



The Aims of National Library Week

FROM April 12 to April 18, 1959, thousands of communities throughout the United States will be celebrating the second National Library Week. This event is sponsored by the National Book Committee in cooperation with the American Library Association. It is devoted to the importance of reading in American life and to the importance of libraries of all kinds—public, school and university libraries, and the libraries maintained by individuals in their own homes. Leaders in the magazine, newspaper, book, radio, television, business and educational worlds will join in participating in the celebration and in providing special attention to reading and libraries in national journals and broadcasts.

In practice, National Library Week sponsorship is as wide and diverse as America itself. The principal motive force will come in individual cities, towns and villages. Here tens of thousands of citizens of all occupations, sensing the importance of reading to a rich, vigorous, and free intellectual and cultural life in their own communities and for their children, will unite in local committees to spread that sense of concern; and, through locally inspired and guided projects, do what is necessary, community by community, to make that concern effective.

The objective of the week is to remind the American people that reading can help them to explore and to satisfy their need for a greater sense of purpose and meaning in their lives; to urge them to use more fully the libraries of all kinds in which the treasures of the printed word await throughout the land. But there is a wider aim: to set apart a time when people can re-dedicate themselves to the ideas and ideals of a free society. Since ours is a society based on the choices made by the many rather than the few, its greatest concern must be the development of every individual to his highest capacity. Its vitality, its very existence, depend upon the extent to which all the people have formed the habit of finding out, of intelligently weighing alternatives of reading to be informed. Limited horizons are dangerous to a free people; so, as we have discovered, is the mindless assumption of superiority and invulnerability.

SUDDENLY, "a better-read, better-informed America" has become a necessity. The printed word, the very basis of education, has assumed a new importance. Only a lifetime of continuing self-education through reading, after formal education is completed, can keep Americans in watchful readiness to exercise responsible citizenship. Only a wide variety of reading can keep us abreast of what has been, and what is, and train the imagination to forge ahead into what might be in the future.

National Library Week is a time to reassess personal riches of mind and opportunity. It is also a time to explore through reading, intellectual potential; to develop readiness to adapt to the changes that an

age of atoms and automation is bringing. Though it can be an unparalleled source of entertainment, reading is not a tranquilizer, but a channel to new ideas and viewpoints that can help Americans respond to the challenge of leisure in a creative, satisfying way. It offers an exciting form of escape from pre-occupation merely with having and doing, into a full life of being, knowing, understanding and believing.

National Library Week is a focus for the continuing activities of the countless organizations and individuals that share its objectives. It can be a catalyst, working with all these other forces for the support of libraries and the spread of reading. Libraries work with and through all aspects of American life; strengthening them in home, school, college and community will help Americans to read and be ready for whatever the future may bring.

IN explaining the aims of 1959's National Library Week, the Steering Committee issued the following statement:

We want to remind Americans what the printed word means to free men in a free society. We want to stimulate more Americans to open their minds. We want to reveal to Americans some of the treasures which are theirs for the reaching.

We intend to work for this through a week-long program which has already enlisted the imagination of librarians, publishers, booksellers, authors, teachers, clergymen—plus thousands of men and women who simply love and respect reading.

We are planning nationwide activities—in newspapers, and magazines, on radio and television, in libraries, bookstores, churches, community centers—to make both concrete and dramatic the wonderful world of print.

We want to heighten the national interest in reading, and shorten the step from curiosity to conduct—by encouraging people to visit a library, bookshop, or newsstand. That step may be short, but it can lead to new frontiers for millions.

The reading habits of a nation cannot be changed overnight or in one week. What we can do is open a door for many who do not know it is there, or who do not know what tantalizing rooms lie beyond.

We are certain that the Founding Fathers were right in their conviction that the future of this country hinges on the enlightenment of its citizens, for through his own knowledge and action, each man helps to guide the direction of the nation.

It is with these aims, therefore, that the second program continues the work of the first. The same theme, "Wake Up and Read!", will be used again to underline the same conviction: we cannot afford a nation of non-readers.