

Brief Overview

This recording captures a Class of 1971 group discussion (March 12, 2023) in which Cornell alumni share memories of their sophomore year (1968–69). The conversation focuses on campus life, the Willard Straight Hall takeover, cultural and political upheaval, daily academic routines, student groups, ROTC experiences, concerts, fashion, social divisions, and memorable individuals. The session also touches on efforts to preserve class history in the Cornell archives.

Summary

1. Purpose and Opening Structure of the Meeting

- The facilitator opens the session to collect memories of sophomore year.
 - Prompts include:
 - Biggest concerns that year
 - How students studied before digital resources
 - What they wore
 - Significant events or personal stories
 - Student social groups (“groups” on campus)
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2. Introductions: Who Was in the Conversation

Different participants introduce themselves and provide context: their college (Arts & Sciences, Human Ecology, Agriculture, etc.), Greek affiliations, extracurricular activities, and early impressions.

Examples:

- One participant (Aggie, SDT) shared meeting her husband at Mann Library.
 - Another was the Cornell men’s hockey public-address announcer for decades and associates many Cornell memories with athletics.
 - A third participant worked at WVBR for all four undergraduate years.
 - Another made the basketball team, balancing athletics and academics.
 - Several people identified as “RC” students and recalled the gender imbalance at Cornell at the time.
 - Another participated in musical comedy (Octagon) and briefly served as one of the first women cheerleaders.
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3. The Willard Straight Hall Takeover and Campus Unrest

A. Emotional & Cultural Impact

- Many recalled the 1969 Straight takeover vividly; some were frightened or concerned, some were fascinated.
 - Holly Flynn remembered her parents' fear when seeing news of the event.
 - Gilda's mother demanded she come home, but Gilda refused, saying "this is just getting interesting."

B. Direct Experiences

- One person was inside Barton Hall during the related protests and followed WVBR's coverage closely.
- Another person remembered news photographers, guns, and the campus closing down.
- Some recalled Volkswagen Beetles being overturned and burned afterward during clashes among campus factions.

C. ROTC Students' Perspectives

- Participants discussed ROTC and the difficult social climate for members during anti-war unrest.
 - A classmate, David G., a Cornell Ranger and ROTC member, was remembered for being killed in Vietnam.
 - Several participants believed such classmates should be formally remembered in the class project.

4. Student Life, Culture, and Social Groups

A. How Students Studied

- Studying required extensive library time, using physical books, magazine rooms, record rooms, and assigned readings.
 - Jeff described learning critical thinking and finding information *without the internet*.
- Sharon emphasized strict time-blocking, using calendars to allocate classes, social time, and study areas.
- Kathy noted students felt isolated from the news, unlike the constant stream of information today.

B. What People Wore

- Students mostly wore jeans, sweatshirts, baggy sweaters, making socioeconomic differences less visible.
 - The clothing uniformity minimized awareness of wealth or legacy backgrounds.

C. Social Divisions and “Groups”

Participants identified:

- Greeks vs. independents (GDIs)
 - Athletes (“jocks”)
 - ROTC students
 - Students working their way through school vs. wealthier students (often only discernible via cars).
 - Working students had less study time due to campus jobs.
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5. Housing and Independence

- After freshman year, Cornell students were largely **forced out of dorms**, unlike at many other universities.
 - This accelerated independence and forced early adulthood.
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6. Concerts and Cultural Life at Cornell

Participants recalled an outstanding roster of concerts:

- Simon & Garfunkel
- Phil Ochs (with dramatic appearance by Father Berrigan)
- The Temptations
- Peter, Paul & Mary
- Jim Croce
- The Association

Cornell’s isolation encouraged the university and student groups to bring high-quality entertainment to campus.

7. Changes in the College of Home Economics

- Sophomore year was when the College of Home Economics became the College of Human Ecology, altering course requirements and affecting many students.
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8. Reflections on the Times: Self-Discovery and World Awareness

- Many expressed that sophomore year was a period of identity formation, exposure to new ideas, and growing awareness of national issues (Vietnam, civil rights, campus politics).
 - Cornell felt like an isolated “world of young people,” shaping personal development.
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9. Memorabilia, Archives, and Preserving Class History

- Participants discussed collecting:
 - Old programs
 - Notebooks
 - Letters
 - Items like Gilda’s 1921 book of Tennyson found in her basement.
- Jeff recommended the book *Cornell '69* by Donald Alexander Downs as relevant to their history.