, while in New York she was a student of Dr. Harry Allen Overstreet whom she later married. She returned to Bakersfield and taught English at Kern County Junior College (now Bakersfield Community College) from 1930
to 1932. She published her first book, *The Poetic Way of Release*, in 1931 with the introduction written by Dr. Overstreet.

The Overstreets were married in New York City on August 23, 1932 after he was divorced from Elsie Lucy Overstreet. Upon her marriage, Overstreet gained three adolescent stepsons: Edmund Wilson, Robert Howison and Alan Burr.

One personal acquaintance remarked that the triumph of Overstreet's life was her marriage to Harry and their work together as a team. The union was a true melding of the minds. A professional colleague in adult education speculated that Overstreet had married her mentor and that Harry Overstreet served in that capacity until his death in 1970. This colleague suggested that Dr. Overstreet had interested her in the field and was the influence and momentum behind their research, collaborations, and lecture style.

After her marriage, Overstreet resided in New York City and taught creative writing at the Arts Guild from 1933 to 1937. Her first volume of verse was published in 1934. *Footsteps on the Earth*, was a collection of poetry which had previously appeared in various newspapers and magazines. In 1938, she published *Search for a Self*, which focused on self-understanding, a topic the Overstreets would pursue in later books. The Overstreets collaborated on *Town Meeting*
Comes to Town, which was released in 1938 and detailed the history of Town Hall, New York City. Following Dr. Overstreet's retirement in 1939 from his position as head of the Department of Philosophy and Psychology at the City College of New York (he was twenty-seven years older than Bonaro), they began a career as lecturers and writers that took them across the United States and brought them considerable popularity.

Overstreet worked as a research associate for the American Association of Adult Education in New York City in 1939 and 1940. During 1940 and 1941, she was an instructor in adult education summer sessions in Claremont County and Mills College in California. She succeeded her husband as Director of the Leadership Training School at Town Hall in New York City in 1941. Her publications—Brave Enough for Life in 1941, Courage for Crisis in 1943, and Freedom's People in 1945—revolved around the theme of individual courage and its role in maintenance of the self and a democracy. Her book of verse, American Reasons, published in 1943, also focused on courage and its relationship in times of war. During this time, she collaborated with her husband on a study for the American Association of Adult Education, which was titled Leaders for Adult Education.

In 1944, the Overstreets moved to Mill Valley, California where Mrs. Overstreet was physically closer to her aging mother. Her father had already died. After
World War II, they purchased a farmhouse in Bennington, Vermont and moved back east to begin renovations on it. During the late 1950s, the Overstreets sold the farmhouse to his youngest son Alan and wife Jean and moved to Falls Church, Virginia.

Margaret Wilkinson made a significant impact on Overstreet's life which extended past the usual mother-daughter relationship. Despite her role as a traditional wife and mother, she was never viewed by her daughter as a menial laborer:

... for she worked with love and pride. I know that I have never felt myself a menial when I have cooked a meal or scrubbed a floor; for I, too, have worked in love and pride—even a scrubbing brush, in such circumstances, can be a symbol of belonging.

During the course of her marriage, Overstreet recalled a letter received from her mother, written after her mother had suffered a stroke and was aging. Her mother had been an outdoorswoman and was, as a result of the stroke, limited in movement to the narrow confines of her home. This was a difficult adaptation after being accustomed to the acres of orchard, vineyard, and garden. Now, with a precarious balance at the best of time, Mrs. Wilkinson could only move slowly from the bedroom to the kitchen, and it was at a desk there that she wrote to her youngest daughter.

In Mrs Wilkinson's expression of her vision of her

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world, the letter was devoted to one subject: a description of the autumn morning with frost coating walnut tree leaves and the beauty of this shower of leaves when the sun struck them. Her mother had sat at the window and observed the leaves falling from the branches and hitting the ground. Her morning had not been rendered empty by the fact that she could no longer go out, as she had always loved to go, to walk through the autumn orchard. It had been a morning full of experience, full of savored beauty, because she knew well how to practice the art of intensification.

It was this art of intensification Overstreet must have inherited that she brought to her work. This lending of the self to the environment present in her writings, lectures, and tapings of discussions was a gift she attributed to her mother.

In addition to her work as a lecturer and an author, Overstreet was an instructor in the extension division at the University of Michigan in 1945, 1946, 1948, and 1949. She lectured in the University of California extension division in 1948. Out of this period, came two solo publications—How to Think About Ourselves, in 1948, and Understand Fear in Ourselves and Others, in 1951—which discussed fear and its ability to cripple one's response to life's experiences. During this period, she was involved with the National Parent-Teacher Association and published

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numerous articles and pamphlets for them. In 1949, Where Children Come First, which was a study by the Overstreets of the history and functions of the Parent Teacher Association was released.

Much of the 1950s and 1960s were spent on the lecturing circuit and in writing numerous publications. Together, the Overstreets published The Mind Alive, in 1954, and The Mind Goes Forth, in 1956. Overstreet also published her third collection of verse, Hands Laid Upon the Wind, in 1955. She lectured and conducted seminars and short courses for professional, business, government, and community groups in over four hundred and fifty communities across the United States and in eleven other countries. In her lectures, Overstreet discussed a variety of subjects—such as the generation gap, emotional health, impetus to keep growing intellectually, nature of extremism, ethical values in times of change, and poetry as an experience. On many of these activities, she collaborated with her husband. In 1952, Overstreet received an honorary L.H.D. (Doctorate of Literature) from Keuka College in Keuka Park, New York. In addition to publications of books, she wrote numerous articles and poetry for newspapers and magazines.

It was during the decade of the fifties that, as psychological interpreters of contemporary life, the Overstreets were propelled into the national limelight through their nonfiction collaborations about communism.

As lecturers, the two developed a successful style called the "Overstreet colloquium." This was more of a conversation between husband and wife and their audience than a lecture in the usual sense.

A personal acquaintance remarked that the notoriety did not affect Harry Overstreet, but his wife tended to be self-centered, unconsciously expecting star treatment. Despite demands on their attention, the Overstreets continued to be generous with their time, often listening to people's personal problems and serving in a counseling capacity.

Overstreet was the recipient of the Theta Sigma Phi Headliner Award in 1957, and McCall's magazine honored her with the Togetherness Award in 1958. Together, the Overstreets' received the Humanitarian Fellowship Award of the Save-the-Children Federation, and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of the Republic of Korea conferred

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upon her the honorary citizen of Korea distinction in 1966.

Harry Overstreet died in Falls Church, Virginia in 1970. Bonaro Overstreet continued to lecture in the field of adult education. In 1971, she was a speaker in the leadership development program in vocational-technical education at the University of California at Los Angeles under the Education Professions Development Act. Although she did not continue to publish in adult education, Overstreet did publish a collection of verse, *Signature: New and Selected Poems*, in 1978. She lectured in adult education until 1984 at the Falls Church Regional Center of the University of Virginia.

Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet died of a stroke on September 3, 1985 at the Manor Care Nursing Home in Arlington, Virginia. She was eighty-two years old.
CHAPTER III

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS IN ADULT EDUCATION

The Poetic Way of Release was published in 1931 prior to Bonaro Wilkinson's marriage to Harry Allan Overstreet and, subsequently, was the only nonfiction book published under her maiden name. Prior to this publication, she published an article for teachers in the Journal of Adult Education.

The introduction to Overstreet's first publication, The Poetic Way of Release, was written by Harry Overstreet and explained the focus as the intent to reduce poetry to its most fundamental level in order to open the door to this avenue of literature to the reader. The book itself represented an educational course in verse as Overstreet explored poetry as an attitude, a mood, and an experience of life so that her audience would conclude that human life devoid of its existence missed one of life's highest possibilities. For Overstreet much of life's poetry remained wordless, developed into an exquisite articulateness by those known as poets. What she sought to teach the reader was that whether poetry was expressed or unexpressed it was one of the liberating ways of life's expressions.
From childhood, Overstreet held a passion for poetry which she nurtured throughout her life, with its culmination in the publication of four volumes of poetry in addition to her endeavors in the field of adult education. It was indicative of her passion that both her first and last publications were collections of poetry.

Through Overstreet's creativity, in *The Poetic Way of Release* she enlightened her audience to the various methodologies of poetry: rhythm, rhyme, free verse, prose, word-sound association, mood, situation word, and repetition. She taught that there was more to poetry than simply rhyming. She expressed her own creativity in teaching as one of the habits of childhood, frequently repressed in adulthood:

We watch a child at play. To that child a doll is a human being, a slender stick a spirited horse, a round slab of sun-baked mud a delicious pie. The child needs only a long feather to become an Indian chief, a leather helmet to become an aviator. We say that the child is simply imagining. So he is; but he is exercising exactly the same power as, subjected to a more rigorous control, enables each of us to conceive more of reality that he perceives. Thus, through imaginatively realized comparisons, most individuals learn those rudimentary facts about their world which are beyond the range of actual observation.¹

For Overstreet, poetry was a method of touching the inner self and connecting with that self beyond the mere accumulation of facts. She believed that, on a higher

level, people were interested in reaching out toward the undiscovered and responded to situations in which they found themselves. In the extension of human knowledge, the ability to sense relationships has always played a significant part and poetry furthered this knowledge:

Indeed, the only test of a good figure of speech is its ability to create in the mind of the hearer an image and an emotion similar to those which exist in the mind of the speaker or writer. But no figure of speech an end in itself—its end is an affective response. If it fails to arouse that response, it as failed utterly.²

Within the context of learning, Overstreet explored the qualities of the poet or what intrinsic measures call one person to follow one journalistic trend over another:

Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of the poet is that, through his receptiveness to life, he escapes the boredom which comes from emotional poverty. The profound and the trivial, the strange and the familiar, come alike within the scope of his interest.³

Many of these qualities Overstreet perceived to be innate within herself. Her sense of humor was exhibited when she discussed what she viewed as humor in poetry, presenting both sides of the parody versus humorous narrative existent in poetry. Her venture into poetry opened the door for men and women to be enlightened and learned in the beauty of the poetic format of the written word. As was her style, The Poetic Way of Release, validated itself as an example of

²Ibid., p.44.
³Ibid., p.70.
adult education in poetry accomplished through written lecture rather than verbal lecture format.

In her publications, *Search for a Self* published in 1938, *Brave Enough for Life* in 1941, *Courage for Crisis* released in 1943, and *Freedom's People* in 1945, Overstreet strived to explain what people gain through encounters with others in the form of self-understanding and self-courage. Each of these publications intertwined with and built upon the context of preceding publications and yet remained a distinct topic of adult education in and of itself. Experiences in self-understanding and self-courage provide sustenance and a measure of crystallized intelligence for future endeavors a person encounters as he achieves his own personal measure of reality. Overstreet discussed her own philosophy of relying upon courage and understanding to face many of life's situations, and she succeeded in providing adult education within the context of this focus.

Overstreet's warm, personal style transformed her writing into a shared, informal conversation with the reader. In this learning experience, she described her intrinsic philosophy regarding the use of inner reserves of personal courage and understanding to gather the bravery necessary to face the numerous facets of life as it existed. It was through her own experience with people that she gained and developed her own personal form of courage and understanding:
I must gather and keep whatever I have experienced with people that has given me confidence in people. Others may strengthen themselves in other ways. But this is my way. Everything I do—my work, my thinking, even my enjoyment of the beautiful—is tied up somehow with my feeling that I am intimately part of a human scheme of things. If the sense of fellowship were to go, everything would go. I should be spiritually paralyzed: one thing to do would seem as good as another, and to do nothing at all would seem equally good. But if I can hold fast to all the human beings who have won my loyalty and love—then I can face the winter."

Throughout this book Overstreet shared not only her philosophy, but also dimensions of the people and experience which have intertwined to form integral layers of the foundation of this philosophy. She explained that as a result of knowing various individuals, these people were layers in the foundation of her strength and courage. It is through significant experiences that people are able to maintain the values of integrity, compassion, and intelligence. Overstreet elaborated upon these experiences and the enrichment they provided in her life:

I have shaken hands with Einstein. But what he has done to my thinking has been done, chiefly, on midsummer nights when I have lain on my back under the stars and tried to get the feel in my bones, so to speak, of one universe after another."

Each encounter with people broadens self-development through added horizontal dimensions of self-learning and


—Ibid., p.36.
self-understanding. It is through these interactions that new depths of thought and feeling emerge in the human being, as she expressed after an encounter with a well-known poet:

I had the privilege, once, of spending a summer Sunday afternoon talking with (poet, Edwin Arlington Robinson) Robinson, at the MacDowell Colony. When I left, he walked down the hill with me through a mist too soft to be rain. After I had said good-bye and got into my waiting taxi, I looked back at him—standing there alone in the gray twilight, his long arms at his sides, his shoulders slightly stooped—and there was no irreverence in my thinking, "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."⁶

Through her exploration of courage, Overstreet pondered the innate motivation and perseverance of intrinsic principles and strengths that allowed one individual to conquer extreme negativism or odds to achieve that which is a commitment and dedication and belief on the most fundamental level of adult learning:

I think, in short, of the men and women everywhere who are pitting their generosity and inventiveness against the problems of the modern world: the librarian who has worked out a plan whereby a reading fellowship can be built up among the lonely shut-ins of her city; the Americanization teacher who finds one way after another in which to give new citizens a useful, prideful part to play in community affairs; the New York lawyer who, confined to a wheel chair, conducts legal aid service in his own living room; helping one frightened person after another to solve problems that might otherwise spell disaster; the businessman who has organized a mutual aid group for young job hunters; the other businessman who has designed an advisory service for people who cannot seem to hold jobs and who need light on what is wrong with themselves; a woman who is, in the middle-sized city where she lives, carrying on a personal campaign against racial discrimination; a young couple in a New

⁶Ibid., p.44.
Jersey town who, appalled by the unsatisfied wants that were driving youngsters into gangs and into crime, have turned their own home into a boy's club; a group of farmers in a dust-bowl community who are, through co-operative methods and almost incredible resourcefulness, making a practical dent in their own problems; a group of Southern citizens who are fighting against the poll tax.\footnote{Ibid., pp.56-67.}

Much of Overstreet's philosophy she attributed to her formative years, as within the context of daily life she was exposed to the pioneering challenge of survival while watching her parents and neighbors pit their wits against the environment in order to survive. This exposure to the realities of life assisted in the formation of her own personal style of self-understanding and self-courage necessary to survive in life. In her years at college, she continued to exhibit this ingrained pioneering spirit necessary to survive at a large state university after having been sheltered within the embrace of a small town:

I began my life among the people--among the neighbors who were to be lived with because fate had dumped me down in their midst. In a one-room country school, a small town high school, and a state university, I was educated among those for whom the public school system was argued and hoped into existence: the people. Waiting table in a tea shop to earn my way through college, I waited on the people--the grateful and grumbling lot of them. Later, I taught the children of the people: in six classes a day, of from twenty to thirty students each, for five years, I taught them. I travel among the people, walk among the people, shop among the people--and am one of those whom the others mean when they speak of the people. It is too late, now, for me to begin pretending amazement at how people behave--at all the infinite ways in which they try to establish their
importance and their sense of belonging. It is too late for me to pronounce any dramatic black-white judgment upon them.\(^8\)

Often during travels with her husband, Overstreet encountered her heritage through those intrinsic qualities innate within people everywhere. Through these encounters, she reaffirmed to herself her roots and origins, touching upon the inner self and confirming the person present within her body:

Not long ago, driving west, my husband and I stopped for the night at a shabby tourist house in a small Wyoming town—the only place there was to stop. I entered the house gingerly, and gingerly followed the landlady up the creaking stairs to the second-floor room. But in that room, suddenly, I found all my own past crowding around. It was there in the crazy-work cushions on the rocking chair, in the log-cabin quilt across the foot of the bed, in the potted begonias on the window sill, in the framed copies of "The House by the Side of the Road" and Kipling's "If." When I turned to the tired woman who stood waiting our decision, it was with a mixed feeling of familiarity and wonder. I wanted to say to her, "Don't you recognize me? I have known you all my life." And I wanted to ask, "Why do you do these things: piece these quilts... plant these flowers? Do you know why, or is it just because you are a person and that is how people are?"\(^9\)

Although Overstreet entered the field of adult education through her marriage to Harry Overstreet, over the years she became as dedicated and versed in this field as any practitioner. Adult education became her focus as she moved through many of the areas comprising this field,

\(^8\)Ibid., p.58.

