

Burning Issue

From Time Magazine

The most remarkable incident arising out of school desegregation occurred at Hillsboro, in southern Ohio. Hillsboro has an unsegregated high school, but maintains a segregated 50-pupil elementary school for Negroes. This year the school board decided to desegregate, but proposed to do so in a gradual two-year program.

The delay ruffled Philip Partridge, 43, the county engineer, who is white and a vehement opponent of racial segregation. He reasoned that if the Negro school did not exist the authorities would have to desegregate immediately. Accordingly, he set fire to the Negro school. After \$4,000 worth of damage, firemen saved the building.

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PARTRIDGE was sent to the State Hospital for the Insane at Lima. Doctors there released him, finding him sane, although possessed of "some unusual and strong ideas." He returned to Hillsboro to resume his duties as county engineer. The county commissioner tried to fire him, but strong-minded Partridge contended that he had job tenure, that his setting fire to the school was an after-hours act performed as a private person and did not affect his professional competence as a county engineer.

This week, as Hillsboro's Negro children prepared to go back to their school, now slightly charred, Highland County was still paying Partridge's salary, and the principle—if it is one—that civil servants are not answerable for their private thoughts and deeds was, for the moment, at least, preserved.