

THE PRESS

Orangeburg Relived

After four students at Kent State University were killed and nine were wounded by National Guardsmen last May, the incident stayed on the front pages of newspapers for weeks. Even today, five months later, the aftermath of the confrontation still makes news. But when students at the predominantly black South Carolina State College in Orangeburg clashed with police on Feb. 8, 1968, newsmen covered the event sparsely, inaccurately, or not at all. Though three students were killed in Orangeburg and 27 others were wounded, the tragedy was effectively ignored by most of the world.

It was neither ignored nor forgotten by

ing itself, the victims, the subsequent investigation and the trial of the policemen charged with imposing summary punishment without due process of law. They interviewed nearly everyone involved.*

Bass managed to weed out the false rumors that had plagued Orangeburg in the days before the shooting. The presence of Black Militant Cleveland Sellers, organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, had led to tales of outside agitation; two thrill-seeking white teen-agers had roared across the black campus firing a gun; a highway patrolman had fired a warning shot into the air; rifle fire had been heard from adjoining Claflin University. State authorities blamed Cleveland Sellers, even though



DYING VICTIMS AT SOUTH CAROLINA STATE COLLEGE
Frustration, resentment, apathy, misunderstanding.

Jack Nelson of the *Los Angeles Times* or Jack Bass of the *Charlotte (N.C.) Observer*. Both reporters are experienced muckrakers, but in their book *The Orangeburg Massacre* (World; \$7.95), published this week, Nelson and Bass find no heroes and no villains. In documentary prose, they spin out the entangling web of frustration, resentment and misunderstanding that began with an attempt to integrate a white bowling alley.

On the Ground. When both Nelson and Bass arrived in Orangeburg to report the incident, they found that an initial Associated Press report of a gun battle between students and police was wrong. The only injured policeman had been hit by a piece of broken banister, and all but two or three of the students had been shot in the back or in the soles of their feet, while they were lying on the ground. Bass took the first part of the book, the chapters leading up to the shooting. Nelson covered the last half: the shoot-

the only available evidence suggested that on the night of the shooting, Sellers was actually a victim. The trial verdict on the policemen's role in the shooting was "not guilty."

Furious Hoover. Nelson was well into his part of the book before he realized that the FBI's role in investigating the tragedy was not exactly in the best German tradition. He accused the FBI agents of misleading the Justice Department, lying about their presence during the riot and afterward "maintaining disconcertingly close relations with the state law-enforcement officials" they were investigating. To Nelson, it seemed highly improper that Charles DeFord, the agent who was investigating the charges against the State Law Enforcement

* The only major figures to refuse interviews: Governor Robert E. McNair and J.P. ("Pete") Strom, head of the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division.

Division, was sharing a motel room with SLED Chief Strom.

When Bass and Nelson submitted their manuscript to World, the publishers sent out a promotional release emphasizing the criticism of the FBI. Two days later, Bass was asked by an FBI friend in Columbia if he could photocopy the book for "Mr. Hoover." Bass agreed, and was soon rewarded by a long, furious letter from FBI Boss J. Edgar Hoover. "The book is so biased in its attempt to smear the FBI," said an angry Hoover, "that it raises serious questions as to the competence and objectivity of the authors." After a rebuttal by Bass, Hoover signed off a second letter with "[Your book] reminds me of the 'scissors-and-paste' method of writing and arguing. As you certainly are familiar with this particular method, there is no need of my elaborating upon it."

The book smacks more of hard work than of paste; besides, there was precious little published material about Orangeburg to cut up. Bass plans no further reply to Hoover. As for Nelson, he has not heard from Hoover at all.