\(^9\)Ibid., pp.68-69.
supporting adult learning through publications, lectures, journeys, and those experiences with people conducted throughout daily life. One such experience occurred when the Overstreets met for lunch with a friend, who was at the time a field representative of the American Association for Adult Education. He had recently returned to New York after six weeks of traveling across the United States for the Association. As they lunched together, they debated and discussed a continent of adult education into existence. The landmarks of the continent were adult education centers, forums, discussion groups, libraries, backyard clubs, public health centers, community orchestras, citizen's leagues, co-operatives, and community councils all of which are places of adult learning.

Overstreet expressed her thoughts on adult education as she sought to explain that everyone had within them something worth cultivating, regardless of who they were and what their position was within the community:

Sometimes I think of adult education as an occupation, a way of earning a living, that can be labeled and defined like any other. Again, I think of it as nothing more than a state of mind that determines how a person will handle whatever work happens to be his . . . the kinds of experience adults ought to have, and an ingenuous determination to make one's own special line of expertness add to the probability that adults will have these experiences.

Overstreet had a clear and concise understanding of adult

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\(^{10}\)Ibid., p.103.
education and what her role as the educator was:

The job of any adult educator, as I see it, is to invent situations that will both fit into the modern setup of life and be inviting enough that grownups will happily enter into them for the rewarding experiences they promise.¹¹

To be a successful educator, the ability to strive for the very best in every person should be intrinsic to the nature of the teacher:

Adult educators want people to climb for the climbing, if they happen to feel like it, and not be embarrassed about their impractical wish to do so. They want them to keep their interests alive, their senses alive, their hopes alive, their curiosities and affections alive—not only for the sake of their own everyday happiness, but also in order that they may refuse to accept as final a world in which most people are squeezed into narrow, unrewarding routines.¹²

Although her husband may have been instrumental in introducing Overstreet to adult education, she remained a contributor in the field through her own beliefs and goals:

If I have talked of what adult education aims at, I have done so only as prelude to a further statement of why I find in this field of work, even in the haphazard unhappy world of today, a clue to work as it might be, and to the fellowship of work as it might be.

First of all, the adult education effort is one into which I can pour everything I know or am ever likely to learn. Nothing that has to do with the wants and behaviors of people, their past or present insights, or the physical world in which they have to do their living is irrelevant to it. The adult educator is too often baffled by his own ignorance to declare he takes all knowledge for his province. But he gratefully puts to work every atom of knowledge that comes his way. This is one reason I am happy in the

¹¹Ibid., p.102.

¹²Ibid., p.107.
field: it not only invites me, it forces me, to keep alive my interest in the whole human enterprise.\textsuperscript{13}

Woven into the tapestry of Overstreet's writings are a common theme of democracy and the need to maintain the leadership of the United States as a nation committed to democracy and vigilant in its efforts to thwart that which threatens democracy as a basic human right. She believed that, through adult education, the United States would maintain democratic standing and leadership. She stated that democracy was dependent upon the cultivation of people and that,

\ldots boredom with the human race does more harm to our democratic way of life than does any other one thing, since democracy must depend upon the conviction that all people have in them something worth the effort of discovery and cultivation.\textsuperscript{14}

In perspective as individuals, we must strive to know people at their expert best, their knowing best, and accept this knowledge as such. To carry this thought further, democracy permeated adult learning in the free world, for without a democracy there would not be adult learning. In those countries subjected to dictatorial regimes, there is no place for adult learning or the need to enhance one's own self-development.

Overstreet felt that two of the fundamental rights in a democracy are the right to vote and the right to work; how

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p.108.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p.125.
these two are combined may be more important than how they stand on their own. Over the years, a democratic system can absorb, without permanent damage, an incredible number of sincere mistakes on the part of its citizenry. What it cannot absorb without structural damage is a prevalent cynicism, a look-out-for-number-one philosophy on the part of its people. As Overstreet discussed in her works, this was exactly what the United States found itself having to deal with when citizens did not have the opportunity to make themselves comfortable in society through their knowledge and working contributions and through the respect this allows them. People need to give of themselves, to reveal aspects of themselves to others. It is through this sharing of the self that self-worth, self-understanding, and self-courage can be developed. She shared an experience her husband encountered when traveling which reaffirmed the understanding and courage behind the basic goodness present in the human race:

Headed west on a lecture trip last winter, my husband caught the prevailing flu and found himself stranded in Chicago. Our relatives there could offer no help, having illness in their own home. But they passed along the word to a another young couple--friends of theirs--and almost before he knew what was happening, or could think of hospital arrangements, my husband was picked up . . . as soon as I arrived . . . they turned their place over to us. A friend of theirs turned her small apartment over to them, and she moved on into the guest room of yet another friend's home.

For ten days we lived there. The young couple came home each evening for dinner; brought the food and medicines we needed, and magazines and newspapers;
shared with us the day's happenings . . . they did it with laughter, with a flair for hospitality.\textsuperscript{15}

Self-knowledge and self-courage are innate resources available in times of need and, as such, should be inventoried from time to time. Overstreet believed that the ability to reinforce personal courage is an act of courage in and of itself, and to reach out to someone is an act of understanding built on personal courage:

Sometimes when the whole precariousness of life seems just too much—when the discrepancy in size between myself and the forces at large in the world is too appalling—I find it restoring just to think of my friends: to take inventory, as it were, of those whom I can count upon. Some of them I have not seen for years; others for months; others for days. But I feel perfectly confident that they will never go back on me so long as I do not go back on the values which they and I are both committed.\textsuperscript{16}

For some individuals the courage of compassion is too much of an ego risk which would place them at a disadvantage as they would not be respected for the quality of courage which is represented by the expression of compassion for fellow human beings. It is, however, these qualities which form good citizenship and are the building blocks in the foundation of a democracy. It is individuals who can stand up and be counted in crisis who are the mortar holding the bricks of democracy together:

And I know when I was teaching high school that there were certain students who went at life in ways I

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., pp.131-132.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p.135.
counted essentially sound. When, for example, as class adviser, I had to appoint committees for this or that, I knew that if a certain girl was chairman, or a certain boy, it would be perfectly safe to put into the working group other students who were normally too shy or too socially inept to take part in activities. I knew these chairmen would never embarrass anyone, and that they had the will and imagination to see to it that every member of a committee had a job to do and was given generous credit for doing it. If certain other students, however, were to have their turn at the various chairmanships, I dared not trust to their untender mercies any save those who could hold their own.

Overstreet was fortunate to maintain her personal intrinsic resources through experience and friendship—to call upon these resources in times of strife and bleakness and to gain the self-knowledge necessary to overcome obstacles which seemed insurmountable:

I have been fortunate in having friends—in finding them wherever I have lived and in keeping them, somehow, across the miles and years. When, now, I set myself to collect whatever will make for confidence through a bleak spiritual winter, I know that nothing is more important to me than to gather in my mind the friendships I have enjoyed. 

During World War II, in 1941 and 1942, Overstreet traveled and lectured across the country on the topics of knowledge, understanding, courage, and bravery. These were the concerns of a nation at war in Europe as she addressed audiences ranging from social workers, women's clubs, church groups to college students, parents, teachers, and concerned citizens. Her lectures were pivotal in her research for

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17 Ibid., p.137.
18 Ibid., p.145.
the books, *Courage for Crisis* and *Freedom's People*, as they provided an abundance of information on the topics of self-courage and self-understanding discussed in these publications.

In this time of the world's confusion there is good reason for fear. No one need be ashamed to admit he is afraid. Our personal lives have been disrupted by war. We are harassed by loneliness. We do not know how to plan or what to count upon. Yet even in a time like this we can prevent our fears from getting the better of us. Out of everyday psychological materials that are ready at hand if we will but use them, each of us can still make the courage he needs.

These lectures supported a nation's concerns with a world engaged in world war and grappled with the issues of fear and a belief in democracy worth fighting to maintain. Her discussions served to assist others in learning about themselves and the world around them, and enabled them to focus on the attitudes and intricacies of life that helped Americans face an uncertain future:

Because the anxious and frightened people with whom I have talked have seemed to show certain common attitudes, while the poised and courageous people have seemed to show others, I have come to believe the most practical attack we can make upon our fears will be by way of sizing up and revising our attitudes toward the whole human situation of which these fears are a part.

Through personal experience and collaborative research, Overstreet was able to classify various forms of courage

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20 Ibid., p.6.
and in her writings place each type in perspective. It was courage that came into focus during times of crisis; yet, courage was not prevalent in the interactions of daily living which require self-courage of a different substance. In a time following a national economic depression and in the midst of a world war, she was determined to find through her research how self-courage is internalized to meet everyday events that people of a democracy encountered:

We shall find, I believe, that most of the fears that beset us stem from three major sources: from doubt as to our own usefulness; from the difficulty of holding to steady long-range plans in a time of unpredictable change; and from loneliness—as sense of broken ties, of isolation, of doubt as to where we belong in the present human scheme of things.²¹

Overstreet concluded that self-courage is comprised of the belief that one counts as an individual present in his determination to simplify and organize life and the preservation of a democratic society which was the fundamental premise in war for America:

We can set the following down as a psychological axiom: the ideals we profess—justice, liberty, equality, integrity, common decency—have to live in individuals or they have no home on earth. They cannot live floating around in space. We do not see a rosy cloud of justice drifting by. We meet justice in a just person. We do not breathe in generosity out of the air. There is no more justice, generosity, and honesty in America that is embodied in American individuals.²²

As Overstreet talked with people throughout America

²¹Ibid., p.12.
²²Ibid., pp.28-29.
about the ways in which they established their wartime courage, she was amazed and impressed by the stories that revolved around the organization and simplification of life—a new conviction in the making of courage.

The thread of democracy binds *Courage for Crisis* and *Freedom's People* through Overstreet's elaboration of two social philosophies continuously locked in mortal combat with the irreconcilable issue being the question of the importance of human individualism. Both philosophies are relevant in the issue of human individualism and its role in courage:

The one philosophy—we call it statism, or fascism, or nazism—affirms that the individual is a mean and helpless creature, without virtue or dignity, except in so far as he becomes the obedient instrument of the State. In return for his willingness to work and fight, and not to reason why, the State confers upon him the comfort and doubtlessness of absolute belonging.

The other philosophy—we have variously called it individualism, democracy, republicanism—stubbornly asserts that each human being is born possessed of some spark of uniqueness that makes him important to begin with: so important, in fact, that a good State is one that encourages the full-statured growth of its individual members.

According to the one philosophy, the State is a mystic entity in itself—something more than the sum of its parts; a whole into which the individual fits as a single cell fits into a human body. For an individual to take issue with the State is accordingly as intolerable as for a single drop of blood to try to remake the whole body in its own image.  

Throughout her discussions in these books, Overstreet revealed much of herself through expression of her thoughts,

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23Ibid., p.31.
feelings, and beliefs as she touched upon expectations for herself and those shared by most people. Overstreet stated that, as people fighting a world war to maintain democracy, what we all wanted was not so much different from person to person as we strived toward a common life goal:

What I want in life is not essentially different from what millions of other people want. I may choose one kind of house, while they choose another. I may read one sort of book, while they read other sorts. I may exercise my individual taste in hats and furniture and food; in vocation and avocation, religion and political party. But not all the differences between me and the people around me would, if added together, weigh as much as what we have in common. Deeper than all surface wants that distinguish us from one another are spiritual wants that we share—wants that have to do with the basic relationships between men and man; wants that can be satisfied only in a free society. I believe, then, that I speak not for myself alone but for all average Americans when I say that one of my stakes in this war—and a stake to be well guarded during reconstruction—is freedom of speech.24

Together with her husband and on her own, Overstreet spent years traveling across America and lectured hundreds of times on the need to maintain the freedoms that Americans as a people take for granted under a democracy. Freedom of speech she exhibited in its most fundamental and real form during numerous forums. It was such an encounter, she recalled:

Someone remarked to me, the other day, that freedom of speech has no meaning except to the few people who want to say something that would make them a minority—something that would subject them to liquidation in a country without free speech. I do not believe our American concern about this basic

24Ibid., p.35.
institution of freedom is as narrow as this. Comparatively few of us may, in a whole lifetime, find ourselves standing alone in support of so unpopular a belief that only our system of civil liberties serves to protect us from an angry mob. But most of us, every day of our lives, say things that would not be tolerated under dictatorship. We say these things without thinking of the fact that no official check is put upon our words. Like the man who talked prose all his life without knowing it—we are scarcely more conscious of it than of the air we breathe. But that does not mean we would not suffocate spiritually if it were denied us—quite as surely as we would suffocate physically in an airtight room.

During the war effort, Overstreet was indirectly involved in the planning of an institute on postwar problems. During this planning phase, she encountered hesitation in other women who were also involved. These women lacked intrinsic self-courage to provide people with the truth of the unpleasant realities upon which such problems would focus. They exhibited the assumption that people were inherently weak and unable to face the harsh truth as it existed and, as individuals, they were prepared to fail rather than allow people this opportunity to call upon inner reserves of self-courage.

Overstreet felt that this was an implied insult to the human mind and the country at large. The American system of democracy was built on courage and, as such, the beliefs in freedom under a democracy are not limited to speech but rather stretched to include all democratic freedoms:

²⁵Ibid., p.35.
But there are other stakes. I want freedom of religion. Here, again, I believe is a freedom as valuable to the majority as to the minority. If heads were counted, I suppose I would find myself safely in the religious majority—and not in danger, therefore, even if freedom were curbed. But because I am in the majority—and subject, therefore, to the dangers of complacency or indifference—I want to live in the presence of free and sincere minorities... I want freedom under law. We often treat law as though it restricted our personal freedom. It is but common sense to recognize, however, that law is the common person's only guarantee of freedom... I want to be permitted to be decent to other human beings, whatever their race or color. I want to keep what seems to me a basic human privilege: the chance to discover "my own people" anywhere... these are, after all, only the solid everyday desires of most Americans. We can take them for granted most of the time—but not when they are challenged by a power that declares its intention of destroying them forever.26

Overstreet frankly stated that courage exists through the practice of courage. And the practice of courage varies according to situations—both on an individual level and a democratic level with each format being just as valid and necessary as the other. To elaborate more fully:

In the matter of courage, this psychological principle of "compounding" holds good. The trouble with the Caspar Milqueatoasts of the world is that, never having dared anything, they never had a chance to acquire the manner that carries off with skill and ease new acts of daring. They never find out from experience, therefore, how safe daring is—how much safer, often, than trying to play safe. It is not only in military affairs that offense may prove the best defense. Wherever we take the initiative against circumstance, we choose, as it were, the ground for action: the stratagem is ours, and can be planned to utilize to best advantage the skills and insights that are ours. When we leave the initiative, always, to someone else, or to the seemingly blind forces of chance, we are forever being caught off guard; called

26 Ibid., pp.41-41.
upon to do what we do not do well; made to appear inadequate by being pushed this way and that.  

Overstreet continued her discussion of understanding and courage in *How to Think About Ourselves* published in 1948, and *Understanding Fear in Ourselves and Others*, released in 1951. The focus of *How to Think About Ourselves* is primarily on thought and communication through analysis of the self. This analysis provides self-understanding, which results from self-knowledge. The decision to pursue this topic in more depth was influenced by Overstreet's personal work over the previous dozen or so years and the growing number of people she encountered who freely admitted to being concerned about themselves and who could not understand themselves or their expectations of life. As a result, they viewed themselves in a less-than-confident manner.

