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## **Memorializing Conflict and Controversy: A Look Into the Kent State Memorials**

BY HEATHER JOHNSON

*Abstract: May 4, 1970, marks a day in American history when the protests of the Vietnam War and the government of the United States erupted in violence. It was on this date that Ohio State National Guardsmen fired into a crowd of unarmed student protestors on the campus of Kent State University. In the span of thirteen seconds, nine students were wounded and four lay dead. The shootings sent waves of emotion throughout the country. In the decades following the May 4<sup>th</sup> shootings, a series of memorials have been created in remembrance of the tragedy. Through the use of oral histories, this project looks to create a cohesive look at the event itself and the memorialization process that has taken place on the campus. By examining the continuing evolution of the Kent State memorials, a better understanding can be made of how best to develop a space that can become not only a remembrance of an event but also a direct connection to lives of those involved.*

## *Kent State Memorials*

On May 3, 1971, at 11:00 p.m., 1,000 students, faculty, and family members gathered at the Victory Bell on the campus of Kent State University. Silently they marched, candles in hand, towards the Prentice Hall parking lot. The processional was led by four students which represented the four students killed by gunfire on May 4, 1970. For the next twelve hours, groups remained standing through the night in constant vigil over the areas where Allison Krause, Jeffery Miller, William Schroeder and Sandra Scheuer were shot.<sup>1</sup> Forty years later, this tradition continues. This candlelight vigil serves as an opportunity for those attending to personally reflect and remember the events.

For those attending, there is much to reflect upon. In a matter of thirteen seconds, a student protest over the Vietnam War, on the campus of Kent State University, turned into a national tragedy when National Guardsmen fired on unarmed student protestors. Those visiting the campus also have the opportunity to think about the incident when they come upon one of the memorials located there.

These memorials include the B'nai B'rith Hillel Marker, a student created memorial, and the May 4 Memorial and Prentice Hall Permanent Markers, which are university sponsored memorials. The creations of these memorials occurred over three distinct decades and have been the focus of great debate on the campus over where, with what funds, and how, if at all, the event should be memorialized. Individually, each of these memorials lack the ability to create a cohesive statement about the shootings, but when looked at as a whole the memorials create a space where visitors can reflect upon the event, the individuals, and the event's overall effect on the campus.

Over the past forty years, the shootings that occurred on the campus of Kent State University have been studied by scholars worldwide. The studies have asked and attempted to answer a range of questions in order to solve what some

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Bills, *Kent State/ May 4 Echoes Through a Decade* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1982), 174.

consider to be “a murder mystery.”<sup>2</sup> The questions that were asked forty years ago are still the same questions that remain unanswered today. Why did some members of the Ohio State National Guard fire on unarmed student protestors? Were protestors from outside of the university student body organizing the events? Questions such as these may never be fully answered. As researchers continue to look in to the subject, the way in which they choose to analyze the event changes. These changes often are a reflection of the current social, political and economic state of the nation.

Research that was immediately published regarding the May 4<sup>th</sup> shootings chronicled the details of the events that led up to the confrontation. In 1971, James Michener, a Pulitzer Prize winning author, wrote the book *Kent State: What Happened and Why*.<sup>3</sup> In 554 pages, Michener, like so many others, took on the enormous task of creating a cohesive picture of the days from April 30, 1970 to May 4, 1970.

While many authors focused on the specific events, other researchers looked into the psychological aspects of the issue. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the American population was told by Vice President Spiro Agnew that these protestors were “hardcore dissidents, . . . professional anarchists”, and “vultures.”<sup>4</sup> Many Americans began to question why the youth of the nation were rebelling in this manner. This led to an influx of research regarding this issue. In 1976, an article printed in the *Sociology of Education* journal, “Changes in College Students Value Patterns in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s,” attempted to answer this question. The article studied “surveys of undergraduate men at Dartmouth (conducted in) 1952, 1968 and 1974 and at the University of Michigan in 1952, 1969, and 1974.”<sup>5</sup> The article’s author, Dean

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<sup>2</sup> “A Teachable Moment,” *USA Today*, May 4, 2010, 9.

<sup>3</sup> James Michener, *Kent State: What Happened and Why* (New York: Fawcett Crest Books, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> Spiro Agnew, Quoted in Denis M. Simon, “The War in Vietnam, 1969-1973,” August 2002.

