

Why has it become impossible for us to justify our present existence? We've convinced ourselves that the preceding generation's inability to immediately change the world is evidence of the hopelessness of our situation. I don't buy it. It seems to me that one of the inalienable rights of mankind ought to be the right to feel good about (or at least be indifferent to) his or her life. I don't live to further a political cause, serve a deity, or see how large the numbers in my bank account can get. Not being driven by any of these common motives and therefore not able to qualitatively assess my life by those standards, I guess I'm just looking to feel good about my own existence. Terribly selfish aren't I?

I suppose this is as good a time as any for the inevitable disclaimer. No,

I don't feel we should all withdraw into shells and pretend all is peachy keen. There are serious problems in this world. I guess my tragic flaw is that I don't worry too much about them because I think we can do something about them. Ah, the idealism of youth! Yes, I actually feel that mankind will survive the next 100 years at least—not as well as we could but not as badly as we might. I think that (Trads II students take note) mankind will not only endure but prevail, as William Faulkner has so eloquently stated.

To regard inflation, oppression, racism, or annihilation as inevitable is to completely relinquish whatever control we do have over our lives to a kind of social predestination and the prophesy becomes self-fulfilling. The apathy of the present arises not

because we don't care but because we don't think it matters whether we care or not. What I'm advocating is a belief that for the most part we have free will. We can order our lives the way we want if we stop convincing ourselves that tomorrow must necessarily be worse than today as one step in a long march down the cosmic toilet. I can no longer accept a defeatist attitude as a realistic attitude.

That having been said, I now realize I can get the money for the Loose Hall Ball, the days are getting longer by 3-4 minutes every day, I'm pretty well prepared for classes tomorrow and maybe I won't get called on anyway. I'll write a letter to my Congressman about Cambodia. I've finished this column and I have an idea for the paper. But right now I'm going to the Pub. A guy can only take so much...

Activism of the 'me generation'

nathaniel borenstein

One thing that has always disturbed me about the anti-nuclear movement has risen spectacularly to the surface in the current movement to oppose draft registration: the abysmal ignorance of the typical modern activist. Lest my desire to speak in generalities render me insufficiently offensive to elite intellectual Grinnellians, I shall be more direct: The average activist at Grinnell College today is ignorant, misinformed, and, far from rebelling, is conforming precisely to the norms of his social conditioning.

If anyone has made it to this second paragraph, I owe him or her at least an indication of why I feel competent to make these charges. I am not a Young Republican. Quite the contrary, I am a lifelong socialist with a family history that includes more families torn apart by the Russia-China split than by long hair, drugs, or Vietnam. Moreover, I am one of what I suspect are at most five Grinnell students who actually took an active role in the antiwar movement a decade ago. I worked in 1968 for Kennedy and McCarthy. I personally threw a potato at Spiro Agnew in 1971. I went to Washington to confront tear gas, motorcycle cops, and guards on horseback in a march against the Vietnam war. I worked for the Columbus Free Press in its early days as an antiwar underground newspaper. I relate this only in an attempt (probably useless) to avoid being summarily dismissed as a "reactionary" by the knee-jerk radicals whose unthinking responses better serve the forces of reaction.

What I, as a socialist, want to point out is that no movement is well-served by followers and workers who are ignorant of the issues on behalf of which they are struggling. When reporters

find that large numbers of the "demonstrators" at an anti-nuke rally only come for the music, does this do justice to those who seriously seek to make a point? When even more of the demonstrators believe that nuclear power plants can explode like bombs, who will take their concerns seriously? The Russian revolution was carried out in such ignorance, as was Hitler's rise to power. But more of that later.

Today's students are, by definition, a wholly different generation than that of the Sixties. What is less visible is that they grew up with an entirely different set of rules. People we looked up to as children opposed the draft. People we looked up to as children opposed the U.S. military and its endeavors. Therefore we, as relative adults, do the same today without pause to consider the radically different situation. Not only was the U.S. intervening abroad with impunity in the early and middle Sixties, but the conventional American student accepted this. The antiwar movement and the whole hippie life style grew up as a rebellion against social norms. Today's anti-registration movement is no rebellion at all. It is an imitation of the idols of our youth without regard for their temporal situations and motivations.

At a recent "town meeting" over 400 people showed up to discuss registration and a possible draft. (This much-touted "rebirth of student activism" contrasts sharply with the evening when only 25 such activists saw fit to devote a few hours to 3 million starving Cambodians.) Hardly anyone wanted to talk about the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, or their use of chemical warfare against a nearly

helpless population. Today, though it has been in all the papers, nobody on campus wants to talk about the Russians lining up all the men in an Afghan village, shooting them, burying them with bulldozers, and telling their wives and children that because of this, "next year's potato crop will be good." Rather, the humane and moral instincts that prompted opposition to similar American atrocities in Vietnam have been replaced by a new dogma: Registration is bad, the draft is bad, use of American force is bad. Is this what we fought for in the Vietnam era? Not as I recall, at least.

Those who see no danger in institutionalizing a cult of the hippies' actions without their motivations would do well to consider the example of the Wandervogel. The Wandervogel movement was a turn-of-the-century German forerunner of the American hippies. Their commitment to free love and a peaceful, communal, non-competitive life-style stood in stark contrast to German militarism and imperialism as it marched toward World War One. Like the American hippies after Vietnam, the Wandervogel lapsed into disarray once the Great War was over. But their lifestyle, stripped of its intellectual foundations, remained a potent force in the psychology of the young. It was from the remnants of the Wandervogel and the ignorant young who idolized their cameraderie and rebellion against governmental authority that was molded the Hitler Youth.

Like the American radicals who are still fighting anti-Vietnam battles as the Persian Gulf totters on the brink, German youth was still fighting the Kaiser's imperialism as the fragile German democracy tottered—and fell.