In Overstreet's experience, people lack both limited and unlimited confidence in themselves and their abilities. This lack of confidence undermines and inhibits their potential as human beings. The rather trite expression, "you never know what you can do until you try" is true, in essence, for all people. To elaborate, she described the story of a friend whose preschool son was incredulously dismayed to discover that he could not fly like birds. This anguished acknowledgement of his earth-bound status caused

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27Ibid., p.80.
great personal distress irregardless of the personal knowledge that nature was against him as man and that he was not alone in this inability. The reality remained, for this boy, that he could not fly!

Different from the stark realities of nature which limit confidence, is the personal limit that identifies mutually exclusive alternatives. For example, a doctor friend of the Overstreets acknowledged to them one evening his desire to return home to manage the family farm. However, he recognized the futility of that desire, as it was incompatible with his medical research and, in the final analysis, medicine was his first love. This was a man who understood himself, was confident in himself, and accepted the limitations of that self.

Another such incident in self-understanding occurred while the Overstreets were driving into town one summer day from their farm in Vermont. They were forced to swerve to avoid hitting a turtle lying in the road. The turtle had, at their approach, halted and pulled into his shell—a normal response to danger. After stopping the car, they carried the turtle to safety and then resumed their interrupted journey. In analysis of the gesture, it was safe to assume that it had no long-term value, as at some point in the future, the turtle would again cross a road and, at the approach of a car, would again withdraw into his shell in reaction to danger. The gesture was simply an act
of pity or compassion for a creature armored against old
dangers, yet at the mercy of new. To the Overstreets, it
seemed worth the effort to give the turtle another chance to
learn what he could never learn.

Often times, learning will occur in a flash of insight
provoked by an unrelated vehicle of understanding. When the
individual has digested this learning, he has gained a
deeper understanding of self. Many incidents such as this
were facilitated by Overstreet in her roles of teacher and
lecturer:

I recall an incident that took place when I was
teaching junior college English some twenty years ago.
At my desk one afternoon, waiting for a class to
assemble, I fingered through a book that had just come
to my hands . . . and found a poem, unknown to me
before, by Ogden Nash—the poem he calls "Old Men"
. . . It stabbed into my consciousness like a dagger
of light. Here, reticent understatement, was the
loneliness of all the old men who, in the small town
of my childhood, had sat idly along the curb in front
of the general store, watching the world go by, and at
intervals had stood in awkward black around the grave
that claimed one more of their diminishing number.

I was still letting myself be taught by Ogden Nash
when my class filed in to be taught by me. . . .
read it to their variously interested and uninterested
ears and minds . . . one student lingered . . . was
not the first occasion on which this boy had shown
himself capable of giving the human tradition a home
in his own life . . . often, as we explored some poem
or drama or story, I would see his eyes change with a
sudden private understanding of some insight . . . this
boy was quietly becoming a person of mental and
emotional distinction. He was not engaged in any
solemn program of bettering himself. He was not giving
himself a veneer of culture in the hope that it would
turn out to have a cash value. He was simply finding
his place within the species, finding his own
companionship of insight and commitment. ²⁸

As Overstreet exhibited throughout her numerous publications, she believed that understanding of the self can occur at various intervals through a variety of modes of comprehension. As one works to understand the self, one also works to understand the self of others—the sharing of ego that takes place among people. Overstreet had one such experience, which occurred during her first year of teaching, involving a young, Mexican male—a high-school freshman who rarely came prepared to class and sat in deep inertia through the lecture. Initially challenged and then exasperated by his unresponsiveness, she cornered him after class and demanded an explanation.

Several moments passed as he assessed her ability to understand anything, or whether she was a person who merely knew things. Finally, in a tired voice he explained how, at home, seven people lived in one room and he started a paper route every morning at four o'clock.

Standing before her, prepared to be understood or misunderstood, he still remained an irritant to her teacher pride. However, she now viewed him with fresh insight and understood a little better that which before had been confusion.

For many, self-understanding provides comfort and

confidence as exhibited in that which is routine or habitual. During her college years, Overstreet supported herself working part-time in a tea room. It was during this time that she became familiar with habit formation on the part of people as she encountered it daily with customers.

Most people accept a break in habit with relatively good grace, whereas others are quite out of countenance by any need to change what has become an established pattern because their comfort level or sense of security is threatened. In adult learning situations, this can be seen as a threat to the ego or sense of self which the individual must preserve at all cost.

In further pursuit of understanding the self, the Overstreets tried an experiment with a large class of adults after everyone had arrived, seated themselves, and were, to all intents and purposes, eager to concentrate on learning. They asked these learners to write down that which they were actually thinking about just as the lecture was to begin. The frank and anonymous replies revealed how far away these adults were from learning:

"I was wondering where I can possibly find an apartment before the first of next month" . . . "I was thinking about my sister-in-law's new hair-do" . . . "I was just feeling mad because someone else got my favorite seat tonight" . . . "I was wishing the woman ahead of me would take off her hat" . . . "I was trying to figure out where I might have put the spare car keys I can't find" . . . "I was hurrying to finish a chapter in a book I brought along" . . . "I was hoping you'd review last week's session because I
lost my notes."

These adults were not inattentive individuals; as yet, their minds had not been removed from the many different situations in which they were still resident. Before learning and understanding can join forces, the mind must be open and ready to receive and process information.

A pattern seems to result when it comes to the challenge of presenting facts and ideas to minds crowded with the products of past experiences. What often appears to be the longest route to the naked eye is proven to be the shortest route home. Overstreet discovered this truth applied to self-learning during her college years when she would commute between Oakland and San Francisco by ferry prior to construction of the Bay Bridge. At the barrier, people would crowd together and push forward en mass to gain the gangplank and deck. Overstreet initially tried to gain access by moving straight ahead with the flow of the crowd. However, with time and experience, she observed that, while people seemed to be packed tight in resistance to this forward motion, there were spaces that allowed for a zigzag form of advance. It was easy to gain access to the gangplank by moving without stepping on anyone or being stepped on. This is true of various self-learning situations. The most direct route may not always be the

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29Ibid., p.89.
shortest route.

Many of the experiences which Overstreet wrote about she had lived through observation and interactions with others. She discovered that, as a speaker, many times a hostile audience must be changed into a friendly one before knowledge can be receptive. Thus, it is imperative that the speaker know himself and understand his audience and can identify with the audience through similarities in their pasts that cultivate learning. Therefore, psychological results can be accomplished in less than a half dozen or so sentences. The lecturer will have humanized himself and his audience as he has established their common status as products of mutual experiences. His audience will have become individualized through the invitation to each listener to see himself in the context of his own unique past allowing them the comfort of differing from one another and yet being accepted for that difference. The speaker offers to his audience friendship through living rather than expounding beliefs abstracted from life. Such accomplishments are the mark of an adult educator because differences are bridged and both the speaker and the listener become colleagues rather than opponents.

While Overstreet researched *How to Think About Ourselves*, she juggled various other enterprises she was involved in. She shared with her audience the juggling that took place:
During this summer—to take efforts more or less at random—I have tried to write this book, extend a perennial garden started a year ago, help shape the policies of a certain education group to which I belong and which is now in a state of transition, help shape a work program for a certain student group concerned about the rights of minorities. Together with my husband, I have put up a new ceiling in the upstairs hall, where the old plaster had fallen, given the living room a new color scheme, outlined various courses that we will be teaching in the months ahead, and made plans for fertilizer bins that we shall not get built until next summer and plans for an extension to the house that will not get built for some years to come . . . if at all.

To some of these projects I have brought a fair degree of skill and knowledge, to others chiefly a willingness to learn. Not even in the areas of my expertness, however, have I been able to rely on the merely repetitive or habitual. Each project required that I gear my energy to a purpose other than that of keeping things as they are, and that I either learn the nature of some working material or improve my knowledge of it. Each has given me a chance to fail, no less than a chance to succeed.

I have been happy this summer as I could conceive of being in a time when the sharp, bitter dust of human catastrophe grimes even the most shining moment of personal joy. It has been a summer when, to make room for both creative enterprises and the chores that keep life going, we have stretched our days as Vermont farmers stretch theirs—from "can see to can’t see." Now at the end of the season I step back, as it were, from happiness and regard it curiously. What aspect of our human nature has been ministered to by this summer of effort, of engagement with creative problems, that would not similarly have been ministered to by a summer in a rocking chair or in a routine? There, in different guise, is the question with which we started: What is the reward? or, more properly perhaps, What are the rewards? . . .

Here—having set that question down in black and white—I myself, engaged on this book, left my typewriter and went out to walk around the house and think things over . . . In this place and time, I myself have, day by day, been trying to get certain things done—things not required for immediate survival. Why have I done them? If I could answer that question, I might be able to handle the more general question of what creative man gets out of life that acceptive man does not. I might know why sloth,
catalogued with the deadly sins, is, from the psychological angle, a deadening habit.  

Throughout her travels in America, Overstreet met adults in little towns and large cities living without any real understanding of the meaning or value of life. It would have been easy to dismiss these people as exceptions and not representative of adults in general. However, what they revealed was a deep perplexity that existed in the life of people in the world—a lack of understanding about man and his world.

Often Overstreet struggled with a personal concern about the relationship between man and work and its distortion as it was applicable to her own life. She admitted she enjoyed both her work as a writer and lecturer which appeared to be the exception to most people. Unlike most other people in the work force, she had never been exposed to prejudice or exploitation. Never had she felt trapped within responsibility or subjected to any of the human indignities that people endure for the sake of earning a living:

I have been puzzled about that work life, not because I have had terrible first-hand knowledge of what work ought never to be, but out of the contrary fact that I have had rewarding first-hand knowledge of what work can be, of what it might be for the many millions if in our culture we could develop a genius for putting first things first.


\[31\] Ibid., p.119.
As Overstreet wrote, she freely admitted to a deep curiosity about those people who have a knack for living with the human race. The role assumed is not important so much as the knack of being in their presence and feeling renewed in the excitement of being human. These are not people easily classified under ordinary labels. Their attraction is not in what they have or who they are so much as in their influence to bring about positive change within a home, city, or culture. These people exhibit an understanding of their self and the world in which they live. For Overstreet, what was gained from this observation and acknowledgement of individual quirks was a type of humor that the human animal rationalized to support those excuses which explain failure; that angry and overbearing opinions mask an insecure ego in defense; and that when life is explained, it is indeed the description of our own inner life.

While research was being conducted for their books, the Overstreets were asked, as a result of their involvement in adult education, to concentrate on the philosophy of human relationships. The requests were generated from three distinct groups, originated with prospective students and channelled through program directors. The students were not philosophy majors in the academic sense but rather men and women who were involved in professions in offices, stores, factories, and classrooms, with the common ground being an
interest in learning what life is all about. Overstreet reminisces about one student:

As one man wrote us, explaining why he had enrolled in our class, "You come to a point, after while, where you realize that if you have things to do but no good reason for doing them you haven't got anything. When you've thought that over long enough, you begin to stir yourself to get a philosophy."\textsuperscript{32}

To her delight, Overstreet discovered that few students attended her seminars seeking easy answers as they debated numerous questions and issues involving the understanding of life. These adults were living testimony that the American adult is concerned about meanings and values. Those people who aim at self-understanding view themselves and others as builders of personal philosophies. In this area of adult education, Overstreet joined these students in the continued development of her own philosophy of life.

The choice to tackle and address the issue of fear, in both the individual and general population, was arrived at as a result of numerous occasions in which Overstreet was able to sharply focus on the realization of how fear limits an individual's free approach to new experiences. As fear limits, so does it halt the development of strong personal and interpersonal relationships, as she discussed in \textit{Understanding Fear in Ourselves and Others}.

Within society, fear recognized for itself fails to be accepted as a valid human experience. Within the work

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p.193.
environment, fear of the job—whether it be technical, emotional or social—is usually not validated as a self-respecting emotion. Acceptable, however, is a nonorganic-based illness, which may stem from fear of the job and grants the employee a self-respecting escape from the root of his fear.

There is much human beings could learn from the natural instincts of self-preservation and fear existent in the animal kingdom. Overstreet described an antidote gleamed from her own exposure to nature's instinctive response:

One morning last summer I saw a deer grazing at the edge of our hayfield. At intervals, it raised its head, listened in one direction and another, sniffed . . . and went on grazing. Then its delicate senses recorded some threat: and it bounded off across the field, over the stone wall, and into the woods.

From the direction it took, I could guess where it went: to a spot among the tamaracks, down by the spring, where ferns have been leveled by deer that have lain there. But with even more certainty, I could guess something else about the deer: that in its ferny thicket it did not reproach itself for having run away. It did not call itself a timid fool, nor think up belatedly some more dramatic role it might have played. It did not take out its self-contempt upon some smaller deer, nor dance up and down in hoofed rage upon the unoffending ferns--these symbolically cast as the enemy it would like to trample. It did not convert into bodily illness a brooding sense of having been humiliated. With danger temporarily past--but with alertness unimpaired and ready on demand--it leant itself to the positive business of staying alive; to rest and nourishment. In short, it remained a deer. It did not become a complex, self-conscious, confused human being.\(^{33}\)

What is relevant in this discussion of fear is the

\[^{33}\text{Bonaro Overstreet, Understanding Fear in Ourselves and Others (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), p.17.}\]
acknowledgement that there are fears that human beings need to fear and that there is respect in that fear—predominantly those fears which inhibit our response to reality as is the case with the deer. Also, there are those fears which prohibit a person from moving forward when he should, or that spur him into plunging desperately forward rather than chance being thought a fool. These are negative fears, damaging to self-understanding and self-esteem.

During the war years, many wives were left behind when their spouses went into the service of their country. Some gave into the fear of loneliness and allowed it to prevent them from moving forward in their life. Others channeled this fear of loneliness into the numerous adult education activities which sprouted up during these years. One such activity began as a small reading group of a few women and blossomed into a larger fellowship of learning becoming known within the community as a center for adult education.

Many times, fear can be converted into self-defined limitations in order to preserve the individual’s ego and maintain an aura of respectability. Such was the situation of a professor Overstreet knew in a small, orthodox religious college, as he assessed and evaluated himself and his colleagues to her:

"We don't drink. We don't swear. We don't smoke. We don't dance. We don't play cards. But we have no important virtues." Here, it would seem, is a classic
Throughout her discussion of fear, Overstreet drew on her own experience in life to add dimension and depth to her point. In one such incident, in her early years of teaching, she was fortunate to be the type of individual, eager with pedagogic creativeness and uninhibited by fear of the unknown. Interested in overcoming the odds of teaching "problem boys" she approached the principal with a plan of action. After gaining his support, she implemented the plan. It failed initially. However, after numerous modifications, she began to see positive results in the classroom. What was important in this incident was that the improvement was derived not only from her idea, but also from the principal's willingness to try innovative methods—the ability of both individuals to risk failure without fear.

