

The Cornell Daily Sun

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Ivy Inferiority [ARTICLE]

Cornell Daily Sun, Volume LXXVII, Issue 108, 21 March 1961, Page 4

Byword

Ivy Inferiority

By Richard V. Denenberg

"It just isn't Ivy."

You have heard it before. The campus jargon is peppered with such expressions, joking admonishments intended to set the indecorous delinquent back on the righteous paths of conduct necessary and proper to every student that treads the Quad. And those admonishments are indicative of the atmosphere that permeates the Quad, that hangs over it like a cloud of reproachful propriety. For Cornell students have an Ivy League inferiority complex.

This mental condition seems to stem from an apprehension that our position in the Ivy League is tenuous. The very existence of a "league" is itself dubious outside of athletics and some degree of administrative policy coordination. But Cornell is a member of this shadow league by common acknowledgement, indeed, just as the league exists by common acknowledgement. If we depend, for our position, on such common agreement, then we depend on an evaluation of ourselves through the eyes of others, of outsiders. And, therefore, we have become self-conscious of our Ivy League image.

It is subtle, but it is there. Perhaps it exists only as a compulsive undertow that gently tugs us into a mood of "Ivyness." Nevertheless, we feel the need to solidify our position, and perhaps we over-exert ourselves to prove such right because of insecurity. Subconsciously, but manifestly, we feel that we must look and act Ivy to be considered worthy of our niche in that hallowed league.

It does not take a social psychologist to see this. The attitude is almost ubiquitous, the excessive number of remarks about Ivyness attest to this. It can be seen in the emphasis of being polished, "smooth," "cool," and "sharp." For these, by consensus, are characteristics of Ivyness.

One of the nastier manifestations is a certain snobbery. Arts students are generally the most guilty of this snobbery which, quite unlike their disdainful attitude towards engineers, whom they consider mercenary philistines, is directed against the state schools and their students. State support implies compulsory admissions, lowered admission requirements, and, therefore, an aca-

demically poorer element in the University student body. But the roots of the social-climbing arts student's grievance lies deeper than carping about admissions standards; you see the very sound of the epithet "state-supported" is anathema to him. State support just isn't Ivy.

Arts students desperately try to preserve their school's private status to keep it in line with the Ivy image. Witness that when it was rumored the state government would undertake support of the graduate school, signs appeared on campus not protesting possible stifling effects of state financial control but urging us to "keep Cornell in the Ivy League" and not to "trade tweed for blue jean." The Arts students were the most adamant opposition to the aluminum sights on campus they spoiled the "traditional" look of the Arts Quad. We may humorously refer to ourselves as the "Cow College of the Ivy League," but underneath this good-natured rub may lie the real rub. Do not the Arts students feel themselves dragged down to a second-class membership in their cherished Ivy League?

But there seems to be a more important question than whether or not this manifested concern for Ivyness is justified or even excusable, whether it is all important or necessary. What sense is there in constantly trying to affirm our right to a place in this nebulous league? We have a structure, a composition of students, a tradition, in short, almost a "cultural ethos" that is peculiarly ours. We do not have to force ourselves to fit into an Ivy League stereotype to avoid boorishness. And we certainly can maintain our own respect and prestige with what is inherently Cornell. We need not repudiate part of ourselves in striving for the patterned look of the "desirable."

What, indeed, would be the shattering consequences were Amherst, for instance, to take our place relinquished through deviationism? It would not appear to be such an utterly ghastly situation. Of course, one could no longer proudly say to friends and relatives that one was a student at an Ivy League school, assuming that this is the ultimate in prestige name-dropping. But then, one really must remember that Cornell is primarily an institution of higher learning—and not a "snow job."

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