

CONTENTS

EDITORS' NOTE

Draft Board's Dilemma	16D
A new court ruling puts it up to local boards to judge the sincerity of conscientious objectors. Text by Michael Mok. Photographed by Grey Villet	
Reunion with Whittier '34	24
President Nixon invites members of his college class to visit him at the White House	
Blight Blossoms on the American Highway	26
Our garish roadways, coast to coast. Photographed by Michael Rougier. Text by Loudon Wainwright. Why the Highway Beautification Act isn't working. By John Neary	
The Race To Save an Infant's Life	36
A new kind of respirator helps a baby suffering from "respiratory distress syndrome"	
Activist Actress Candice Bergen	40
She wants to do her part in the protest movements but above all to write. By Maggie Paley	
Last Season for the 'Delta Queen'	46
Dali's Dollars	48
The dauntless surrealist paints less and less and sells more and more. By Robert Wernick	
A Child's Playground of Verses	56
Photographer Gary Gladstone has a new book about kids, the games they play and the poems they make up	
DEPARTMENTS	
GUEST PRIVILEGE Mere survival is not enough for Man. By René Dubos	2
GALLERY Henry Grossbard's self-portraits	6
REVIEWS	8
<i>Sexual Politics</i> , by Kate Millett, is reviewed by Anatole Broyard	
<i>The Resurrection of Richard Nixon</i> , by Jules Witcover, is reviewed by Karl Hess	
COMMENT William Zinsser writes about the Johnson Smith catalogue	12
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	16A
PARTING SHOTS Is the Nixon administration an equal opportunity employer?	61

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COVER—MICHAEL MAUNEY 1—WALTER DARAN 2—ELIZABETH WILCOX 6, 7—HENRY GROSSBARD 8—SHI-GIOSHI NOBORI, BEN MARTIN 16A—JACK MUI CHELL, ALBERT NOVACK JR.—RUIH GOBEL, DORINE F. GILMAN 24, 25—UPI 36 through 39—MICHAEL A. GEISSINGER 40, 41—MICHAEL MAUNEY—© DAN BUDNIK 1969, MICHAEL MAUNEY 42—MICHAEL MAUNEY exc. bot. rt. ENRICO SARSINI 43—MICHAEL MAUNEY 44—AP—MICHAEL MAUNEY 46, 47—JOHN LOENGARD 48, 48A—ENRICO SARSINI, JEAN-PIERRE LAGARDE 48D—ESCO/INCO TV COMMERCIAL for LANVIN CHOCOLATES—LOUIS MOLINIER 53—courtesy OWEN CHEATHAM FOUNDATION, NEW YORK 55—ENRICO SARSINI 56 through 59—GARY GLADSTONE 61—t. UPI (2); cen. STAN WAYMAN; bot. lt. DON CARL STEFFEN, rt. STAN WAYMAN 62—STAN WAYMAN exc. lt. DON CARL STEFFEN

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'Nobody we met seemed to care'

Five years ago, in the days of Lady Bird, the cause of highway beautification suddenly became popular with conservationists and political leaders across the U.S. Recently Correspondent Richard Woodbury and Photographer Michael Rougier traveled the highways of the nation to see what, if anything, had been achieved in those last five years. The result of their trip appears on pages 26-34.

"From one end of the country to the other," says Rougier, "the highways are a mass of billboards, junk heaps and neon lights. Most of the billboards are in bad taste, many are in dire need of repair, and for some perverse reason they seem to be concentrated in areas of natural beauty. Even when you drive along a country road it's sometimes difficult to see the trees. With the exception of landscape architects, nobody we met seemed to care much about the problem. They didn't even seem to notice it. Once, when we were shooting Tucson's speedway, a patrolman in a cruiser stopped by and took a look through my 1,000-mm lens. 'My God,' he said, 'is that what this street looks like?'"

Rougier did much of his shooting right from the highway. But he ran into trouble when he tried to get into junkyards and garbage dumps. "Obviously we couldn't count on junkyard owners to cooperate," says Woodbury. "To get into one huge private dump just north of San Francisco, we filled our station wagon with all the trash we could find and went in as paying customers. While I slowly unloaded our garbage, Mike slipped off up a hill to shoot."

Rougier and Woodbury covered 12,000 miles, traveling from the Northwest down through the Rocky Mountains to the Arizona desert, and on to the Midwest, the Smoky Mountains, Florida and New York's Hudson Valley. "In the East," says Woodbury, "we found the problem serious but oddly less acute than we had expected, probably because there is not much scenery left to spoil. But Florida was a different matter. Mike had lived there until three years ago, and as we headed south, he said, 'Now you'll see some beautiful beaches.' But we didn't see anything of the sort. All the views from the coast road which Mike remembered from three years earlier had been blocked by new billboards."



MICHAEL ROUGIER




RICHARD WOODBURY

RALPH GRAVES
Managing Editor

LIFE

DILEMMA OF NEW STANDARDS
A Draft Board Rules on
a Conscientious Objector

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