No person can experience a literal freedom from fear if he has a mature sense of reality and responsibility. This person is cognizant of the weight that rests on mankind and the likelihood that there is no foundation except in a system of values that is continually under siege. Overstreet stressed in her writing that man is fearful that he might render inadequate service to those values held important.

\[^{34}\text{Ibid., p.101.}\]
through preoccupation with a shift in priorities rather than alert to a common danger. In addition, he may keep still and play it safe at a time when great risks are indicated or that he might misinterpret complex trends and situations as to become an unwilling supporter through ignorance of that which should be repudiated. This type of experience was one she shared later in a collaboration with her husband Harry.

As Overstreet observed, there are fears which citizens in a democracy must support:

We need to fear those tendencies in the human mind that make for obtuseness . . . the destructive influence of the hostile, exploitative personality and of pressure groups that practice totalitarianism in the name of democracy. We need to fear the cultural lag that keeps the physically unified world a chaos of traditional antagonisms . . . physical, mental, and emotional distortion that this violent age has worked upon the lives of children. And we need greatly to fear our own tired, confused readiness to say we can do nothing. 35

All of Overstreet's nonfiction publications focused on self-understanding and self-courage with numerous avenues of exploration conducted. These topics are woven into the threads of future collaborations with Harry Overstreet and served as a basis for many of her lectures.

CHAPTER IV

JOINT COLLABORATIONS IN ADULT EDUCATION

Prior to the Overstreet's first collaboration Town Meeting Comes to Town, in 1939, Mrs. Overstreet was employed at the Arts Guild in New York City (1933 - 1937) and taught creative writing. Harry Overstreet was Professor of Philosophy at the College of the City of New York until his retirement in 1939. He then served as Director of the Leadership School at Town Hall in New York City from 1940 to 1941 and remained a trustee of Town Hall until 1950. His wife succeeded him in the Directorship position at Town Hall in 1941.

The focus of the Overstreets' collaboration was one of social education versus political education. The book discussed the history of Town Hall as an educational agency within the New York City community and, specifically, a program at Town Hall, "Town Hall on the Air," which was an educational program in the true tradition of adult education conducted via radio. The program was the brain child of George Denny, then Associate Director of Town Hall, and was created in an attempt to open the closed mind to intellectual thought. The format presented all sides of crucial questions and promoted freedom of discussion, fine
tolerance with the free exchange of ideas, and a successful means to achieve democracy through discussions of fascism, socialism, communism, and democracy.

Although the major thrust of the book was about that particular institution, Town Hall in New York City and its joint program, "Town Meeting on the Air," it was in reality a book about America and the discriminating genius of the American mind. As the Overstreets elaborated:

This genius worked wonders in the town halls of New England and in the country stores of the growing West. We have tried to keep hold of that American method of working things out together. But it has had hard sledding in the crowded world of today, where we seem to praise the democratic meeting of minds without giving minds a place where they can meet.

Town Hall of New York City emerged as a result of the determined efforts of six women to achieve the right to vote. After these women—Eleanor Butler Sanders, Catherine A.B. Abbe, Lucia Gilbert Runkle, Lee Wood Haggin, Adele M. Fielde, and Mary Putnam Jacobi—encountered defeat at the Constitutional Convention in 1896, they were informed by their male legislators that females were not prepared for the ballot because they possessed no knowledge of politics, no political sense, and no education. Encouraged in the face of defeat, these women dissolved the Committee on Suffrage and formed a League for Political Education

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dedicated to the provision of education for themselves and others.

From this intense motivation to learn, these women sought out those men who possessed political knowledge and invited them to come and lecture to the League on what they knew. Through informed lectures and the openness of thought, the League for Political Education grew and emerged into the Town Hall of New York City, which served to provide educational services to the men and women of New York.

Much of the successful growth of this organization can be credited to the involvement and subsequent leadership of the League under Robert Erskine Ely. Under Ely's guidance, Town Hall flourished as an agency dedicated to adult education.

Ely was invited to give six lectures on political economy . . . After two years, the membership decided that they must have him for their leader, and on May 1, 1901, he became director. From that day, for over thirty-seven years, the impress of his personality has been on the League.2

However, despite its extensive educational offerings, there was not a place to which people could adjourn after a lecture to sit, eat, and exchange ideas. The idea of such a place or club, initially expressed by Samuel McCune Lindsay at the dedication ceremonies, was implemented. The Club would be a place for both men and women to meet on equal terms. A liberal gesture in the early part of the

2Ibid., p.98.
twentieth century.

Created in 1919, the Club did not achieve a facility until January 1925. Comprised of a lounge and restaurant, the Club was located atop the Town Hall, only a stone's throw from Times Square. It served as a meeting place for the country's most famous painters, writers, leaders in business and other professions, and others from all walks of life. The Club attracted widespread attention as it was the first of its kind in greater New York to maintain a high standard of service for moderate dues.

The social life of the Club and the intellectual life of Town Hall were interwoven since membership was controlled by an independent Board of Governors and was composed of a diverse, eclectic group of individuals. Overstreet believed that inclusion into this club was a signal of importance and criticized methods utilized in teaching adults through the discussion format of the club:

Man does not live by ideas alone, but by various forms of intimate fellowship. Education can easily become so abstract as to lose the human quality. Ideas need to be warmed by companionship just as truly as companionship has to be vitalized by ideas. Someday, no doubt, we shall realize this in more for our educational undertakings. As we now go about our ventures in adult education we stop short of people's brains. We deem it enough if we start their thinking processes going.³

Over time, Town Hall acquired a reputation for learning. All types and formats of learning—political,

³Ibid., p.105.
cultural, academic, and social—were utilized in educational programs. The policy at Town Hall was to hear all sides of public questions, to initiate the process of grappling with new ideas, and to match one thought against another in order to truly experience the impartial search for social truth. Significant experiences were abundant at Town Hall, as one such occurrence involved the issue of freedom of speech demonstrated in a lecture by Margaret Sanger on the topic of birth control. This notorious and historic occasion in adult education came about when the public or, in this situation, a self-appointed fraction of the public intervened on behalf of the people. This occurred at Town Hall on November 13, 1922. Ms. Sanger's lecture drew a large crowd of adults seriously intent upon intelligent contemplation of the problems of birth control. A law officer intervened and attempted unsuccessfully to disrupt the lecture and prevent discussion from being conducted. At the conclusion of the lecture, Ms. Sanger was escorted to police headquarters, interrogated, and released. The people of New York campaigned to have their outrage heard through newspapers and other media vehicles at the loss of Ms. Sanger's freedom and, hence, their education.

Another major event in Town Hall's history was the birth of a radio program committed to the presentation of all sides of a question, and it successfully communicated to its listeners that this was one of the greatest educational
services provided to the country. George Denny, the creator of the program, was greatly distressed when he encountered a closed mind, which he defined as "... one who doesn't listen ...." A closed mind was a true danger to democracy and prevalent across America:

Denny saw clearly that a democracy could not work unless people of diverse views learned to think together. To permit each individual to be free to think as he pleased was indeed excellent--so far as it went. It was at least the prerequisite to a civilized way of living. Dictator-countries didn't go even so far as that. But a democracy had to go further. Where each one hugged his pet convictions to himself, bolstering them up by the approval of others of like mind, nothing much could be achieved in the way of a common or public conviction. It was like parallel lines that never meet.5

The result of these beliefs, "Town Hall on the Air," was born as a means to convey the democratic way of thinking, born out of community life. It was within the small, intimate, close-knit community where individuals live as neighbors that differences of opinion and temperament were felt and whatever collective judgment was reached had taken all of these factors into account. Whenever democratic thinking ceases to exist, then democracy, in all of its essential forms, dies. This was a belief which the Overstreets endorsed through their writings and lectures:

Here is where the most serious of our dangers lies: and this is what Denny came to see, the essentially democratic way of a common understanding,

4Ibid., p.4.
5Ibid., p.4.
reached by people who live intimately in communities, is in large measure nonexistent in America today. That neighbor across the way, with his furious hatred and his isolating himself from all views that did not harmonize with his own, was a symbol of what, in less virulent form, is now true of most Americans.

"Town Meeting on the Air," was a bold idea to unify America into a town meeting utilizing radio as the media to link a nation of people together. The program was comprised of weekly discussion of issues vital in America. Discussions were uncensored and conducted by the most knowledgeable persons, and the listening audience was encouraged to participate by questioning the speakers. The radio program was a joint venture between the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and Town Hall, with NBC absorbing the financial impact and Town Hall responsible for the program organization in consultation with NBC's educational staff.

A six-week series of discussion was launched in 1935 and served to reach millions of people and present all sides of vital public issues. "Town Meeting on the Air" was embraced with overwhelming positive public approval, as hundreds of letters conveyed the relevance of this format of education and its meaning to the listening audience.

Through drama and social sportsmanship, the program was a success, as it served to educate and inform people across the nation. However, to the question, "Is this a successful

*Ibid., p. 6.*
means for achieving a workable democracy?", the Overstreets responded:

The crucial issue lies here. Is democracy a matter of counting heads or is it one of educating needs? We can, of course, doubt where heads—enough of them—can be educated. If so, we might as well fold up and confess that our "American dream" is as insubstantial as the stuff of which most dreams are made. Or we may be emboldened to declare that what is wrong with us today is that there is no nation-wide effort to train adult minds so that they will develop the mental habits essential to a democracy . . .

We are confronted here by the gravest problem of modern life. No democratic society today can hope to succeed so long as its citizens are incapable of making honestly informed judgements about the matters that concern them. Either the great mass of citizens must hand over the government of their lives to the few or even to the one; or they must somehow be educated to do the job themselves.7

Into this picture, "Town Meeting of the Air" came as a simple, unassuming effort to initiate a beginning—a beginning dedicated to express a sole method, only one of many methods, to initiate broad, widespread critical thinking on a national level to the people of America as a means to maintain an informed democracy.

During this time, vocational education began to attain momentum as people recognized that few occupations were limited to simple, repetitive affairs in which initial training sufficed over a lifetime career. Rather, occupations required increasing attainment of knowledge and skill to encompass continuous learning. Both of the Overstreets applauded the necessity for continued education:

7Ibid., 18-20.
Where the opportunity for growth is not provided on the job, it must be found elsewhere. So a democracy that cares about its people begins to assume the obligation of giving them, as adults, all the chances they need to continue their vocational education. Also, individuals do not always make the wisest choice of occupation. Either they choose what they are not fit to perform, or they choose what they later dislike. So a democracy that believes in the right of individuals to pursue their happiness begins to give them the chance, once they have made vocational mistakes, to train themselves for some other kind of work that is closer to their interest and capacity.\footnote{Ibid., p.232}

The Overstreets believed the privileges of a democracy go beyond the mere freedom to vote, with one of the responsibilities being citizenship. It was this concern that America was ill prepared to address:

The outstanding fact about the America of recent years is the unprecedented problems thrust upon the attention of the average citizens. Their school education, confined to the traditional studies, has given them no special training to meet these problems. They have therefore had to undertake a new way of training themselves for citizenship.\footnote{Ibid., p.233.}

With this dawning realization, necessity became the mother of invention, and adult education was initiated to resolve the concern of citizenship. The federal government became involved in 1936 and, through monetary support, encouraged communities to make the most of the opportunity to experiment with forms of organizations and methods of discussions to establish adequate systems of adult education.
At the time *Town Meeting Comes to Town* was published, America was beginning to respond to this need for adult enlightenment through the leadership of the American Association of Adult Education. The Association served to meet the needs of adult education for a more organized, nationwide effort to build and nurture centers of adult learning. In the decade of its existence, it had functioned as a valuable clearinghouse of information as well as a source of financial aid to experiments in adult education. It was through this organization that leaders in the field gathered together for discussion and mutual clarification.

Adult education assisted people in the realization that their intellectual and social life could be enriched through learning and that they, as citizens of a democracy, owed it to themselves to make use of this opportunity for free mental processes.

*Leaders for Adult Education*, the result of a study the Overstreets undertook at the request of Morse A. Cartwright, then President of the American Association for Adult Education, was published in 1941. The study was initially designed to address the problem of leadership training in adult education; however, research findings revealed a larger scope of training in progress than what was hypothesized at the onset. Research for this study enabled the Overstreets to talk with many adult education directors across America and to observe their techniques and
experience in leadership training:

When we began this study a year ago, we knew that the problem of leadership training was a vital one, but we had no idea how widely and seriously it was being tackled. From our then uninstructed viewpoint, it seemed to us that the leadership training in adult education was well-nigh nonexistent. At the end of this year of going up and down the highways and byways, we have come to the conclusion that the training of leaders not the next thing that must go on the agenda of American adult education—it is on the agenda already. We end the year with a happily amazed sense of the vigor and ingenuity with which leaders throughout the country are working to produce more leaders of the kind the movement requires.10

Through the pages of this text, the Overstreets stressed the value of democracy and the latitude it allows in the cultivation of leadership. Democracy encourages development of the individual, as it allows people to find their own intellectual, political, and vocational way and to express admiration for those leaders which they follow.

One form of leadership deliberately fostered in the American democracy was the educational. To be an educator, one does not have to be a "natural," as some are mediocre and some are superior. However, they are able to fit within the social framework and maintain the freedom intellectual thought that is taken for granted within America's democracy.

For many decades in American history, it seemed enough to provide educational leadership to children, with the

assumption that all of life's problems were solved with the emergence of the individual into adulthood. Adults are mentally stimulated to challenge life, and a democracy can thrive in a complex time if its citizens have the interest and opportunity to continue to learn throughout life. The entirety of the adult education movement endorsed this conviction with the realization that:

... a persistent problem of the movement is to discover and train leaders who can exert the type of influence characteristic of educators but employ methods geared to adult problems and adult psychology.\[^{11}\]

In the course of their travels, the Overstreets viewed first-hand the problems and frustrations encountered by adult educators involved in the adult education movement:

They have come to life as places where individuals whom we can group together loosely as adult educators are grappling with one of the most exciting problems of our day: the problem of finding and training men and women to function as democratic leaders on an adult level of life.\[^{12}\]

As they were involved in the adult education movement, the Overstreets formed their own philosophy, which was supported in a measure by their exposure to adult education as it existed nationwide. Tenure in the field, however, was a matter of distinction between what qualified one individual as an adult educator and what criteria should be established for continued leadership. In the Overstreets'
opinion, to be a leader one must continue to grow:

Tenure in the adult field has to be tenure by achievement: and the psychological setup is such that achievement is not lastingly possible to anyone who has himself stopped growing. For the job of the leader is that of being a person among people - a person, to be sure, who has accurate knowledge to communicate, or some particular administrative skill, must always a person and not merely a body of knowledge or a set of skills tied together by skin and bones.  

Many of the adult educators the Overstreets encountered in their study were involved in the attainment of literacy. In this area, the mark of a true leader is the person intent on sharing knowledge without patronization or acts of superiority with respect to his learners. In the classroom of illiteracy, students make blunders in grammar and cannot express themselves clearly in writing and often not in speech--the leader who recognizes the limitations of his own knowledge and can see that the status of the voluntary learner is honorable and valued. Each individual is not born with command of the English language, especially if the individual is from a foreign country, but assumes this knowledge in the formative years of life. However, the adult who fails to possess this language command or has inadequate verbal and written command of the English language is at a distinct disadvantage in American society. As such, the adult who has decided to rectify this omission should be praised and supported for the decision rather than

\[13\text{Ibid., p.1.}\]
patronized or made to feel inferior.

