

THE NATION

AMERICAN NOTES

Metaphysics

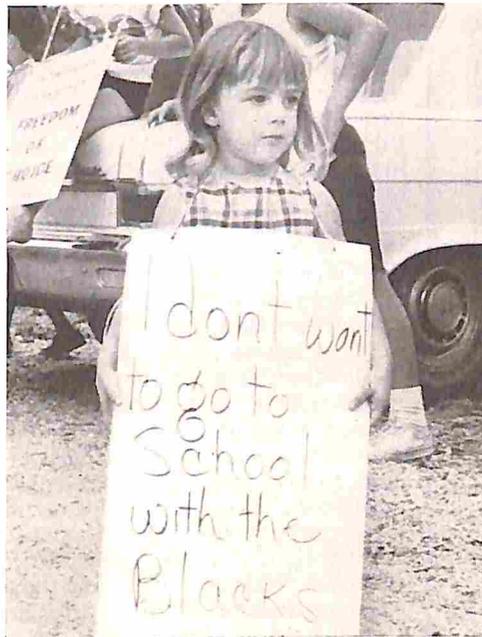
Texas law sets a minimum jail term for robbery by assault, but no maximum. That legal quirk gave a Dallas jury last week an opportunity to indulge its draconian fantasies. The panel found Joseph Sills guilty of a \$73.10 stickup. It was roughly his 20th conviction. Dallas has been roiled by repeated banditry, and the prosecutor touted the deterrent value of long prison terms. So the jury sentenced Sills to 1,000 years.

It was mere hyperbole, of course. The jury evidently wanted to damn Sills, who is 50, to death in jail, but an ordinary sentence of life imprisonment would have accomplished that; besides, he will probably be considered for parole in 20 years. The Dallas sentence opened up the possibilities of a whole new scale of metaphysical punishment, however. If 1,000 years for robbery by assault, why not 2,500 for rape and 3,000 for murder? Such sentences would have little meaning except as a measurement of moral outrage and as gratification for those who impose them.

The Emperor's Skivvies

For all the talk of a new stifling of dissent, the unsilent minority still seems fairly aggressive. Last week a group called 1970 Senators for Peace and New Priorities published a full-page ad in the *New York Times* depicting the President, the Vice President, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Defense, and South Carolina's Senator Strom Thurmond marching along in their undershorts, presumably leading the country toward the abyss.

"It's *The Emperor's New Clothes* all over again," said the ad, which promoted a Madison Square Garden rally to raise campaign funds for antiwar Senate candidates. Among the scheduled speakers: Ramsey Clark, I. F. Stone and Julian Bond. The cartoon was hardly a contribution to the national debate, and few other countries in the world would casually allow their Chief of State to be depicted so contemptuously. But the U.S. presidency has survived sharper lampooning. Actually, the present instance might have been worse. The artist, Robert Grossman, originally had the whole crew walking along naked. The *Times* rejected that version on grounds of taste, so Grossman airbrushed in the topless skivvies.



YOUNG PROTESTER IN LOUISIANA



MADDOX & AX HANDLES

Turn-Around on Integration

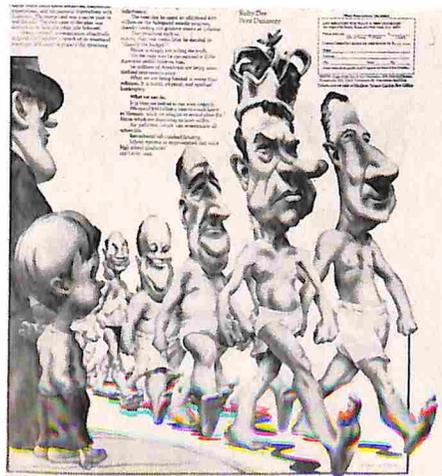
SUDDENLY, in a shift that could prove historic, the nation has faltered in its determination to grapple with the toughest moral and political dilemma of the postwar era: how to ensure justice for its blacks and tranquillity among its races. The momentum created over 16 years by stern courts and forceful federal officials to eliminate segregated Southern school systems has been slowed. The first hesitant steps toward racial balance of Northern schools have been thrown off stride. The nation, at least temporarily, seems to be retreating on the sensitive and highly symbolic issue of school integration.

Signs of the uneasy new mood were everywhere last week. The South's most segregationist Governors were so emboldened that Georgia's Lester Maddox felt free to flaunt his racism in the restaurant of the U.S. House of Representatives. He passed out replicas of the ax handles he had used to bar blacks from his Pickrick Chicken House in Atlanta; when challenged by Mich-

igan's Representative Charles C. Diggs Jr., he accused the black Congressman of acting like "an ass and baboon." Alabama's George Wallace announced that he was once more running for Governor "to get our schools back from the Federal Government," and boasted that he might not have to run against Richard Nixon in 1972, because "Nixon will give us what we want." In a memorandum to the President made public last week, Daniel Moynihan, Nixon's resident liberal in the White House, suggested that "the time may have come when the issue of race could benefit from a period of 'benign neglect' . . . in which Negro progress continues and racial rhetoric fades."

While Southern politicians gloated, Northern liberals were in total confusion. Oregon's Representative Edith Green, chairman of the House Select Subcommittee on Education, seemed to have given up on integration. "We simply cannot afford to let our classrooms turn into battlefields," she said. "We really have to go back to quality education and put our emphasis on that." Hubert Humphrey, on the other hand, charged that the Nixon Administration had "sold out" black Americans and was in "full retreat on the civil rights front." Connecticut's Senator Abraham Ribicoff, whose Senate speech denouncing "rampant racism" and "monumental hypocrisy" in the North had led to the first Southern congressional victories on civil rights issues in over a decade, said he had no regrets. "I'm damn glad I made that speech," he said. "I've touched a soft nerve in America. I wanted to make America look at itself—and that's what it's doing."

The Ribicoff speech put new life into last-gasp efforts by such segregationists as Senator John Stennis and Repre-



GROSSMAN CARTOON

FIFTY CENTS

MARCH 9, 1970

THE NEW

RETREAT FROM INTEGRATION

STOP

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WHAT



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