

Augusta, Jackson

A Southern View Of Police Killings

Atlanta

Police gunfire that last month killed six blacks at Augusta and two at Jackson State College reflected a national "escalation of animosity and official violence" aimed at dissent, the Southern Regional Council has declared in a report.

The council, a civil rights research group that long has studied racial violence and police reaction to it, said the killings "occurred in an atmosphere of hostility encouraged by inflammatory statements of leaders. . . which exacerbate tensions between groups and which seem to approve the over-use of police and military force. Governors of states, congressmen, and even the President and the vice president have been criticized for such utterances."

The 76-page report said President Nixon's public comments after the killing of four Kent State University students on May 4, preceding the Augusta and Jackson State incidents, was an "abdication of responsibility."

The report cited the President's comment that the Kent State incident "should remind us all once again that when dissent turns to violence it invites tragedy."

The council noted that after the Feb. 8, 1968, incident in which highway patrolmen killed three black students and injured 27 others at Orangeburg's South Carolina State College, it issued a lengthy report warning that get-tough policies by law enforcement "carry into highly volatile situations new elements of danger. Order must be maintained, but the duty of society and of police is that it be so with a minimum of force. At least suggested—in Orangeburg and evident in other situations that have arisen in the south and other parts of the nation—is the frightening spectacle of an over-escalation of police and military force."

Points in common between

the Augusta and Jackson State incidents which are "applicable to such tragedies across the nation," the council reported, include:

Failure to cope fully with long-neglected problems of racism and poverty.

Death and injuries from heavy caliber ammunition.

"The nation needs to demand and somehow effectively enforce a prohibition on police resort to gunfire where less lethal methods would prevail. Never should be tolerated random firing without given orders, without warnings, without conventional,

nonviolent methods of crowd control."

Hostile police attitudes toward black people and toward a general principle of the right of protest, and ineffective riot control training by police.

Unanswered critical questions about what happened, and why.

"Perhaps the nation needs to consider an investigative body—something more than a temporary 'blue ribbon' committee as proposed by the present administration," the council declared. "Representatives on it of the classes of

citizens who consider themselves victims of police oppression would seem mandatory." *Times-Post Service*