Another quality of leadership is the determination to continue to excel and surpass previous performance. The intrinsic motivation to grow—not only as a teacher but as an individual interested in learning for the sake of knowledge—is manifested within this determination. In reviewing the Overstreets' publications, this determination was present, as it resulted in further exploration of knowledge, which culminated in additional publication of books and articles focused on the many dimensions of a sole topic of knowledge. This was prevalent in their works, as many of their books elaborate upon and add dimension to previous issues discussed in earlier publications.

The leader of adults should be recognized to be an expert in the field that he will instruct, which, although it may be stating the obvious, is a quality often overlooked by those individuals deemed as present or prospective adult educators. Specialization and accurate knowledge is the mark of a good leader according to the Overstreets. This was the description of one subtle power of the adult leader as he combined specialized knowledge with insight into implications that went beyond the specialized field to incorporate challenges for the adult mind intent on learning:

Dealing with people experienced in work, homemaking, voting, and social life, the adult educator can go at subjects at a more mature angle than can the
formal educator: from the angle of meaning. The adult educator, then, has to be a person capable of thinking in terms of meanings.\footnote{Ibid., p.42.}

Adult education in the late 1930s and early 1940s was a broad, diverse field not bound by academic walls or structures. The adult educator was an individual who, through the sharing of knowledge, introduced persons to that half of themselves which had been missing. Within the realm of the learning situation, the adult educator must be able to convey the whole experience range necessary to tap the resource of power that resides in mastery of learning. However, he must be diversified to individualize the various types of learning to each learner's situation within the community setting.

In the course of their research, the Overstreets' had the opportunity to view the community wisdom of adult education leaders through the Extension Service and the Adult Education Program at the State University of Michigan. The University was committed to the problem of assisting communities to form community councils. The formation of these councils was founded upon specific astute insights into the interactions of the average American community.

The theory behind this service, for the University, was that a visiting adult educator could be objective, whereas those involved often have the issues clouded. They
prevailed upon such educators to establish points of building the foundation. Culmination of the Overstreets' research defined and explained several qualities they found existent in adult leaders:

Upon four qualities of leadership, then, we have found outspoken agreement: a leader of adults must himself want to go on learning; he must have some expertness that gives, as it were, a vertebrae character to what he says and does; he must have a sense of relationships broad enough to redeem him from narrow specialization; and he must have a sense of community—a power to think and act in terms of the real problems and resources of real places where real people live.15

Beyond mere satisfaction of their own curiosity, the Overstreets' wanted to acknowledge a peculiar characteristic of adult education, as they concluded that most of the outstanding leaders were concerned and committed to the training of future leaders despite the fact that they themselves were never trained to be adult leaders. Therefore, all adult training programs within the adult education field must have incorporated in their basic philosophy an appreciation of the position of the adult educator as a person leading people.

There were several years between collaborations, during which time the Overstreets pursued their separate areas of interest in research and publications. In 1949, they published Where Children Come First, which was a study of the Parent Teacher Association idea and was commissioned by

15Ibid., p. 61.
the National Congress of Parents and Teachers after the organization had been in existence for fifty years. The focus of the study was to locate the idea of the Parent Teacher Association within the history of its time and to expose its influence on educational and social growth within the United States.

The National Congress of Parents and Teachers was the largest volunteer organization of its type founded on a basic interest: the child. Beyond this initial interest were educational institutions within the country which focused on the child's growth and development. For a number of hours, five days a week, the teacher exerts influence over the child which guide and develop this person. Therefore, the image of the parent-teacher began to emerge. As this image grew, more concise parent-teacher associations were organized to work together towards the common goal of the educational needs of children and parents.

The organization initially was founded as the National Congress of Mothers in 1897, as a means to promote knowledge about children that would rely heavily on people who possessed that knowledge and expertise. The primary motivation of the women founders was to protect and cultivate children as our nation's future resources. Particular attention was focused on the Child Labor Laws passed in 1825:
No social standards applicable to the factory system existed to safeguard working children. They were brought into the factory at a very early age, required to work almost unlimited hours. . .dependent children lived frequently in almshouses under conditions usually depressing and often degrading and were sometimes apprenticed in gangs to the factory owner, with no further thought of their protection. The method called "baby farming," by which large numbers of children were boarded with a careless custodian, resulted in a tragically high death rate.\textsuperscript{16}

It was believed by these mothers that thousands of children entered into industrial careers at an early childhood age without benefit of education and the normal home life influence only to grow into unfulfilled and frustrated adulthood.

The organization also published its official magazine, \textit{National Parent Teacher}, directed to an audience of laypersons. The organization focused on discussions of such child-centered subjects as education, psychology, medicine, nutrition, economics, anthropology, and government, exploring changes and influences and their effect on children.

The organization was committed to the belief that children were our democratic nation's future as citizens. Through knowledgeable education and guidance they would develop into responsible citizens.

The most exciting news that comes out of the fifty-odd year story of this organization is the news of how these people, devoted to the welfare of the

child, have by the sheer power of their working together been repeatedly able to make their will prevail. This power to move together toward a common objective . . . has revealed itself with increasing sureness in the years that have followed. 17

A key female figure in the foundation of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers was Alice Birney. Deeply committed, as a parent, to parent education, she traveled across the United States in 1895 and, in the stimulating atmosphere of adult education, she met women from all over the country who shared her ideas and supported this organization committed to child-study.

The Congress worked under the belief that if people are to succeed in their parent role, they must work collectively to create a world where all parents can succeed in their parenting role. Many parents were unenlightened in their roles outside of their own experiences. The movement of parent education was initiated by women committed to the belief that:

Every woman had to learn how to be a mother. It would not do for them, in their ignorance of the laws of health, to keep shifting the burden to Divine Providence. They must face the fact that when disease and death occur, their own ignorance is often to blame. Nor would it do for them to go on thinking sentimentally of their power to bring forth life. They must learn that birth can be, for tainted offspring, a curse that entails a lifetime of suffering. 18

The benefits of child-study resulted in a psychological

17 Ibid., p. 15.

18 Ibid., p. 69.
awareness of children as people, but not as miniature adults with an adult's psyche. The realization came about through the Overstreets' study that children were hand oriented, with learning taking root through their ability to touch what was being taught. That children learn through imaginative education and possess an imagination which should be cultivated was a new mode of thought.

Much of the organization's work focused on legislative and governmental changes, and it grew to be a recognizable "pressure group." Areas of concern on this level were financing of programs, election of qualified, nonpolitically controlled school board members, cultivation of educational affairs on a community level, and federal bills influencing children. Among such bills addressed were federal aid to education, safety legislation, juvenile protection laws, juvenile courts, care to dependent and handicapped children, health, and child welfare.

The principle behind the parent-teacher movement was essentially nonpartisan, with the concentrated issue being the sole welfare of the child. Add to this the establishment of a democratic congress of parents and teachers to deal with legislative questions. One subcommittee of the National Congress, the National Committee on Legislation assumed the responsibility of reviewing all federal bills that affected education and child welfare. This committee would make recommendations
to the National Congress. On the state level, the National Committee on Legislation recommended action when deemed appropriate. During 1941, one hundred sixty-five bills were reviewed with recommendations.

The organization of the Congress of Parents and Teachers was comprised of thirty standing committees to address concerns such as membership, procedures and bylaws, programs publicity, publications, and legislation; interfacing with colleges in the teacher education sector. Other committees focused on the tasks of determining the needs of children and youth and what could be done to fulfill these needs. These needs involved parent education, health, safety, juvenile protection, rural services, cultural education through art, music, reading, video and audio learning, and recreation. The ultimate aim was to work with children to assist them to attain a responsible character in order to assume the position of the adult within society.

The end of World War II in 1945 proved to be a test of strength for the National Congress of Parents and Teachers. In a male-dominated society, it was thought that the primarily female dominant congress would retire and allow men to assume the politics, business, and diplomacy of managing a country. Although assisting in the war effort was a patriotic duty, the making of intelligent peace was of deep concern to all citizens of the United States. As in a
true democracy, the making of peace is dependent upon people—the broad intellectual minds of people, which began as the minds of children.

In January 1947, Congress enacted its Four-Point Program, which was designed around a strong parent-teacher effort in areas of health, parent education, school education, and family life education and would incorporate world understanding. To date, all of the presidents of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers have been women who have succeeded in the guidance of a fellowship of over five million in the United States.

The National Congress of Parents and Teachers benefited from strides made in the field of adult education:

In a score or more years of experiment in adult education we have learned certain things about adults . . . The first of these and perhaps the most fundamental is that if adults are to fulfill themselves and thus be capable of building adequate communities for their children, they must go on learning. Those who have stopped their mental growth, who have settled into a fixed satisfaction with things as they are and with knowledge learned long since, are no fitting influence for young minds. Such adults set a false pattern; they give young people wrong expectations of what adult life is to be.\(^\text{19}\)

Although the Overstreets did not have children of their own (Harry had three sons from a previous marriage), they were deeply committed to the cultivation of children as the future resources in the survival of democracy. Children, they believed, were the nation's assets, and the education

\(^{19}\)Ibid., p.240.
of these children into and beyond adulthood was a necessary step in the fight to preserve America's freedom and ensure democracy for future generations.

The Mind Alive, released in 1954, and The Mind Goes Forth, published in 1956, detoured from the style of writing employed in earlier collaborations and concentrated on the mental and emotional health of the individual. As a topic within adult education, the content discussed in these books exposed clues to the emotional well being or illness of a person and what determined the functioning or nonfunctioning of the individual's restorative powers.

In their research on emotional health, the Overstreets determined that one identifying characteristic common among people who need clinical counseling or intervention is the inability of these people to heal after receiving psychological wounds. These people maintain a distorted perception of the self which hinders emotional healing.

To elaborate for their audience, the Overstreets' recounted a story shared with them by a friend about how a false image of the self hampered his free growth. In his situation, his father had expectations that the son would attain a certain status in life. While the son strived to meet this goal, he lacked the skills necessary to do so. Numerous disappointments and frustrations attacked his self image as he continued to attempt this goal. With the realization that he would never be able to attain his
father's dream despite his best efforts, he acknowledged this to the father, and the father's ultimately acceptance of the son's decision.

Another tragic characteristic of the emotionally disordered person is the inability of the person to feel a part of the group. Rather, the person perceives himself to be acutely different and singled out from everyone else and, as such, believes himself to be the focus of the group. The emotionally ordered person could be singled out and could express the self without fear of reprisal. In their discussion along these lines the Overstreets describe one gentleman in particular whom in their experience was innately secure in himself:

We recall an evening when an adult education committee met in our home to discuss a policy problem about which there were strong disagreements. When one man came up with a certain remark, another said in a tone at once muted and firm. "Now wait a minute. Wait a minute." We waited. "Oh," said the man, when he realized he had induced silence. "I wasn't talking to you. I was talking to myself . . . never talk about, without getting mad unless I warn myself in time." Then he grinned. "O.K. Go ahead. I'm warned--and I guess you are too." This is the type of experience the deeply disturbed person could not have: it call for more self-knowledge and humor, and a more detached fairness to the other person, than he can afford.20

What democracy allowed at that time was the mental freedom that remains a trademark of our society but one which was deprived under communistic rule. During the time

this book was researched, Nazi concentration camps were history; yet, Soviet slave labor and prisoner-of-war camps were in existence. Whereas Nazi leaders were scientifically sophisticated in their ability to calculate personality changes among prisoners and utilized these prisoners for psychological experiments, the same was not true for Soviet soldiers in charge of labor camps, for their main concern was to extract the maximum productivity from their prisoners in order to protect their own security and prestige. For those prisoners who could not be worked to death, a phenomenon of "brain washing," or the death of mental freedom, was applied—thus depriving the individual of this basic prerogative of adulthood.

During the reign of McCarthyism in America, the revocation of mental freedom did not take place as a result of "brain washing" techniques. Rather, it occurred through the loss of job and reputation that resulted from anonymous charges, whispering campaigns, pressures from unofficial but powerful people, and numerous lists slanted toward communism. These were the methods employed to force the American mind into the pattern of the conforming mind and, as such an undemocratic mind, under the zealous pursuit of Senator Joseph McCarthy's leadership, to ban communistic infiltration in the United States after World War II.

In the 1930s, the House Un-American Activities Committee was established to identify American communists
because internal security forces had documented well advanced communistic infiltration in sensitive areas of American government. This form of federal government involvement acknowledged the threat of communism and its existence as a real ground for apprehension within America's democracy. However, it was not until the end of World War II, when the Kremlin revealed its true colors and the Cold War was a reality, that the American government had enough information collected to overhaul the security measures implemented prior to and during World War II.

Communists, in order to avoid conflict with the enemy, had learned to disguise motives and operations to make themselves almost invisible. As such, the familiar open and confrontational tactics usually employed were rendered defenseless. It was this elusive, conspiratorial power that had little respect for national boundaries, as its strength lay in its insidious power to divide and confuse people. Oblique, conspiratorial communism was a force which directly or indirectly affected democracy through confusion because it loosened hostile emotions, fears, and suspicions. It pitted one anticommunist group against another and served to divert America's attention from long-range goals and objectives because it undermined the confidence citizens had in their own ability to collaborate within the framework of their democracy. In this manner, communism served as a threat to the emotional and mental health of millions of
United States public opinion was polarized by Senator Joseph McCarthy's campaign against communism in the United States. The heat generated by the McCarthy controversy yielded positive and negative ramifications. There was no disagreement among Americans concerning the necessity of resisting communistic military and diplomatic aggrandizement in foreign countries or to expose communistic espionage present in the United States. The dissension involved the methods employed by Senator McCarthy and what later became known as "McCarthyism." During this reign, the Overstreets had the occasion to clarify—not only for the public record, but also in their own minds—certain tenuous associations they had a decade or more before with several groups that were later determined to be subjected to communist infiltration. In the course of this experience, they went to Washington D.C.:

...to the office of one individual who, we had been told in advance, was known for his "toughness" toward anything that savored of communism. We put our problem to him—particularly with regard to one organization that we could only vaguely place but that we were told had been practicing a calculated subversion even at the time when one of us had unsuspectingly signed one of its petitions. He laid the facts before us—and they were striking enough to make us feel abashed. Suddenly, however, his manner changed from that of detached, exacting coolness to that of "parental" warmth. "Look," he said, "don't let this get you down. No one of us was born knowing all the facts about communism—and even those of us who've done nothing for years but work at the problem don't know the whole score yet."

Our own reaction to his unexpected and spontaneous
warmth was instant. We recognized that we were on the receiving end of the kind of emotion that holds human society together . . . this man returned our self-respect to us and at the same time indirectly emphasized our need to learn.\textsuperscript{21}

One colleague of the Overstreets' suggested that the ramifications they encountered as a result of these associations were the impetus behind the Overstreets' diligent and intense research into communism and all of the implications which surrounded this controversy. It was also a means to eliminate a potentially disastrous situation and use it to their advantage. In the situation which involved this congressman, tenderness and caring proved to be indispensable human emotions as this gentleman sought to ease their distress rather than exacerbate their concern.

