

In The Nation: For White Readers Only

By TOM WICKER

WASHINGTON, May 18 — Suppose you were black. What would you think if you had read these items in your newspaper in the last ten days?

From Augusta, Ga.: Six black men are dead, all shot in the back by police rifles or shot-guns. At least four may have been no more than bystanders at rioting last week that followed the death of a black youth in a jail where conditions are known to be so terrible for blacks that community protests have been regularly made for years. One of these protests was a letter to Attorney General John Mitchell. He never answered.

From Jackson, Miss.: At Jackson State College, two black students are dead and nine are wounded, including several girls. All fell before a thirty-second barrage of gunfire from state highway police who for unexplained reasons took over the task of quelling a student disturbance, although town police and National Guardsmen also were at hand. The highway police justified the shooting by contending that they were receiving sniper fire from a dormitory roof. No evidence or

witnesses have been found to substantiate the sniper story, although there are dozens who refute it, and there is no explanation at all of why trained police officers, upon receiving what they thought was sniper fire from a rooftop, fired more than 140 bullets into a crowd of unarmed students standing on the ground in front of a girls' dormitory. At the moment, no national protest rally is being planned for the Ellipse in Washington.

The Chicago Shoot-Out

From Chicago: Months after Fred Hampton, a Black Panther leader, was killed by Chicago police in what they described as a blazing gun battle with a band of armed Panthers, a grand jury has discovered that only one bullet was fired at the police raiders. It was the police who poured a massive fire into the apartment where Fred Hampton and others had been sleeping; it was the Federal Bureau of Investigation that provided the preliminary information, and it was police and city officials who later covered up the truth and concocted the story of the "shoot-out." Some Chicago newspapers as well

helped carry out the distortion.

From Washington: The Justice Department has filed a brief in support of the proposition that Southern parents should get a tax deduction for making contributions to private academies set up as an alternative to desegregated public schools. As recently as January, Robert Finch, the Secretary of H.E.W., pledged to fight any such move, because he knows well that these academies can survive only through tax-exempt status; and that if they receive it, they will spring up throughout the South, thus effectively re-establishing a tax-supported dual school system.

Someone to Turn To

Well, since I am white, I don't know for sure what I would think if I were black and read those news stories. But even the effort to put oneself in the other fellow's skin, under these circumstances, is frightening. It is bad enough to be, say, the victim of a crime, or to be in fear of crime and disorder, when you have recourse only to an ineffective police force and to a court system heavily overburdened. But at the least, in that case the

law is on your side, or you believe it to be; there is someone to whom you can turn.

But suppose you feel that the armed policeman is not there to protect your life and rights but to do away with them? Suppose even the Federal Government is no longer trying to assert your rights in court and its highest law enforcement arm seems more interested in helping the police exterminate black militants than in impartially observing and enforcing the law? Suppose that, by all evidence available to you, the law does not even seem to be on your side—is at best indifferent and at worst hostile?

No wonder Dr. Aaron Shirley, up to now a moderate black leader in Jackson, said the other day that "if black folks have to die, they ought not to die so peacefully." White men who read that as a threat instead of a desperate plea for rudimentary justice and humanity can make no answer that will not ultimately echo the Mississippi patrolman who said after the Jackson slaughter: "You better send some ambulances, we killed some niggers."