<http://faculty.smu.edu/dsimon/change-viet4.html> (Accessed May 24, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Dean R. Hodge, “Changes in College Students Value Patterns in the 1950’s, 1960’s and 1970’s”, *Sociology of Education* 49 (1976).

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Hoge, used these studies to determine what outside influences prompted declines in traditional values and promoted increases in deviant activities among youth.

As the generation of youth affiliated with the shootings graduated and moved on, researchers continued to search for the answers. In the 1980s, scholarship concentrated heavily on the trials that occurred in the aftermath of the shooting. There were a total of “seven major judicial investigations and trials which have focused upon the events of May 4.”<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hensley, a professor emeritus of political science at Kent State University, wrote the book, *The Kent State Incident: Impact of Judicial Process on Public Attitudes*, which studied the “impact of the grand jury’s decision on the attitudes of Kent State students.”<sup>7</sup>

In the 1990s, scholarly research sought to create accurate accounts of historical events. By this point mountains of literature had been printed regarding the Kent State shootings. According to the article, “The May 4 Shootings at Kent State University: The Search for Historical Accuracy,” even college level U.S. history books contained false information about the incident.<sup>8</sup> One of the authors of the article, Jerry Lewis, was a professor at Kent State at the time of the shootings. Lewis’ intimate knowledge of the situation has driven him to play a pivotal role in reconstructing the day’s event. In this article, Lewis, and co-author Thomas Hensley, create a basic overview of factual information pertaining to the shootings.

As the May 4 incident neared its thirtieth anniversary, scholars and activists began relating the Kent State massacre to current political agendas. This change in focus is discussed in the article, “Kent State Thirty Years Later.”<sup>9</sup> The author of this article, Mac Lojowsky, chronicles the public memorial events that occurred at the thirty year anniversary of the shootings.

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hensley, *The Kent State Incident: Impact of Judicial Process on Public Attitudes* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1981), 85.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, *xiii*.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis and Hensley, “The May 4 Shootings at Kent State University”, revised 1998 in *The Ohio Council for the Social Studies Review* 34, no. 1, <http://dept.kent.edu/sociology/lewis/lewihen.htm> (Accessed May 9, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Mac Lojowsky, “Kent State Thirty Years Later,” *Humanist*, July 2000.

These events were attended by “some 3,000 students, Vietnam War veterans, activists and others...to remember what happened in 1970 (and) to celebrate the long tradition of protest and resistance that stemmed from it.”<sup>10</sup> These events were controversial for several reasons. First, the focus of the memorial had been pulled away from its main purpose, to remember and reflect upon the shootings. Secondly, the organizers of the event had invited a person of questionable character to speak. Coordinators of the occasion had decided to play a tape-recorded speech given by death-row inmate Mumai Abu-Jamal, a journalist, activist, and convicted murderer of a Philadelphia police officer.<sup>11</sup> This move prompted a backlash from Ohio officials and others. Lojowsky’s article looked into why organizers felt that this was an appropriate stage for the activists of the Mumai Abu-Jamal case to be heard.

Today, forty years in the future, scholars have gained a broader historical perspective. Research is being conducted on how to best maintain the history of the event and how to turn it into a “teachable moment.”<sup>12</sup> As Kent State works to embrace the event, research is being conducted on the effectiveness of the university’s memorials and educational materials regarding the shootings. Kathryn Weiss, who received her PhD from Kent State University, wrote the book, *The Kent State Memorial to the Slain Vietnam War Protestors; Interpreting the Site and Visitors’ Responses*, in which she discusses the memorials that exist on the campus today as well as the controversies that have surrounded them.<sup>13</sup> Weiss studied how these memorials were interpreted by visitors and how the event will be remembered in the future.

Through the decades, students and alumni of Kent State have worked to memorialize both the victims and the events of May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1970. Much of this work has been met with hesitation

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> “A Teachable Moment,” *USA Today*, May 4 2010, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Kathryn Weiss, *The Kent State Memorial to the Slain Vietnam War Protestors: Interpreting the Site and Visitors’ Responses* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

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and resistance on the part of the university administration and the community at large. In 1974, a plaque dedicated in remembrance of the victims was stolen and reappeared with bullet holes in it. In the mid-1970s, a massive student demonstration occurred over the decision to build a gymnasium annex over the area where the shootings took place. For a long period of time, the university, a state funded institution, chose to keep their involvement with any type of a memorial minimal. In 1990, a university-funded memorial was finally erected. In 2007, the site was declared an Ohio state historical landmark and in 2009 it appeared on the National Registry of Historic Places.