To many Americans during the 1950s, Senator McCarthy, as a public figure dedicated to the identification and elimination of communism both in and out of government, was known as "Mr. Anti-Communist." To other Americans, Senator McCarthy was,

\textit{. . . a dangerous, power-hungry demagogue, whose activities had the net effect of helping rather than hurting the communist cause.}\textsuperscript{22}

Among his numerous allegations, the Senator charged that the State Department's International Information Administration's overseas libraries were stocked with

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., pp.303-304.

\textsuperscript{22}James Rorty and Moshe Decter, \textit{McCarthy and the Communist} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954) p.2.
communist books. In establishing overseas libraries, the State Department took its policy lead from a specially created advisory committee which included presidents from Minnesota, Princeton, Wisconsin, and Catholic Universities. The criterion for book selection recommended was this:

The content of the book, regardless of authorship, should be the criterion which determines its availability for inclusion in United States Information Services libraries. 23

In February 1953, this recommendation was included in an International Information Administration policy directive. These directives disseminated information abroad about the United States and its foreign policies. This particular directive allowed, in certain situations, for the presence of communist and other controversial authors in libraries if the use of their works was beneficial to United States propaganda aims. The long-range psychological objective of this policy was to impress upon the foreign public that libraries abroad were truly representative of the free way of life present in America.

Shortly after the International Information Administration hearings commenced in February 1953, Senator McCarthy, Chairman of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, expressed his disapproval with the policy directive permitting the selective use of Communist material in anticommunist propaganda warfare. Immediately, the

23Ibid., p.31.
directive was revoked. From February to July 1953, the United States embarked on a campaign to wage anticommunist psychological warfare through the restriction of freedom of expression and the implementation of its anticommunist propaganda agency. In March, the State Department ordered the withdrawal of any American periodicals from the libraries which contained information hostile to the United States.

In June, at the Voice of America headquarters in New York, a division of the International Information Administration which broadcasted American news in foreign countries, the following announcement was effected:

... the works of Harry Overstreet and Gilbert Highet could not be used for projected cultural programs because their "security status" was in question. ... This extreme denouncement of the flight from sanity was officially reversed in July 1953. But much irreparable damage had already been done ... to the effectiveness and credibility of our anti-Communist message of freedom.  

People in America enjoyed the freedom to promote the mind's positive health through mental freedom. When this freedom was not exercised or was at risk, as was the situation with McCarthyism, then democracy was at risk.

Many times in daily encounters, when it came to intellectual thought or capabilities, assumptions have been made without consideration of the individual and his expectations. These assumptions have placed democratic

24Ibid., p.93.
choice and mental health at risk. In emotional health, all persons have experienced fear and the drawing back and withdrawal of attention in a particular situation. This too, was an experience the authors of The Mind Alive had encountered. As they explained, they were traveling in Arizona on a highway, when they rounded a curve to encounter a vehicle moving at a high speed directly in their path. They avoided a collision with the realization that, in the moment of crisis, there was only the immediate situation to draw on without any mental or emotional healing powers to provide comfort.

In reading the knowledge put forth on the pages of The Mind Alive, it might be confusing to sift through and determine which groups within society could be stirred into mutual alliance by the research found here. The spectrum of adult learning discussed was so broad and diversified that it cannot be pigeon-holed into any singular discipline.

One answer to this quandary can be found in the composition of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, formerly the American Association for Adult Education, founded in 1926, which proved to be a valuable fountain of information and assistance in the composition of many local adult education councils within the communities of America. Librarians, social workers, university extension directors, penologists, and teachers of naturalization classes discovered one another as companions.
in concern. They all strived to work toward the same goal, "... to have the adult mind move out of fixity into flexible growth."\textsuperscript{25} To accomplish this, they needed to share with one another their experiences in encouraging the mind to broaden horizons. The climate of adult opinion through learning had come of age through the efforts of citizens working to understand life in a clearer perspective, with the realization of a richer quality of life through their understanding.

The Mind Goes Forth elaborated upon discussions in The Mind Alive, which focused on the understanding of individual emotional and mental health. The Mind Goes Forth is divided into three distinct areas: the drama of understanding, structured relationships and the public domain, with each section designed to concentrate understanding within its scope.

In the first section, the Overstreets open the discussion of understanding with the practice and energy behind the achievement of understanding, allowing personal space, role of knowledge, error, and gratitude to join forces to achieve true understanding. At the onset of the book, they shared with their audience what they hoped to achieve through understanding:

In this book we try to come to grips with what we

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feel to be the central problem of our time: the growth among us of extremism and hostilities. Curtains of anger and suspicion have everywhere been lowered, not only between nations, but between individuals and generations under the same roof; and between groups and races that must work constructively together if our kind of society is to have a future . . . .

We believe that the most appropriate drama in which we humans can engage is that of understanding. This is the drama of the mind's going forth to meet life more than half way. It is the drama of trying to see the other person's point of view; of trying to look at problems through other people's concerns and life conditions. Wherever this drama is enacted, the qualities that make us human have a chance to find expression and endow life with meaning.26

There is the need to continually practice at life to experience true understanding because there are many directions the human mind can tread; however, the most challenging and, subsequently, rewarding is toward another human being. There is a personal risk in this particular direction as it involves believing in the integrity of another human being to gain true understanding. In the society of the 1950s, however, it appeared that many human needs should be ministered to by the head and heart of human understanding rather than by muscle and force. As a nation, Americans were fated to live out their lives in times of turmoil when the incitements to fear and anger seemed more numerous and imperative than the incitements to love and understand. Much of this was visible in the wave of McCarthyism which swept America in the 1950s.

Many times, nonverbal communication conveys understanding, effectively diffusing a potentially hostile and possibly verbal situation. This is present in the simple task of driving an automobile. As in the case of the Overstreets, they were motoring through a New England town and came across an absent minded driver in a potentially dangerous situation. A warning honk of the horn and nonverbal facial communications communicated a friendliness rather than animosity.

In order for communication to be successful, a conducive environment for dialogue must be experienced by the adult. This environment should be open and accepting to encourage a sharing of knowledge. If one wants other people to think broadly and feel deeply in one's presence, one must provide this opportunity. Personal space must be provided to encourage diversity of thoughts and feelings experienced.

If, for example, we want them to consider all sides of a subject, we must give them the mental chance to walk around it and look at it from all sides. It makes no sense for us to argue them into a corner where they can think only of how to hold their own against us or how to escape.²⁷

To maintain democracy, there should be one further type of opportunity to be granted to people on behalf of individual growth and for the sake of democratic freedom. That opportunity should exist in the acceptance by society of an

²⁷Ibid., p.50.
individual to move from being an outsider to being an insider within society.

Assumptions are often a stumbling block to true understanding with respect to other human beings because they have no foundation in factual knowledge. The ramifications of assumptions and their impact on human relations can be extensive. Utilizing themselves as a case study, the Overstreets related an incident from their Vermont farm. The scene they encountered was so exquisite that the beauty halted them in their journey as they witnessed a small mysterious drama of growth in the opening of an Oriental poppy in response to the sunlight. As the last petal was unfolding one of their farm neighbors came down the road on his tractor. In their opinion, he was a man who worked from "can see to can't see"; and who, despite long hours of toil, could produce from his land little more than a bare subsistence. Seeing the couple, he slowed down to greet them.

At this point, a peculiarly insidious temptation almost had its way with us . . . to assume that he, living in terms of work and more work, would respect us as early workers, but would feel only an astonished contempt for our actual reason for being there.28

Resisting the temptation, they shared their discovery with this neighbor and he shared their wonder at the unfolding of nature, leaving both Overstreets with the

28Ibid., p.71.
feeling of knowing and understanding him better than they had initially. The experience was important to the Overstreets in its significance because they nearly missed it. They came dangerously close to making an incorrect assumption about another human being without giving that person an opportunity to change their thinking.

The Overstreets believed that knowledge provided a heightened acuity to a person's conscience and awareness. Bonaro Overstreet recounted their first experience of looking through a microscope at a cross section of cornstalk. As with most common, everyday occurrences, they had seen corn growing all of their lives. She herself had grown up on a farm, had planted corn, cared for the crops, gathered ears and, eaten it. However, until a friend shared his microscope with them, and later his expert knowledge of what they had viewed, there was a secret the corn was withholding. A further gift of sight was then bestowed upon them, enriching their knowledge of a casual sight.

This same oversight of knowledge can be attributed to the threat of communism prevalent within the United States during the 1950s and the subsequent turmoil and havoc which reigned into the 1960s. What was appalling was that communism did not tolerate the distinctive individuality that goes with each person, similar to the individual composition of an ear of corn. Although they may appear
homogeneous to the visual eye, each is distinctive on closer examination. On the flip side, in researching the appeals of communism, society should have been armored against the pull of totalitarianism. Society was, however, vulnerable to the fanaticisms of resentment—communist, fascist, and others. Individuals within society were unable to assume roles to perform that allowed them to view themselves as worthwhile and earn the approval and support of their peers. Therefore, much of communism's strength was in its people power. Communism struck at select individuals and allowed them seemingly significant roles while it undermined their understanding of the self because it encouraged support of its causes.

During the scourge of communistic investigations led by Senator McCarthy, many writers came under investigation by the government. One such person, a friend of the Overstreets, had come through an intense grueling investigation—grueling in both its duration, the harassing technique employed by the investigators, and the publicity attached to the investigation—with dignity and no trace of bitterness. In discussing the ordeal, they inquired as to how he had fortified himself throughout the ordeal,

Fragment by fragment, then, during the next couple of hours, he told us the psychological story of how he had lived through the hearings. With one part of his mind he had listened with all the alertness he could command to the questions put to him, and had framed his answers. But within another part he had called upon
his inner resources.\textsuperscript{29}

It was this inner strength and solitude which allows people the ability to triumph over stress and despair.

According to one family source, the Overstreets were often cast in the role of therapists by both friends and acquaintances. It was not unusual for Bonaro Overstreet to receive letters from persons whom had attended her lectures or read her books and wanted to share their experiences and thoughts or seek advice. One such woman contacted her about a year prior to the publication of The Mind Goes Forth to share the depth which she had touched in her life:

Last summer, we received a letter from a woman—a stranger to us, except that she knew us through our books—which began with these words: "This may be one of the last letters I will ever write. I am going blind. The diagnosis is conclusive; and it won't be long now. Before the darkness closes in, however, I want to say thanks to a number of people—you among them—from whom I have borrowed thoughts that will go with me into that darkness, to keep me company there."

She then went on to tell us, with no work of self-pity—but in words that left us humble and grateful—just what it was she had found in certain passages of our books that she felt would be of permanent use to her. She shared with us, also, some of her other "borrowings." She has gathered and memorized, for example, certain vivid lines of poetry... She was not, she made clear, intending to spend the rest of her life with her hands folded in her lap and her blind eyes remembering past beauties. She planned to find her way, as promptly as possible, into new skills and relationships—and most of all, into new ways of being useful. "But meanwhile," she wrote, "all I have learned and loved will stand by me."\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p.152.

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., p.189.
This happened quite frequently to the Overstreets with persons seeking them out for their own personal enrichment and learning. It was a role that, for whatever reason, the Overstreets did not hesitate to assume:

We think, again, of a couple who telephoned us one evening to ask whether they could drop around and see us. They were acquaintances only, people with whom we had crossed paths a few times in professional circles. But they came and sat with us for long hours, before the fire; and when they left we were proud to know them. They needed, the husband said on arrival, to talk themselves out to someone who would just let them talk. They had been forced, that day, to accept with grim finality a fact that they had earlier refused to credit: namely, that their only child was mentally deficient. What they did, in effect, while we listened, was to define for themselves a parental role far different from the one they had deeply hoped to enact. They defined that role; accepted its painful demands; explored its possibilities; and tacitly promised each other the type of support that the long pull would require. Then they went out together into the night; and we, watching from the doorway, saw them as figures of more than individual courage. We could not help seeing them as part of the interminable procession of human beings who have taken on their fated roles and carried them through.31

Throughout the composition of The Mind Goes Forth, and perhaps the impetus to further their own personal education through research, the threat of communism prevailed in the United States, as investigations and hearings led by Senator McCarthy continued to destroy reputations and create havoc and turmoil in the United States. At a New Year's Eve party the Overstreets attended during the final hour of 1955, the usual prophecies were made. One

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31Ibid., p.190.
gentleman predicted that the harassment and accusations would continue and be worse in 1956 than in the previous years. He listed his reasons to support this assertion:

It would be an election year . . . at home, it would be a year when extremists of the right would increasingly find that their haphazard charges of communism and pro-communism were falling on skeptical ears— or bored ears; and when they would, therefore, in frightened desperation, find even more wildly and nonsensical things to say than had been their recent stock in trade . . . it would be one in which so-called "moderates," infected by extremism, would provide their share of immoderate talk . . . a year in which a great many people would misquote a great many others, or quote them out of context . . . a year when the human race would continue being human—and therefore prone to substitute positiveness of tone for accuracy of knowledge, rationalizations for reasons, and rumors for facts . . . issues that would be coming up before Congress and specific investigations that were shaping up that seemed made to order . . .

Out of all of this chaos, the Overstreets turned their attention to learning and writing about communism in an attempt to educate the American public about this as a threat to democracy and those rights guaranteed under a democracy.

The Communist Era

What We Must Know About Communism was the first of many joint, nonfiction publications which addressed America's concerns about communism. This book launched the Overstreets into the public limelight with invitations for interviews and lectures. What We Must Know About Communism was published in the midst of a period of turmoil and fear.

32 Ibid., p.223.
which arose out of Congressional investigations and hearings against citizens believed to be supportive of communistic maneuvers within American democracy.

The Communist Party U.S.A. was founded in 1919 and, from its very conception, was a self-declared part of the world communist movement. The Overstreets felt that, as a nation, Americans needed to know in what sense the Communist Party U.S.A. was part of the communist movement through a study of its past record and current teachings. *What We Must Know About Communism* was an examination and interpretation of communistic propaganda materials in an attempt to educate the lay person to what was behind the movement in language that was easily comprehended.

Many of the problems America encountered in relation to communism were due to lack of attention to the issue of communism. This lack of attention was prevalent across the nation after World War II because people avoided social problems and accepted half truths and concentrated on their own personal concerns. This lack of attention nurtured a widespread mental and emotional ambiguity in a world where the adversary <communism> had been planning and refining strategy.

The Overstreet admitted that they wrote *What We Must Know About Communism* in a conscious effort to enlighten persons about the need to accept individual responsibility for the direction America was embarking upon:
We have written this book because we had to. There comes a point where the world's peril turns into every individual's responsibility. So far as the problem of Communism is concerned, this point, we feel certain, has long been reached and passed. The time has come when each of us is obligated to study the character of this new force which claims the human future as its own, and to convert such knowledge into awareness of what is at stake and what needs to be done.33

No other movement can match the record of communism on one score: that of enticing people to itself through their desire to better the human lot in life and then subsequently losing these supporters through disillusionment.34 When a movement such as this sets a precedent on this peculiar count, there is something wrong with it. That it achieved the success it had worldwide was confusing and frightening.

Much time and energy was expended in reading communistic propaganda in an attempt to gain an understanding of its teachings and its success before either of these authors felt comfortable delivering the following opinion:

After we have read enough of this type of thing --this record of the vengeful and arrogant--we are fairly well fortified against the belief that communism took the wrong turn only with the advent of Lenin--or of Stalin.35


34James Rorty and Moshe Decter, McCarthy and the Communists (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954).

