

NYTimes MAY 25 1971

Panther 13: System Exposed

To the Editor:

To read the acquittal of the Panther 13 as vindication of the fairness of our hallowed system of jurisprudence (editorial May 15) is absurdly naive. Such a judgment ignores all that preceded the verdict: the spurious indictments, the incredible bail imposed, the inhuman treatment of the preventively detained defendants who couldn't raise bail, the attempts at intimidation of the defense during the pretrial hearings, the demeaning of defense counsel by the court, the bias of court rulings during the trial—hardly the ingredients for a "fair trial."

The justice of the verdict cannot eradicate the injustice implicit in the indictments themselves, the evidence having proved as tenuous as it ultimately did. The Times should ask if these indictments would have been handed down at all had the defendants been other than black militants.

Nor does the justice of the verdict compensate for the ordeal undergone by the defendants during this endless trial and during their cruel and wholly unjustified incarceration.

Furthermore, contrary to what The Times seems desperately to want to believe, the refusal of the jury to be steamrollered into joining in the political vindictiveness of the prosecution did not, in any sense, remove this trial from the political category.

It remains yet to be demonstrated that a black militant, or a political dissident of any hue, for that matter, can expect a fair trial.

HERBERT F. HECKER
Oakhurst, N. J., May 16, 1971