Competition Claimed Essential

By BILL LIEBLICH

“Honest rivalry should characterize competition in such a shared endeavor as college education,” Dr. Allan Nevins, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, told a large gathering last Thursday afternoon at the Memorial Center’s Grand Ballroom.

Nevins, formerly a professor at Cornell and Columbia and now Senior Research Associate at the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California, spoke on “The Happy Rivalry of Private and Public Universities: A Historical View.”

COMPETITION, Nevins said, is essential to our society and to the educational process; education suffers from uniformity and benefits under competition of state, church and private institutions.

Higher education was primarily private in the United States until 1920, when a great number of state universities appeared, Nevins said, adding that since then the growth of private universities has slowed.

Friction, resentment and jealousy were some of the by-products of the shift in balance between private and public schools, he continued, but these effects have gradually lessened as the lines between the two types of universities have become more and more blurred.

“ALL GREAT universities, public and private, have grown and will continue to grow more similar,” Nevins asserted. He mentioned several reasons for the growing similarity, including government grants to private schools, huge endowments, and growing concern for higher standards and better faculty and facilities among state schools, and greater cooperation between the two types of universities, especially between those in the same geographical area.

Nevertheless, as the universities grow more similar, several (Continued on Page 10)
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friction points are created, Nevins said, pointing to the rough competition in the recruiting of good students, in the raising of funds, and in the building of faculties and facilities. In all of this competition, he continued, state schools have an advantage because of their ability to charge low tuition rates and because of their greater command of resources.

NEVINS SAID that private-public differences often make for less separation among schools than cultural and regional differences.

Rivalry and cooperation, he added, can benefit the two types of schools. Examples cited were Stanford and Berkeley, Duke and North Carolina, and Tulane and LSU.

Good private universities with large endowments can induce the states in their areas to better their schools’ quality, Nevins continued, using Stanford and the University of Chicago as examples.

“IT IS A national misfortune that no strongly endowed university exists in the Rocky Mountain area or the Pacific Northwest to stimulate the states' schools to higher excellence,” he said.

Concluded Nevins: “All that Stanford did for the West Coast and that Chicago did for the Middle West, Rice can and will do for the rich and teeming Southwest.”