During this time, any vestige of communist moderation, no matter how strategic the reasons for it, was interpreted as a sign of extremism. In modification of this extremism, however, one must bear in mind that although Khrushchev painted Lenin as magnanimous toward dissenting Communist Party members, Lenin could also be a ruthless avenger when provoked. In sifting through the volumes of communist propaganda, the Overstreets discovered that those persons at the heart of Khrushchev's reforms were the Soviet writers. In the late 1950s, Khrushchev began a strong reaffirmation of the Party's domination over the creative intellect of man, targeting those in the cultural art fields. Authors and artists alike who had ventured observations or interpretations of minor shortcomings within the Soviet system of government fell under his attack and his pronounced edict:

We are against those who select from life only the negative facts and wickedly rejoice at this attempt to defame and blacken our Soviet ways.

In their book, What We Know About Communism, the Overstreets explored Stalin's methodologies, one of which coerced one writer after another into public confession under torture of either no means of livelihood or concentrated physical torture in a labor camp. Therefore, propaganda written by Soviet authors was produced under extreme duress.

\[36\] Ibid., p.144.
The disagreements explored in these pages, had to do with the best way of addressing not persons identified as Soviet agents, as had been the technique of Senator McCarthy, but the Communist Party itself as it operated in the United States. J. Edgar Hoover and Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, both experienced in government, represented different viewpoints on this subject. While J. Edgar Hoover had been careful not to step out of his own province (the Federal Bureau of Investigation) to trespass upon that of policy-making, he had analyzed, from the angle of law enforcement, the difficulties which were created by outlawing the Communist Party U.S.A. and forcing it underground. On the other hand, Hubert H. Humphrey, during the 82nd Congress, conducted the hearing on Communist infiltration of the labor unions, and in 1954, became the author of the Communist Control Act. Although this did not outlaw the Communist Party U.S.A., it circumscribed the Party's activities and required a detailed accounting of these activities.

In researching the history of the Communist Party U.S.A., the Overstreets made a significant discovery in the connection:

...that inner obedience of the type required is not always easy to deliver. "Speculativeness" and the moral sense, it would appear, have a stubborn way of coming back even after they have been ruled out.\(^{37}\)

\(^{37}\)Ibid., p. 304.
It was not uncommon for party members to have to adjust to a reversal in Soviet policy which, often times, is tantamount to an about-face. However, they had been efficient in their ability to change their programs and propaganda and minimize doubts and misgivings which arose from such a reversal. In these situations, communism discouraged intellectual maturity and forbade the right of man to grow and learn. During the time of the Overstreet's research, Senator McCarthy was experiencing the censure of his colleagues. The controversial hearings had resulted in the end of a turbulent career and a fearsome era in American public life.

In their next expose on communism, *The War Called Peace*, published in 1961, the Overstreets' furthered their discussion of communism with the focus on Khrushchev's version of communism. Through the years, they collected a sampling of materials from communist printing presses. In their travels to Europe and Asia in 1960, they viewed communist newspapers, pamphlets, and books but were not permitted to retain any samples. In the study of these materials, what was appalling was the single, unchallenged interpretation of what was taking place in the locality or in the world. These and more were the tools of the integral apparatus of mind control.

Whereas Lenin limited his politics to Soviet consumption and Stalin concealed his ambitions behind cryptic politics, Khrushchev made no secret of his political
ambitions for communism. He had announced his intentions, which were designed to confuse, and followed these intentions with actions that were unmistakable. The world could no longer doubt communist intentions.

The Overstreets believed that, with Khruschev, the confrontation between democracy and communism was on the threshold:

So a new phase of the war called peace begins. We can at last move out of our semi-confusions and begin to see communism clear. The conviction grows among us that the free world today faces an issue of moral and spiritual survival it has never faced before. Communist man confronts the free man.\(^{38}\)

In their research, the Overstreets discovered that communism's ideological geography was one designed to divide the world into two parts that would be reunited, according to communists, only on communist terms. The Soviet people were not the powers behind the world revolution. It was not their revolution in the first place. But with communism, people do not make policy—even Soviet policy. The Communist Party makes policy.

To persuade the Communist Party that democracy is not imperialist would be defeating under any normal effort, as this was ideologically defined by the Party long before. Anything less than communism was unjustified in the Party's belief. As such, democracy would be served better by

shaping policies to beliefs about man and life on earth than to adapt them in the hope of bringing the Communist Party around to the democratic state of mind.

Khruschev's communism paid lip service to peaceful coexistence between countries with varying social systems, and his doctrine was issued to America in his report to the Congress under the gesture of peace. However, his practice of peace called for:

... an urgent stepping-up of the effort to "instill communist consciousness" and to "combat bourgeois ideology." The doctrine of "peaceful coexistence" must be understood ... as a bold doctrine for opening up opportunities to carry on that struggle along new lines, particularly the line of economic competition.\(^{39}\)

Although a person may be educated, if he were a political illiterate at the time when he perceived the existence of the world being out of context, his education could itself entice him to be impressed by a universe constructed of words. Rather than making him critical of communism, it could just as well make him view it as, "a system of great human integrity, indeed of architectonic grandeur, apparently logical, coherent, and reasonable."\(^{40}\)

In the Overstreets' study of the content of Khruschev's Plan, they observed that the statistics and percentages revealed as economic goals were impressive. Yet, it was a

\(^{39}\)Ibid., p.35.

\(^{40}\)Ibid., p.63.
strange amalgam. This was a nation that issued a plan for fifteen million new residences with increased abundance of shoes, milk, meat, steel, chemicals, and electrical power for its people. It was easy to be seduced by these figures. Delving past the surface, however, it was no ordinary plan for a developing nation, nor was it beneficial for world economic supply. On closer examination, what was revealed was a blueprint for economic warfare—a blueprint designed to target all free nations with the culmination being the entrapment of the free spirit of man worldwide.

Both the Overstreets were committed to democracy. In The War Called Peace, they observed that communist propaganda ensured that communist man was satisfied, compliant, dependent, and diligent in his performance of those tasks set by the Communist Party. The Soviet people were made to feel that they were enjoying democracy, whereas they were being denied basic democratic rights.

In their next publication, The Iron Curtain, released in 1963, the Overstreets concentrated their efforts on a close examination of the communist need for the physical existence of the Iron Curtain. This research was conducted with the delineation of those objectives which existed that were the impetus behind the erection of this concrete barricade complete with electrified barb wire to ensure an effective enclosure. The Communist Party devised between its empire and the outside world a formidable structure and
symbolic form in the Iron Curtain. The Iron Curtain was perceived as the key to the true nature of communism—as a system that cannot achieve its purpose in the free world.

The primary goal of The Iron Curtain was to serve as an educational vehicle to inform the American layperson about communism as a social system to be lived with and lived under. In this book, the Overstreets discussed the Iron Curtain and the role it assumed within Khruschev's politics. They answered many abstract questions about communism in the most direct book they wrote on this enigmatic topic. Their search for answers in this bewildering realm of world politics provided a clear design. They unfolded the facts which were behind the reasons for what was walled in and walled out as the Iron Curtain existed as a source of both communist strength and weakness. They had been students of communism as they served to educate the American public in the opportunity for a free world offensive that must rely on the will and skill of free individuals and governments of the world.

During the summer of 1959, the Overstreets traveled abroad in search of answers to questions they had concerning communism and to view the Iron Curtain. This was prior to Khruschev's friendship visit to the United States and the United Nation speech aimed at peaceful coexistence and the strengthening of international relations. They recounted the impact of what they encountered:
Then, abruptly, we were halted—as Gedye had been halted five years earlier. Electrified barbed wire, plowed strip, concrete dragon's teeth, and three guard towers in sight from what one point; these marked the boundary of communism's domain.

That by which we were confronted was but a sample of what the communists feel to be necessary wherever their orbit touches the non-communist orbit.

The Iron Curtain was a six thousand mile, physical barricade representative of the spirit of the Communist Party which continued to exist despite Khruschev's talks of peace. The ultimate climax of its construction was the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 because it effectively served to divide Europe.

Although the physical aspect of the Iron Curtain was overt, the communistic element for dividing the world remained much more subtle. This division involved censorship of media reporting through control of air waves and publications. The Iron Curtain had two sides, and each side had its own function. The side inhabiting the communist world served to keep in, subjecting the people to the Communist Party's influences and adherence to the Party line. On the other side, where it inhabited the free world, its function was to keep out--to make the Party the arbiter of contact between these two worlds. The perpetual goal of the Party was to divide and control; despite Khruschev's talks of cultural exchange and peaceful

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coexistence, he had made no effort to dismantle the Iron Curtain. Rather, deliberate discussions, incorporated with peaceful propaganda on the part of the Communist Party supporters in the free world, served to confuse as many free world minds as possible.

The purpose of the Iron Curtain was confirmed by Walter Ulbricht, dictator of East Germany, in November 1961:

Stripped of these accusations, however, what Ulbricht said amounted to a flat acknowledgement that the Berlin wall had been a necessary response to the flight of workers and youth . . . .

This, then, was news: to have a communist dictator admit—with the world listening—that the Iron Curtain is designed to prevent the escape of people who would not otherwise remain at the Party's disposal.  

In addition to the Iron Curtain, Khruschev in order to maintain monopolistic power within his Communist empire, had to achieve unchallenged monopoly over all consumer goods and services, a decisive monopoly over all descriptive propaganda about the free world that failed to portray the social and economic jungle that existed waiting to destroy the Soviet Union. He also had to preserve a monopoly of rights in the sphere of organization and administration against any uncontrollable encroachment on communism. Regardless of Communistic propaganda, the democratic governments of the world have proved, repetitively, that they can survive the comparisons that exist when living in

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42Ibid., p.34.
an open world, encourage freedom of thought and speech, effectively acknowledge criticism, and anticipate the willing support of their people when the need for such support is crucial.

With its Iron Curtain, the Communist Party was successful in producing a collectivized man through its ability to regulate pressures and dictate patterns, wielding fear of reprisal as its tool to ensure compliance. Through fear, people take for granted the Party's monopoly of power; also, their concept of the free world beyond the Curtain was propaganda induced. Another contributor to communistic success was that, for most of the people, communism was their history. Khruschev had produced totalitarianism by consent through acceptance of the Party's dictatorship as permanent by the will of the people. Civil liberties such as freedom of speech, press, assembly, academia, religion, and freedom of movement were a threat to the going order of communism.

In conclusion the Iron Curtain was symbolic in its denial of human rights as it existed as a barrier intent on blocking the road to peace. In the free world, Party propaganda worked to entice confused, problem-ridden people into the cloak of their beliefs.

In the Overstreets' chronology of communism, The Strange Tactics of Extremism, published in 1964, built upon their previous publications in an attempt to raise the
consciousness of the American citizen. The focus of the book was the extravagance of extremism, its form of expression, impact within society, and what could be done about extremism within American society. Together, they detailed communism and the mistakes American democracy made in dealing with communism in society:

Our major thesis in this book will be that the mistakes we made, during crucial years, with respect to communism and nazism, must not be repeated with respect to extremism of the Right. Even while we carry forward that self-education about communism in which we as a people have become tardily engaged, and which can never be completed because of changes in the Party line and the world situation, we must begin doing our homework with respect to the second front in our two-front war against extremism. .. we recall two incidents so oddly parallel that they serve to underscore the point we are trying to make. One dates from the time when we were shaping up our What We Must Know About Communism. Talking with a friend, we tried out on him our plan for the book—only to encounter skepticism about the worth of any book for the lay public on the subject of communism. "Well," we challenged, "if we write it, will you read it?" He hesitated, and then blurted out, "I detest communism. Why should I read about it?"

The second incident took place in late 1955. . . . a spokesman for the far Right. With measured contempt he read its title aloud: Dan Smoot Speaks. Then he asked, "But who wants to listen?"—and dropped the publication into the wastebasket. . . . to toss into the wastebasket or otherwise ignore that which offends our sense of truth and fairness may be a satisfying gesture; but it may also be a costly one. May we not, as a people, be repeating once more a type of folly for which the world has paid, in this century, an appalling price?\(^{43}\)

As a couple, the Overstreets were interested in a responsible study of communism at the community level and

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had encouraged colleagues in adult education to conduct such a study without success. They did receive a letter from a reader informing them of a group formed to promote learning of communism called the Birch Society. Although, they heard nothing further at the time, in the months to come, this group would position itself under the guise of learning.

In May 1961, Senator Milton R. Young drew the attention of his colleagues to the Birch Society\textsuperscript{44} and one particular fact of its mission. It pinpointed communism as its target and drew only a nebulous line between communists and liberals. According to Senator Young, criticism by the organization was in conflict to its intent. "Strangely enough, most of its criticism is leveled, not against liberal public officials, but against the more middle-of-the-road, and even conservative Republicans."\textsuperscript{45}

The Birch Society became visible in its protest against child guidance clinics and textbooks. Surprisingly enough, both Overstreets found themselves under censure from this group:

\begin{quote}
Sometimes we were ourselves the target. Thus, several program chairmen of organizations to which we spoke told us of efforts--which they believed to be of Birch Society origin--to force them to cancel our lectures. Again, various individuals who had put our books on recommended reading lists became targets for letters of protest--samples of which they often sent on to us. And in certain school districts, notably in
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., p.21.

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., p.27.
the Los Angeles area, the use of our *What We Must Know About Communism*, in classrooms or for reference, was denounced by the Bircher.\(^{46}\)

What was unsettling about this censorship was that the Overstreets had no contact with the Birch Society, other than an initial letter from a reader, and no opportunity to defend themselves or their works from this form of extremism.

The Central Intelligence Agency became a target of both the radical right and the communist left and other various persons and groups. Unlike the communist left approach, the extremist right was not subject to any overall discipline. It proved to be an arena in which groups and projects multiplied with abandon with no sure tally on how many of these groups existed within the United States. As quickly as they multiplied, they died. Added to this was the confusion compounded by the fact that an organization may be a facade behind which someone with a mailing list and a home printing press produces and sends out literature.

Another target of the radical right was the Parent Teacher Associations because of their ties to the public school system. The radical rightist effort attacked the P.T.A.s in an attempt to pry the local unit loose from its ties with the State and National Congresses of Parents and Teachers. The radical right also attempted to gain control

\(^{46}\)Ibid., p.28.
of the local unit and use it as a pressure group to force school administration and classroom teachers to emulate their policies. The Overstreets believed, as a nation, the United States was at risk if it continued to ignore the activities of these extremist groups:

We are venturing to inject, here, a personal note. Eleven years have passed since we undertook to make the study of communism our chief preoccupation. During these years, the overwhelming proportion of the reading we have done has been in this field; and we have, also, given ourselves as many chances as possible to talk with persons who could supplement what we had learned from the printed page with what they had learned by long scholarship, intimate contact with special problems, or experience within the Party or the orbit.

Several years ago, for example, we traveled what might be called the Iron-Bamboo crescent from West Berlin to Hong Kong. As we write, we feel surrounded, as it were, by a cloud of witnesses: Polish, Czech, and Lithuanian refugees with whom we talked in London and Paris; East Germans with whom we talked in West Berlin, Nuremberg, and Munich; Hungarian students in Vienna; Bulgarian sailors in Turkey; Tibetan refugees in India; North Vietnamese in South Vietnam; and refugees from Red China in Hong Kong . . .

Quite explicitly, in fact, we have been moved to write this book by our study of communism. This study has convinced us that unless we Americans get down to the task of appraising what extremist methods, of the Left or Right, lead to in the way of human sorrow and an erosion of the moral sense, we stand to lose the best that the centuries have given us."

