

Mills on Media

this week:

Impressions Biafra March SUB Circus

by Stephen R. Mills



Crowds frighten me. So easily influenced, so unpredictable. But the frightening is fascinating so I watched. Media, in a very real sense, is everything you see, hear, and feel. Let me share with you some of the things I saw, and heard, and felt at about 12.45 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 28, 1969. I was standing along the railing of the second floor of the Student Union Building and below me, in the lobby a crowd of people were gathered round two tables filled with literature. Yes, crowds frighten me. So easily influenced, so unpredictable. But the frightening is fascinating so I watched, resolving not to speak, not to influence the drama about to unfold before me, just to gather impressions. Fortunately, I was in an excellent position to do so. I watched. The mumbling crowd centered about a little man who, it seemed, had violated a Union Building rule the previous day by selling literature in the lobby. He had been forcefully ejected from the building by the campus police but the little man was back again today, selling his literature because he was not alone. The Dal NDY and the Graduate Students were backing his play. It was the members of these groups that surrounded the little man as they all waited for the return of the campus police. Several anxious minutes passed and then they appeared, huge men wearing yellow jackets. My first impression was of a fleet of mindless engines of destruction, machines, unfeeling, unthinking. This impression seemed verified when I saw these yellow hulks tear into the crowd. I was really scared. The yellow-jacketed men tried valiantly to grab the little man and his table of literature, the crowd resisted, and in the ensuing chaos, all became less than human. Animals they were, shoving, shouting, hurting each other.



It was awful hard to keep the
candles lit.
Smiling faces, silent mourning,
A song in the night, eyes that
cared.
Cold hands and feet, warm hearts,
Old and young for a while together.
Little children; peace in their
time?
Perhaps a few silent prayers went
out
To those crying half a world away
And to those not caring very close.
It was awful hard to keep the
candles lit
But even harder to set them
ablaze.

I found myself wishing that someone break a window or tear something off the walls. Better that the building suffer than those who struggled like insects below me but who were still my fellow men.

The turmoil subsided after what seemed many hours but which had only been a few minutes. A man with a megaphone began to speak; sane words that made sense, but a different kind of sense than the crowd was used to; perhaps a better sense. They tried so hard not to listen to Kim Cameron's words. It seemed like they pained. Kim's words made me happy. Next spoke a different kind of person. Where Kim had projected confidence, sanity, and newness, this man projected nothing but old ideas, security in unquestioning conformity. "This is a circus" said Bruce Gillis, little realizing he was the clown. But everyone listened for Bruce was the personification of the foolishness that ruled them, closing their minds, closing their hearts. The little man spoke next. Tried to communicate with the people but he could not pierce the wall of prejudice, hatred, and, yes, even jealousy, they had set up to keep themselves safe, to make them forget about others, other ideas, better worlds they would have to make.

Kim spoke again. Then someone else. Then another. Soon, no one spoke. Maybe a few were thinking. The crowd broke up. Most of the clowns went away laughing, laughing themselves into forgetting what they owe tomorrow: the responsibility to listen, to struggle with new ideas, to somehow find the best of all possible worlds and make it a reality. So those are my impressions of what was almost a riot. I sincerely hope most of the clowns who were present start enlarging their outlooks so my next impressions will not be of a circus meeting but of a meeting of the minds, concerned and open minds, minds without the media, minds with each other. By the way, Merry Christmas and a Concerned New Year.