Today, forty years since the Kent State shootings, it is necessary for researchers to reflect upon why these memorials have been so long in the making and the significant impact they have made on the remembrance of the victims and the events. The exploration of these issues will first include extensive research into the specific events that led to the shootings. Secondly, the examination will look into the memorials that exist on the campus today, the process that took place to create them and the statement each one makes about the events. Finally, we will analyze how the memorials work together as a whole to create a complete narrative of the events.

In order to grasp the enormous effects the shootings and subsequent memorials have had on the campus of Kent State, the town of Kent and the nation as a whole, one must understand what took place during the time period from April 30, 1970 to May 4, 1970. During the spring of that year, turmoil erupted on campuses throughout the United States. Much of this campus unrest was related to dissatisfaction with the way the government was handling the Vietnam War.

Protests on campuses escalated on April 30, 1970 when President Richard M. Nixon announced, “in cooperation with the armed forces of South Vietnam, attacks are being launched this week to clean out major enemy sanctuaries on the

Cambodian-Vietnam border.”<sup>14</sup> A Student outcry against this military operation was witnessed immediately. On the campus of Kent State University, the group World Historians Opposed to Racism and Exploitation planned the first in a series of protests regarding Nixon’s speech. The group planned a burial of the constitution at twelve noon on the campus. A flyer distributed by the members listed the reason for the burial; “President Nixon has murdered the constitution and made a mockery of his claims to represent law and order.”<sup>15</sup> This peaceful demonstration was the beginning of four days of unrest on the Kent State campus.

According to James Michener’s book, “Kent State: What Happened and Why,” the evening of Friday, May 1, 1970 began like most in the city of Kent. The bars on North Water Street were jammed with a mix of university students, hippies, runaways and motorcycle gangs. Around ten o’clock in the evening, some in the crowd outside grew restless and began throwing bottles and bothering cars driving by on North Water Street. This escalated into groups of people blocking vehicle access to the street. Later in the evening, a fire was lit in the middle of the road and the crowd began to move from North Water Street into the center of town smashing forty-seven store windows. Michener’s timeline indicates that at 12:17 am the police moved into the area and ordered all the bars to shut down. This decision angered the patrons so much that the rioting escalated further. Shortly after this, the mayor of the city of Kent declared a state of emergency and contacted the state governor in Columbus.<sup>16</sup>

After the events of Friday night, protestors organized a rally to be held Saturday night at eight o’clock. Somewhere

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<sup>14</sup> Richard M. Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the Situation in the South East” (Mekong Network, 2008)  
<http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/nixon430.htm> (Accessed May 15, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> “May 1, students bury the constitution” (May 4 Collection, Special Collections and archives)  
<http://speccoll.library.kent.edu/4may70/exhibit/chronology/bury.html>  
(Accessed May 15, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Michener, 48-58.



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between several hundred and one thousand people attended the event where the group set fire to the old Reserve Officer Training Corp building on the campus. When firefighters arrived the protestors cut their hoses. According to an oral history interview given by Jim Vacarela, the crowd then moved off of the campus and onto Main Street. He states that the National Guard, arriving around 11:00 pm to disperse the demonstrators, was met with much resistance from the students.

They were pelted with rocks and bottles and knives and whatever anything, anything anybody could throw. No question. And there were half-track tanks, jeeps and big old trucks carrying all kinds of soldiers. And they came and I guess they went to the field, where the practice field, and they set up. And all night long it was a guerilla-kind of warfare. We were up all night long throwing things, harassing the guards. It was interesting.<sup>17</sup>

After two nights of riots, the town was quiet on Sunday morning. Students prepared for exams and discussed the events of the weekend. However, around dusk the calm was disrupted again. An oral history interview of a National Guardsman relates what the scene was like for the guardsmen as they prepared to approach the crowds of protestors. “We got the order to line up shoulder to shoulder and form a straight line somewhat behind the old Student Center and the ROTC building...a helicopter came over, shown a light on the hill where the architecture building was, and there were several thousand kids up there. They were very quietly massed there.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> James Vacarella, interview by Sandra Perlman Halem, “Kent State Shootings Oral Histories Collection, April 3, 2000, [http://www.library.kent.edu/drc/oral\\_histories/item\\_detail.php?search=search\\_keywords&itemId=118](http://www.library.kent.edu/drc/oral_histories/item_detail.php?search=search_keywords&itemId=118) (Accessed May 15, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Anonymous National Guardsman, interview by Sandra Halem, May 4 Collection, May 2, 2000, <http://speccoll.library.kent.edu/4may70/oralhistory/anonymous5.html> (Accessed May 17, 2010).