The FBI in Open Society, released in 1969, was the Overstreets' last joint collaboration before Harry Overstreet's death in August 1970. The research utilized in this book commenced, in the early 1950s' more as a project of self-education. The initial focus was communism,
but it moved into the realms of United States governmental agencies. The book's thrust is the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), with attention given to its history, its functions within society, and concentration given to its functions after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

In the Spring of 1939, the House Subcommittee on Appropriations issued a report on a sharp increase in violations of espionage laws against the American government. As a result, the General Intelligence Division was created within the FBI to coordinate all activities related to espionage and other subversive activities of communist nature.

In this book, attention was given to every facet of the FBI's work, criticism of its policies and practices, and cases that revealed the complexities of federal law and its enforcement. Much of the information involved in the pages of this book concentrated on communistic infiltration into American democracy. America has always been regarded as the land of the free; it was recognized that illiterate immigrants could easily be enticed to join communist organizations, the real purposes of which they did not understand. Therefore, no individual case could justly be closed at the point where membership in the Communist Party or Communist Labor Party was proved.

The Communist Party U.S.A. learned that the larger and
more complex the FBI could be made to seem, the lower the probability was that many Americans would examine the credentials of the Communist Party before clamoring to its defense when it was under siege. In their book, *The FBI in Our Open Society*, the Overstreets mentioned that, to the communists, J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, was the nation's watchdog, although both the communists and the FBI had informants within each other's camps. The Communist Party U.S.A.'s war against the FBI was not an isolated event. It was only one battle in the war against the democratic system as a whole.
CHAPTER V

POETRY

From early adolescence, Overstreet had a passion for poetry which remained with her throughout her life. In addition to publications in adult education, she wrote poetry for newspapers and magazines. It was collections of these poems that were published at intervals throughout her adult writing career.

In addition to Overstreet's work in newspapers and magazines, she wrote poetry which was read over the Voice of America. It is indicative of her interest in verse, that both her first and last publications concerned poetry. Footsteps on the Earth was published in 1934 shortly after her marriage. As was the acknowledgement of all of her nonfiction, this one was dedicated to her husband Harry. The book is a collection of her poetry, some of which previously appeared in her earlier book The Poetic Way of Release, as well as such publications as Poetry of Today, Poetic Viewpoint, The American Poetry Journal, and Bozart. One personal acquaintance of Overstreet's recalled her reading several selections of verse from this collection at the Harvard Summer Festival in the latter 1930s. She resided in New York while teaching at the Arts Guild and,
subsequently, spent many hours at the New York City Library. As such, it was not surprising to read a poem describing her perception of this place,

This is the corner where pigeons circle,  
Cleaving with their curved wings the stagnant air,  
In grey-blue whirl, they lift and circle,  
Circle and settle . . . and go nowhere.

This is the corner where lost men linger,  
Hunching thin shoulders when north winds blow.  
Here they huddle in an endless waiting . . .  
Waiting for something . . . with no place to go.

Bonaro Overstreet, "Public Library, New York"¹

Throughout much of her poetry, Bonaro Overstreet's sense of humor was illuminated. One of the skills she acquired from her mother was the ability to sew and to review her wardrobe each spring in preparation for the year. It is in rememberence of this yearly ritual that she wrote:

My wardrobe has been set aright.  
For as the Spring comes round,  
I must, from morning until night,  
Walk forth correctly gowned . . .

But though I walk so radiantly--  
Each gown a fresh surprise--  
No neighbor turns to stare at me  
With envy in her eyes.

Instead, in pity and distress,  
They murmur, "Oh, my dear,  
I see she's making that old dress  
Last through another year!"

Bonaro Overstreet, "Spring Sewing"²

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²Ibid., p.52.
In addition to magazines and newspapers, Overstreet wrote verse to be read over the Voice of America. These poems are collected in *American Reasons*, and are representative of the sentiment held secure in the hearts of Americans to the men sent into battle and the women and families left home. Many of the poems were untitled, although not uninspired, and appeared also to be reflective of her thoughts and feelings concerning World War II. The theme appears to be the war in general, motivations of the American male in enlisting in the war, democracy, freedom of thought and speech, and other freedoms unique only to a democracy:

Is not a land where men are required by law
To honor falsehood . . . where they are restrained
by law
From reading the truth if they want to read the truth.
It's still a land where the words of honest men
Are given a sort of open-market chance
To carry conviction to the minds of men.
If they do not carry conviction . . . I'd want to say
Honest men still have a lot to learn
About the power and the beauty of the Word . . .
One of the things I'm fighting for, myself,
Is a chance to go on learning what words can do
On the tongues of our speaking race . . .

Bonaro Overstreet, "America"  

*Hands Laid Upon The Wind* is a collection of previously published poetry which appeared in her earlier book, *Footsteps On The Earth*, and in newspapers and magazines, such as the *Saturday Evening Post, Better Homes and Gardens*,

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This collection of poems reveals facets of Overstreet's life as she explored a variety of themes: nature, man in society, inward thought, and the significance of small events. Her viewpoint was fresh-tempered with a wisdom and compassion which permeated her work with the warmth of human understanding reflective of the deep values within her soul,

Must you shout?
If you are speaking truth, the universe has subtle ears to hear.
If you are not . . .
I still ask,
must you shout?

Bonaro Overstreet, "A Loud Voice"

In the poem titled after her collection of verse, Hands Laid Upon the Wind, Overstreet conveys the depth of awe and wonder experienced when contemplating the universe and all the multiple facets involved in the existence of man and the world as it exists.

Hands laid upon the wind can only bless
Long restlessness.
They cannot bid wind stay.
And if we feel the ages like a wind,
We can but lay
Our hands upon them with a mute caress,
Over the tenuous rim of space they blow,
Whither we cannot know.
Our hands will not dissuade them: what wind lingers

Because it feels the touch of human fingers?  
Our lifted hands confess  
Not the wind's need, but our own need to give  
Our tribute to the Law by which we live.  
This our compact that the stars have sealed:  
That to long winds of earth and time we yield  
Ourselves, to keep their law inviolate;  
And we walk garmented in modesty

In the old presence of the sky, the sea,  
The full-plumped planet, and forbear to prate  
About the scintillant honors that we earn  
As short-lived men;

   and as a rich return  
Shall Matter rest itself upon our will,  
Lending its prowess that we may fulfill  
The sharp creative urgencies that burn  
Our souls like tinder.  

   Deepest falsity  
It is to think that we are driven to choose  
Between submission and high right to use  
The Law that uses us.  

   Splendidly free  
Are we to make our compact with the powers  
That blow like wind across our straitened hours.

Man bends his brains and heart to shape from these  
Fruits of his ecstasies . . .  
And then with quietness that understands  
The way of wind, lifts up his roughened hands  
To bless  
Long restlessness.

Bonaro Overstreet, "Hands Laid Upon The Wind"\(^5\)

In her poem, "After a Time," Overstreet appeared to have made a commitment to education which could be attributed to her warm, personal, and enthusiastic approach to adult learning, as she vowed never to become stale or stagnant in teaching.

   I will not let it happen--not to me--  
This far-too-sober teacher-tendency

\(^5\)Ibid., p.31.
To see oneself as chosen instrument
Whereby the solemn truth effects descent
From generation unto generation.
I will reject all stamp of my vocation
And be a person--curious, young, and free.
I will not bow to the monotony
Of checking grades.
And never will I act
As though a student's wholeness could be packed
Into that special fragment of his brain
Devoted to my class.
I will retain
The right, the wish, to be a growing cell
Among my human peers.
I now rebel . . .
Yes, now: this moment: off me I will throw
Octopus arms. Invisibly they grow
To squeeze my thought--which once ran swift and keen--
Into a stodgy pattern of routine.

I will be blithe tonight . . .
And breathe a rain-damp air and know it sweet.
Along a night-cool throat.
And after . . . after . . .

Bonaro Overstreet, "After A Time"^6

With humor and understanding, Overstreet captured and
revealed the frailties of human beings. The twist to her
philosophy is the acceptance of the person for who they
are.

They warn me you have feet of clay,
O precious idol I adore.
But--strange effect--their scoffing words
Have only made me love you more.
For always when I worship you

My waiting thoughts, released, take wing--
So if the works they speak are true,
Then clay must be a lovely thing.

Bonaro Overstreet, "Feet of Clay"^7

^6Ibid., p.54.
^7Ibid., p.72.
The impact of the Great Depression was felt by everyone. Overstreet captured the bleakness, hopelessness and pain experienced by people during this time of nationwide economic devastation. Through verse, she was also able to convey the good fortune she experienced at this time of national disaster. Her verse touched the inner aspect of the individual for it expressed the emotional and mental depths experienced in times of crises: war, economic depression, and self-worth.

Another focus in Overstreet's was her mother. Margaret Wilkinson had a tremendous impact upon her daughter's life. In several of her poems, Overstreet paid tribute to her mother and expressed the bonding which existed between the two women.

Her last collection of verse, Signature: New and Selected Poems published in 1978, was dedicated to the memory of H.A.O. (Harry Allen Overstreet). Many of the poems in this book previously appeared in newspapers and magazines, as well as in earlier books of her poems, Footsteps on the Earth, which is out of print, and in Hands Laid Upon the Wind.

In her verse Overstreet pours bits and pieces of herself, her personality and the facets of the dimensions of the self that made her unique. One gains insight into the depth of the emotion and commitment Overstreet held toward her life:
Young spruces stood bolt upright, every twig
Stiff with refusal to be beat by snow.
Young hemlocks sloped their boughs beneath the load,
Letting it softly go.

Each solved, no doubt, to its own satisfaction
The problem posed by uninvited weight.
I'd not take sides with either. I have tried
Both ways of handling fate.

Bonaro Overstreet, "Introduction to Philosophy"

Overstreet vividly recalled her first experience as a teacher, which occurred at Kern County High School in the late 1920s—an experience shared by new teachers everywhere throughout the decades:

Now this is new: that I habitue
Of classes where my thinking has been stirred
To surging tide or frothy ripple) stand
Before a class to speak instructive word.
I planned to have it so. Deliberately

I laid the foundation for this moment. Yet . . .
I did not know my feet would feel so large . . .
O God of Teachers, may I not forget
Those neat assignments, practiced to the letter,
Those deftly fashioned phrases that I planned.
Now must I pass these papers. O dear God,
Let not the sheets go slithering from my hand.
And if You could but ring the fire alarm . . .
Or anything . . . O any sharp surprise
To turn away from my stiff dwindling self
These thirty pair of adolescent eyes.

Bonaro Overstreet, "First Day of Teaching"

In the vast collection of poetry that Overstreet wrote, only one touches on the depth of emotion experienced in the relationship she shared with her husband Harry and honors

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9 Ibid., p.233.
the love and commitment which formed a lasting bond between them,

No eye beheld the colors that bannered from my hand.  
No ear but mine heard bugles drip splendor on the land.  
No one read the sunrise that wrote out fiery news,  
Nor guessed that little feathered wings were fitted to my shoes.  
Small blame to them: how could they know? how could they hear or see?  
There was no witness when your eyes spoke love to me.  

Bonaro Overstreet, "Unwitnessed"¹⁰  

Overstreet's poetry carried the imprint of her personality and her approach to life as she wrote about her personal psychology and human relations.

¹⁰Ibid., p.35.
Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet earned distinction as a teacher, lecturer, and writer. She was a frequent contributor to national magazines and the author of several books. She was, however, best known in publishing circles for the works she collaborated on with her husband Harry—especially those focused on communism. Throughout the years, the name "Overstreet" came to mean "The Overstreets," Harry and Bonaro, as they combined their talents as colleagues in the field of human relations. Their writings reflected their shared abilities and combined experience.

As a team, the Overstreets traveled the United States extensively; however, it was not until their interest in communism was ignited that they traveled abroad in their search for information. Their publications on communism earned them worldwide recognition as authorities in this realm of adult learning, and they were in much demand as guest speakers and lecturers on such topics as communism, democracy, and personal freedom. Despite their fame and popularity, they remained devoted to the pursuit of adult learning through publications, lectures, and individual discussion. Although it is not evident in their
collaborations, one might wonder whether competitiveness existed between these two prominent personalities, perhaps motivating each in their quest for adult learning.

Harry Overstreet was the mentor who introduced his wife to the field of adult education and quite possibly kept that interest focused until the time of his death in 1970. Perhaps their relationship was a true melding of the minds, with each as individuals contributing to form a whole team. It is possible that Harry Overstreet was the influence and momentum behind Bonaro Overstreet's research, writing, and lecture style, as evidenced in what became known as the "Overstreet colloquium," a conversational style between the couple and their audience. It is also possible that through this lecture style, in the later years, Bonaro Overstreet influenced and motivated her husband in their lectures of adult education. As a team, the Overstreets published over twelve books and articles in adult education.

In addition to their joint collaborations, Bonaro Overstreet published over twenty books and articles in adult education. She believed that writing and lecturing were intensely personal and individual processes of adult education. Her style of writing was one which limited her individual and collaborative nonfiction to a singular focused topic of learning so that each book in and of itself was an adult education course, where she served as both the author and the educator. This style was evident in her
earlier publications which focused on fear, courage, and bravery.

After her husband's death, Overstreet did not publish within the field of adult education although she published a collection of verse in 1978. She continued to lecture on topics in adult education at the Falls Church Regional Center of the University of Virginia until the Fall of 1984.

Bonaro Wilkinson Overstreet was born the child of a farmer and a housewife. All through her life, she carried the values and principles of her childhood within her own personality as she worked to create meaning out of life for others. She believed that the role of the adult educator was to educate to meet the needs of the learner, and this she did accomplish through her nonfiction—both her individual and joint publications.

Bonaro Overstreet earned acclaim for many of her works and her involvement with such organizations as the Parent Teacher Association. Poetry remained a passion for her, a passion that comforted her throughout her life. Poetry also demonstrated what she had learned about herself and others, giving her the breadth and depth of wisdom to continue to learn about herself and the world around her.

In determination of her leadership role and significance in the adult education movement in America Overstreet's publications are representative of examples of
adult education. Her lectures and nonfiction publications influenced the quality and methods of adult education, although her strength as a practitioner was exhibited through her interactions on an individual basis with people. Overstreet was a sensitive woman committed to uplifting people through learning. As a person, she was the ideal image of the adult education practitioner, committed to adult learning and nonjudgmental in her approach.

Overall, Overstreet did not influence or alter the course of adult education as a field of study. The strength of her position within the adult education movement was as a teacher and contributor to research, theory, and professional development of the adult education field. She was not, however, a leader in the field of adult education, for she did not guide the way for the direction of the field during the formative years of the 1930s through the 1960s while she and Harry Overstreet were active practitioners in adult education.

Bonaro Overstreet broadened the depth of adult education—not so much the content of courses, but as an advocate of knowing oneself and acting responsibly in the content of democratic responsibility.

Although she is not significant as a leader in the adult education movement, that is not to say that she was not successful in the field of adult education.
Emerson defined success as:

To laugh often and much;
to win the respect of intelligent
people and affection of children;
to earn the appreciation of honest
critics and endure the betrayal
of false friends; to appreciate
beauty, to find the best in others;
to leave the world a bit better,
whether by a healthy child, a
garden patch or a redeemed
social condition; to know even
one life has breathed easier
because you have lived.

This is to have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Success"¹

Bonaro Overstreet was, by Emerson's definition, a
success. Therefore, she was a significant female in her
success and in her ability to have influenced so many lives
through her publications and lectures.

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