

And what do you do?

What do you do? — This may still be the most common question asked at social gatherings in the 21st century, but the answers are likely to very different from today's.

Most Americans will work in information-related fields, futurists say. Few will work in factories, and fewer on farms. When Ronald Reagan was born in 1911, almost a third of Americans worked on farms. Now barely one in 30 tills the land.

Manufacturing is shrinking, too. In 1980, 28 percent of the work force labored in factories. A Washington D.C. career counseling service estimates it will drop to as low as 3 percent by 2030.

A future area cocktail party might include a biologist, a paramedic, a geriatric social worker, a restaurant owner, a travel agent, perhaps even a space-flight attendant and a robot technician.

Chances are, futurists say, that it won't include a bank teller, metal worker, or supermarket checkout clerk. "Automation," asserts the National Geographic News Service, "will send these the way of the elevator operator, milkman, and bowling pinsetter."

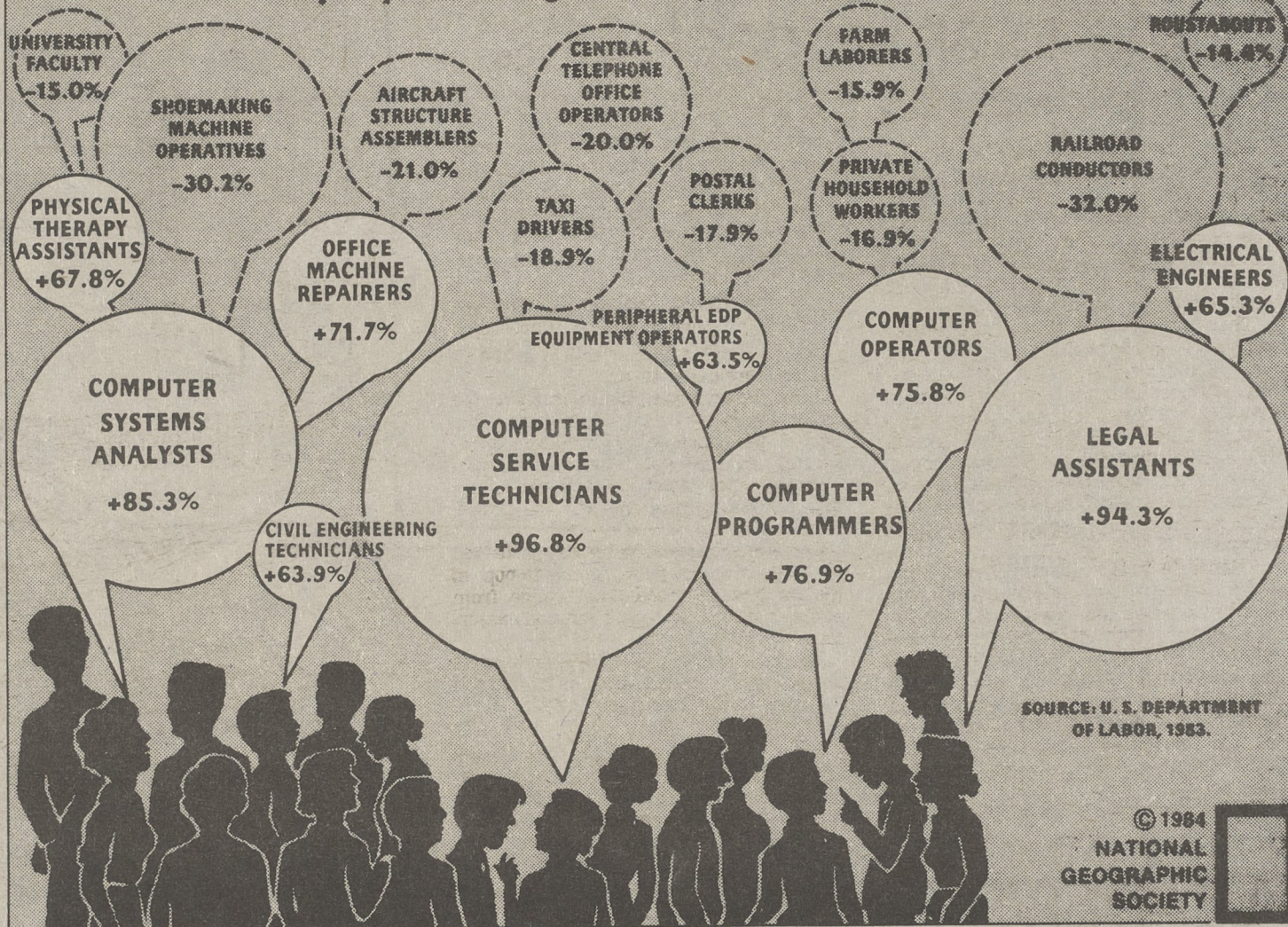
In some cases, automation may get you even if you do have skills and a high level of training. Automated bank tellers and computer banking may send personal bankers to the same limbo occupied by buggy whip makers.

One fear that seems ill-founded here is that Americans are not preparing for jobs of the future.

W. Clyde Helms of Occupational Forecasting Inc. in Virginia says, "The future doesn't begin at 12:01 a.m. Jan. 1, 2000; it's happening today. Kids in school now are the work force of the 21st century."

WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR A LIVING—AFTER 2000?

The ten fastest growing (+) and the ten most rapidly declining (-) occupations, 1982-1995.



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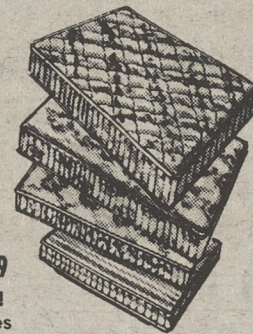
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