The National Guard used tear gas to finally disperse the crowds, preventing the protestors from moving off the campus and into the town.

Kent State University's May 4 Collection gives a chronology of the events that took place on Monday, May 4, 1970. According to the website, two thousand demonstrators gathered for a rally at twelve noon, shortly after this, an order to disperse was given by the guardsmen. When the protestors failed to comply, they were met again with tear gas. Rocks were hurled at the guardsmen as they moved the demonstrators into a nearby athletic field. The guardsmen then turned and began marching back up the hill.<sup>19</sup>

Near the crest of Blanket Hill, the guard turned and 28 guardsmen fired between 61 and 67 shots in 13 seconds toward the parking lot. Four persons lay dying and nine wounded. The closest casualty was 20 yards and the farthest was almost 250 yards away. All 13 were students at Kent State University. The four students who were killed were Jeffrey Miller, Allison Krause, William Schroeder and Sandra Scheuer.<sup>20</sup>

The scene after the shootings was one of disbelief and chaos. Ambulances whirled in and out of the scene taking the wounded away. Photographers, both student and professional, captured numerous pictures of the events. The pictures included the widely recognized picture of a fourteen year old runaway kneeling next to the body of Jeff Miller, one of the students shot that day.

The campus of Kent State University was closed, as a result of the shootings. Twenty-one thousand Kent State

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<sup>19</sup> "KSU Libraries and Media Services Chronology", Special Collections and Archives,

<http://speccoll.library.kent.edu/4may70/exhibit/chronology/index.html>  
(Accessed May 17, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Chronology, May 1-4 1970, May 4 collection

<http://speccoll.library.kent.edu/4may70/exhibit/chronology/index.html>  
(Accessed May 17, 2010).

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Students were given the order to evacuate the campus within one hour and the campus remained closed for the remainder of the semester.<sup>21</sup> “In the wake of their decision, 760 major American institutions of learning either shut down or came close to doing so.”<sup>22</sup>

The Kent State shootings can be seen as the day the Vietnam War came home. The nation learned of the tragic events on the evening news and through photographs taken of the events. Letters to the editors of newspapers began rolling in showing the concern, frustration, and anger that the people had towards the student protestors. Letters that supported the actions of the guard described the young students as “surly, foul-mouthed, know-nothing punks”.<sup>23</sup> Many throughout the nation not only supported the actions of the guard but felt that more students should have been shot. Vietnam was thousands of miles away, but the campus of Kent State was a familiar site. The men and women in these photographs could have been the viewer’s next door neighbor. It was this familiarity and feeling of attachment that helped to escalate emotions concerning the situation.

Today, the topic of Kent State massacre is still widely studied and numerous questions remain. One of the most talked about aspects of the event is the debate over whether or not an order was given to fire on the unarmed students. Another question that exists is whether protestors from outside the Kent State student body were orchestrating the events, pushing the students towards the use of more radical behavior. These questions may never be answered; however, many historians feel that it is important to continue to researching these events.

Jerry Lewis, a professor at the university in 1970, lays out three main reasons why it is important to continue teaching the history of the Kent State incident. One of his arguments is, “If the Kent State shootings will continue to be such a powerful symbol, then it is certainly important that Americans have a

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<sup>21</sup> Michener, 419.

