

Nightmare in the Catskills

The dreams of marijuana and rock music that drew 300,000 fans and hippies to the Catskills had little more sanity than the impulses that drive the lemmings to march to their deaths in the sea. They ended in a nightmare of mud and stagnation that paralyzed Sullivan County for a whole week-end.

What kind of culture is it that can produce so colossal a mess? One youth dead and at least three others in hospitals from overdoses of drugs; another dead from a mishap while sleeping in an open field. The highways for twenty miles around made completely impassable, not only for the maddened youths but for local residents and ordinary travelers.

Surely the parents, the teachers and indeed all the adults who helped create the society against which these young people are so feverishly rebelling must bear a share of the responsibility for this outrageous episode. It is hardly credible that pot, acid and other illegal drugs could be freely exchanged and used on the scale reported by reliable witnesses.

The sponsors of this event, who apparently had not the slightest concern for the turmoil it would cause, should be made to account for their mismanagement. To try to cram several hundred thousand people into a 600-acre farm with only a few hastily installed sanitary facilities shows a complete lack of responsibility.

The mix-up with the New York City Police Department, which left them without the services of several hundred off-duty policemen they had counted on for security purposes, greatly complicated matters. Apparently a high officer of the department encouraged them in the hope that they might be able to enlist some of the men.

When Police Commissioner Howard R. Leary learned of this he promptly and very properly forbade the men of his command from engaging in such activities. They are plainly a violation of the regulations against moonlighting, and the suggestion should never have been put forward by anyone familiar with the department's rules.

As always, there were redeeming features to the generally dismal situation. One was the genuine kindness shown by the residents of Monticello and other overrun communities, who boiled water and made thousands of sandwiches for the hungry, thirsty hordes of youngsters. Another was the help given by the doctors and nurses who flew to the scene.

Last, but by no means least, was the fact that the great bulk of the freakish-looking intruders behaved astonishingly well, considering the disappointments and discomforts they encountered. They showed that there is real good under their fantastic exteriors, if it can just be aroused to some better purpose than the pursuit of LSD.