

Did you cry?

By Howard Pearre

In studying psychology, we learn that the human mind tends to blank out the horrible, that it is much more conducive to retaining pleasant thoughts and memories. If something really horrible is brought up, the human mind tends to treat it in a distorted manner and laugh nervously or not to admit it into the mental process at all. This is necessary, the psychologists tell us, in order to maintain a healthy attitude on life.

This is why it is difficult to comprehend the horror that was the result of Nigeria's recently ended civil war. We don't like to -- and, in fact, can't fully -- dwell on the subject of starving children. If we do for long, our minds become sick and lose the capacity for happiness. Life goes on. Don't concentrate on the sordid. Have a healthy mind.

But recognize it once. The horror which is real. Several million children

starving, slowly, to death.

TIME Magazine's January 26 issue cover depicted it well -- a grotesque orange skull shape with deep empty eyes. Fear, death, starvation, war. Merciless war. Merciless starvation.

And the picture accompanying the news of Biafra's surrender in the CHARLOTTE OBSERVER. Black, swollen bellies, Nakedness. If you didn't cry, it was because you either have a sick mind or you didn't think about the picture.

So this -- starving children -- is an evil which transcends the various criteria for living -- both political and religious. This is condemned equally by a Communist or a conservative, by a Catholic or a Buddhist or an aesthet. This is a sin against humanity. This is the unpardonable crime.

So who is to blame? Who can we hang and watch drop through the gallows and

slowly nod our heads and agree that justice has finally been done? Who is the evil person with an evil grin that we can sacrifice to the god of vengeance? Is it Nigeria? Is it the Ibo leaders? Is it Africa and WAWA? Is it the black people? Or perhaps humanity itself that must be punished? But it was humanity that suffered from the crime.

The immediate cause was civil war. Somebody, surveying the sad result of nearly three years of fighting, said that nobody wins a civil war. One side only loses more than the other. In this case, the children of Biafra lost.

The case is thus presented to lay blame upon civil war and those responsible for it. Ultimately, this leads to the survey of many civil wars -- where a portion of a national body breaks away, from that national body by means of force. Condemn, now, if you will, our own nation's birth out of violence. If you

cannot, as I cannot, where lies the blame for the deaths of the Ibo children?



A recent Cronkite show told about an "enterprising" student from Xavier College working as a private garbage collector during a strike by Cleveland's garbage men to finance a trip to Florida. He may be enterprising, and he might get to Florida. But striking laborers, he must not understand.

Union people are not generally known to feel gentle feelings toward scabs. Especially in Cleveland, especially in that kind of situation, and especially if the scab brags about his enterprising on nationwide television.

Letters

Dear Editor

On October 15, 1969, a little more than six years after American troops became "official" combatants in the Vietnam conflict, a national moratorium was held in protest of that conflict. This paper is an effort to put this moratorium in perspective and assess its utility with respect to its stated goals. Ambivalence and ambiguity have long been characteristics of the American public, and they are no less evident with regard to the goals of the moratorium. However, for the sake of agreement, we will say that the "goals" of the moratorium are three in number: (1) honor of the American dead and wounded in the Vietnam conflict; (2) to make it plain that there is general disapproval of the Nixon Administration's conduct of the war; and (3) to force the President to change his policy with regard to the war. What follows will be an attempt to examine these goals and what effect

the moratorium has had on them.

Two assumptions are critical to this evaluation. The first is that, with respect to the Vietnam conflict, that is NO majority opinion on the part of the American people. There are those who advocate a unilateral withdrawal; there are those who favor progressive troop reduction; there are those who say keep up the present policy with no escalation; and there is, finally, the "lunatic fringe" who advocate escalation. The fact remains, however, that there is no SINGLE majority opinion. Ambivalence rears its ugly head once more.

The second assumption underlying this analysis of the moratorium must be looked at on two levels. On one level the moratorium has emphasized the potential for extreme POLARIZATION of American society with regard to the war and, by extension, much of the established tenets of our social order. On the other level, and more

specifically, the moratorium has served to make President Nixon's position more INFLEXIBLE with respect to the option he can now exercise. These two phenomena of polarization and inflexibility are particularly salient to a discussion of the utility of the moratorium.

Earlier in this paper, we agreed that there were three goals to be served by this moratorium. None would deny that the first goal, the honoring of American dead and wounded, was achieved, and rightly so. The other two goals are, unfortunately, not so cut and dried. The question as to whether the second goal, an effort to demonstrate to Mr. Nixon that there is a general disapproval of the conduct of the war, was satisfied is an extremely complex one. In simple terms, however, it boils down to this. A surprisingly large number of people demonstrated in FAVOR of the Nixon policy in Vietnam, along with the expected large number of those against present Vietnam policy. This in itself, however, is not so significant as the second

ramification of the moratorium with respect to this goal. It is generally conceded by political scientists who study voting behavior that forty per cent of the electorate DO NOT vote in national elections. Most of this group is in the thirty-five to fifty-five age group. Since it is also conceded that people are definitely more inclined to vote AGAINST something rather than for it, an interesting conclusion that has repercussions for the whole of our society, can be deduced.

If this forty per cent were to become sufficiently aroused by events like the moratorium, the activities of the New Left, and other forms of irrational student activity, they could be moved to participate! Then there would be a "revolution," all right; but it would be a revolution of Conservatism rather than one of Liberalism (the more necessary and desirable

alternative). It is here that the notion of POLARIZATION becomes vitally important. The American political system is a democratic system. Unfortunately, however, our system is too cumbersome to function without the "lubrication" of consensus and peaceful conflict resolution. If American society were to polarize, as it now seems inclined to do, with apolitical dreamers and reformers on one side, and hard-core narrow-minded conservatives on the other, our system would, out of necessity, become more restrictive, authoritative, and coercive. Everyone would lose out, including those who favor a rational political approach to conflict resolution. The thoughtful observer cannot deny that the moratorium has aided in this movement toward polarization.

In looking at the third goal of the moratorium, one must conclude that the result will be diametrically opposed to the intent. In seeking to make President Nixon change his policy, the supporters of the moratorium have only made his position more INFLEXIBLE. Hanoi MUST take a different view of the advantages that will accrue to holding out a little longer,

now that the moratorium has made it unmistakably clear that there is division within American society. Consequently, Mr. Nixon loses a degree of flexibility with regard to moves to deescalate the war. Any move now would most certainly appear to Hanoi to be a sign of weakness and uncertainty. On a different plane, the President cannot make it appear that he is bowing to the wishes of a "bunch of hippies" (however much of a misrepresentation this may be) by drastically changing policy now.

In summary, it cannot be denied that the goals of the moratorium are valid and much in need of implementation. In fact remains, however, that in seeking to further these goals (except for the honor paid to those killed or wounded), the moratorium has only led to their frustration. It is most definitely true that President Nixon missed his best opportunity by not changing our Vietnam policy right after his inauguration-- this he has yet to explain. It is equally true, unfortunately, that the moratorium and events like it, have only and will only serve to delay any salient reversal in our policy in Vietnam.

Thomas D. Coggin

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