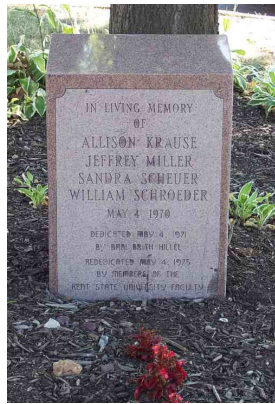
<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 440.

realistic view of the facts associated with this event.”<sup>24</sup> Secondly, he discusses the fact that the nation will not be able to heal from this event until the truth about what happened is finally revealed. Lastly, and what Lewis says is the most important reason, “May 4th at Kent State should be remembered in order that we can learn from the mistakes of the past.”<sup>25</sup>

Today, on the campus of Kent State there stand four memorials, the B’nai B’rith Hillel Marker, the May 4 Memorial, and the Prentice Hall Parking Lot markers. Each of these memorials offers their own unique way for visitors to reflect upon the shootings. Each marker was designed by different individuals at different time periods.

The B’nai B’rith Hillel Marker was first dedicated on May 4, 1971. It was placed in a garden plot located in the parking lot where the shootings took place. It was dedicated by the student members of the Hillel chapter and Rabbi Gerald Turk. The marker was originally an aluminum plaque inscribed with the statement “in loving memory’ and then listed the names of the four students.”<sup>26</sup> According to an oral history



interview conducted with Shirley Ohles, the wife of a Kent State professor closely related to the placement of the marker, “this aluminum plaque was not anchored...people frequently came, picked it up, and had their picture taken with it.”<sup>27</sup> For many years this student-initiated memorial was the only one that existed on the campus.

On May 3, 1974, the Hillel plaque was reported stolen. In February of 1975, Professor John Ohles took on the difficult

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<sup>24</sup> Lewis and Hensley.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Shirley Ohles, Kent State Shootings Oral History Collection, May 2, 1990, [http://www.library.kent.edu/drc/oral\\_histories/item\\_detail.php?search=browse\\_narrators&itemId=134](http://www.library.kent.edu/drc/oral_histories/item_detail.php?search=browse_narrators&itemId=134) (Accessed May 9, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

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task of collecting \$800.00 from the faculty in order to replace the original plaque.<sup>28</sup> The new marker was made to be permanent so that it could not be stolen again. The marker consists of “a small upright granite rectangle [that] resembles a tombstone.”<sup>29</sup> The inscription on the second memorial is the same as the first with the addition of the line “Rededicated May 4 1975 By Members of the Kent State University Faculty.”<sup>30</sup>

As the only memorial on campus, this new marker became center for remembering the event.

The marker became a focal point for some of the May 4th activities, and also for the media. Frequently when they were here, TV cameras would focus in on the marker, when they were telling their story. At the end of the procession, it always ended in the parking lot, and students began placing their candles near the marker. Now during these years, the University grounds had made special efforts to plant flowers, and keep it neat and attractive, particularly around May 4<sup>th</sup>.<sup>31</sup>

On May 4, 1979, candles placed around the marker at the end of the yearly candle light vigil caught the woodchips surrounding the marker on fire leaving the marker badly damaged. After noticing that the administration was not going to step forward and repair the marker, Professor Ohles again took on the task of collecting donations for its repair.

The story of the B’nai B’rith Hillel Marker shows the lack of interest that the University had in creating a memorial during the first decade preceding the shootings. In the early 1980s, Professor Ohles was asked by the May 4 Memorial Committee to write a brief history of the marker. The memo was shared by his wife during her oral history interview.

It should be emphasized that the marker was intended solely as a permanent replacement for the cast aluminum plaque dedicated by Hillel on

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Weiss, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Ohles.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

May 4th, 1971, and stolen in 1974. My greatest concern from the first efforts to provide the marker, to the present, has been the apparent lack of interest and concern on the part of the administration, where there should have been the original plaque or the replacement marker. The actions I initiated were taken only when it seemed obvious that the University would not replace the stolen plaque, and later, would not repair the fire- damaged marker. I'm not aware of any commitment by the University to assure security and maintenance of the marker.<sup>32</sup>

This memo shows Professor Ohles contempt for the university's inaction in recognizing the need to establish a permanent memorial. By neglecting to create a physical monument to memorialize the event and victims of the May 4 shootings, the university could be perceived as attempting to erase the memory from the universities historical record. "The faculty members' decision to rededicate the marker countered this erasure."<sup>33</sup>

The second memorial to be created on the campus of Kent State University was built after great controversy. In the spring of 1977, it became public knowledge that the university was intending to build a gym annex on a location that was considered part of the shooting site. The intent to build here led to mass protests. On May 12, 1977, approximately sixty people pitched tents on Blanket Hill after demands made by the May 4 Coalition to university trustees were not met. The trustees "rejected two demands, official acknowledgment by the University administration that the events of May 4, 1970, were an injustice, and never building on or altering the site of the shootings."<sup>34</sup> The amount of pitched tents grew and the controversy continued for several months. The events played

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Weiss, 70.

<sup>34</sup> Mikhail Slobodinski and Jennifer Schragar, Tent City Chronology, May 4 Collection, <http://speccoll.library.kent.edu/4may70/citychron.html> (Accessed June 14, 2010).

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out on the campus, in the courts, and by the media. Growing fear of another violent confrontation with the protestors led to a White House invitation for then acting president of the university, Michael Schwartz. Schwartz recalls that, “we left at the end of the day, and there was no resolution of anything except we understood no one was supposed to get hurt. Well, we didn't need a trip to the White House to tell us that. But we had a trip to the White House and that's how far up in the food chain--the political food chain--that this concern had finally reached.”<sup>35</sup>

The decision to construct the gym annex in this area came about long before May 4, 1970. University officials argued that the site did not encompass the area where any of the victims had fallen or the area where the guardsmen had stood and fired their guns. However, many felt that this entire site was sacred ground. An interview conducted on November 5, 1980 with Nancy Grim, a former Kent State Student and founding member of the May 4 task force, shows the other side of the argument.

But the importance of the site as a historical place included the entire area. People were in fact shot about two feet from where the building was constructed. The Guard marched right across the area. One of the historical arguments to say, “Look, it wasn't the Guards fault,” was the idea that they were hemmed in. And when you put that building there, it sure looks like the guard was hemmed in. It really changes the whole area.<sup>36</sup>

In this quote, Grim is referencing the claim that at the time of the shooting, the National Guardsmen were trapped and felt

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Schwartz, interviewed by Craig Simpson, Kent State Shootings Oral History Collection, November 20, 2008, [http://www.library.kent.edu/drc/oral\\_histories/item\\_detail.php?search=browse\\_subjects&itemId=200](http://www.library.kent.edu/drc/oral_histories/item_detail.php?search=browse_subjects&itemId=200) (Accessed May 24, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Bills, 226.

threatened and had no choice but to shoot on the crowd of protestors. The placement of a building in this area changed the overall landscape significantly altering historical perspective of the site.

“Constructing the gym despite protests could be read as a rhetorical maneuver on the university’s part, an argument that this part of the story is not significant, or that the past should be forgotten.”<sup>37</sup> Again the University was neglecting the need to publicly and permanently recognize the shootings. Michael Schwartz related he was under great pressure to build the gym annex. He stated that he was told by the speaker of the Ohio State House of Representatives, Vernal Riffe, that, “if you don’t build that Gym Annex where it’s supposed to go, you’ll never get another building on campus.”<sup>38</sup> Schwartz’s pressures were representative of the amount grief and anger that still existed in the community seven years after the shootings.

In 1982, Michael Schwartz became the President of Kent State University. His position as acting president during the Gym Annex controversies had enlightened him to see the need of a permanent university sponsored memorial.

Early in my administration--I think that probably the first six to ten months--that I felt we gotta come to terms with this thing. And we'll never end this, because it's not gonna end, but we can get at least the beginning of an ending. An ending in the sense of the anger and bitterness. We got the beginning of that going. So we struck on the idea of having a memorial built. That is something that people had wanted. But it's also something that an awful lot of people did not want. So the trick was, somehow, to bring both sides together, and let them hammer this thing

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<sup>37</sup> Weiss, 70-71.

<sup>38</sup> Amanda Young, “Tent City and the Decades of Discontent: An Interview with Former Kent State President Michael Schwartz,” *The Burr*. <http://www.burr.kent.edu/archives/may4/tentcity/tent1.html> (Accessed June 14, 2010).



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out. And see what sort of conclusion they could reach. And it was miraculous that we got them to sit down at the same table.<sup>39</sup>

The committee eventually came to the conclusion that a memorial would be created to recognize the events of May 4, 1970.

A design competition was ran using a grant from the National Endowments For the Arts.<sup>40</sup> The competition was announced in 1986, and 698 submissions were received.<sup>41</sup> The design contest was not without controversy. According to Schwartz, before the grant money was received he had a visit from an individual within the Regan Administration who explained to Schwartz “that he wasn't too sure that the government wanted to make an award like this, that politically it was too hot to handle, too controversial.”<sup>42</sup> Schwartz found this visit ironic because it took place concurrently with President Reagan’s visit to Germany, where he laid a wreath in a cemetery where numerous SS soldiers were buried.

The May 4<sup>th</sup> shootings represented a time in United States history that many in political power would like to forget. The era of the Vietnam War was filled with turmoil. Overseas 58, 193 U.S. soldiers had given their lives to fight a proxy war that many back in the states did not support.<sup>43</sup> Political leaders feeling increases in dissent over the war had taken to making statements that were driven by pressure to stop the protests. Even Ronald Reagan had been heard making a statement about how to deal with the rapidly growing amount of increasingly aggressive protestors. The statement, made while he was governor of California, is one which will haunt him from the

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<sup>39</sup> Schwartz.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Historical Note, May 4 Memorial Design Competition Records, 1985-91, May 4 Collection, <http://speccoll.library.kent.edu/4may70/85.html> (Accessed May 24, 2011).

<sup>42</sup> Schwartz.

<sup>43</sup> The National Archives, “Statistical Information about Casualties of the Vietnam War,” <http://www.archives.gov/research/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html> (Accessed June 14, 2010).

history books, “If the bloodbath must come, let's get it over with it”.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps Reagan’s disinterest in creating a May 4<sup>th</sup> memorial is connected with his need to distance himself from the May 4<sup>th</sup> event and his comments.

Contempt towards the memorial came at the local level also. In 1986, the local American Legion came out with a resolution opposing the memorial, opposing the "memorial to terrorists, as they called it.”<sup>45</sup> A similar resolution was passed by Ohio’s Fraternal Order of Police.<sup>46</sup> In the summer of 1986 President Schwartz received a letter from State Representative Lynn R.

Watchman suggesting, “that the site be moved to a park not owned by the taxpayers of Ohio.”<sup>47</sup> Oppositions such as these made it difficult to collect donations for the memorial.

The winning design for the memorial was created by Bruno Ast. Ast’s original entry was downsized after fundraising efforts fell short. It was originally estimated that it would cost 1.3 million dollars to construct Ast’s monument and the new budget to create the monument was only 100,000 dollars.<sup>48</sup> The size of the memorial also became issue. Many were disappointed and felt that the university was again trying to downplay the events. “Alan Confera, [a] wounded student, writes that the memorial was scaled down ninety percent in response to pressure from conservative community members, and is therefore incomplete.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Bromell, *Tomorrow Never Knows: Rock and Psychedelics in the 1960s* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 128.

<sup>45</sup> Lisa Lynott, interviewed by Deborah L. Woodson, Kent State Shootings Oral History Collection, May 4, 1990, [http://www.library.kent.edu/drc/oral\\_histories/item\\_detail.php?search=search\\_keywords&itemId=165](http://www.library.kent.edu/drc/oral_histories/item_detail.php?search=search_keywords&itemId=165)

<sup>46</sup> May 4 Memorial: Chronology of Events, Special Collections and archives Kent State University, <http://www.library.kent.edu/page/14887> (Accessed May 24, 2011).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Weiss,74

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The scaled down monument is “tucked into a wooded area.”<sup>50</sup> A visitor’s brochure available at the site describes it as follows:

The “plaza measuring 70 feet wide” and bound by a granite walkway” is bordered by a granite wall “representative of both shelter and conflict.” The Plaza’s “jagged abstract border” is “symbolic of disruptions and the conflict of ideas” and suggests “the tearing of the fabric of society.” The “four polished black granite disks embedded in the earth...reflect our own image as we stand on them” and the “four free-standing pylons aligned on the hill” to which the desks lead “stand as mute sentinels to the force of violence and the memory of the four students killed.’ Finally “a fifth disk placed to the south acknowledges the many victims of the event” and implies a much wider impact...that stretched far beyond the Kent State campus.<sup>51</sup>



Inscribed on the memorial are the words “Inquire, Learn, Reflect.” The meaning behind this inscription is to “inquire into the many reasons and purposes of the events, to encourage a learning process, and to reflect on how differences may be

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 75.

resolved peacefully”.<sup>52</sup> Nowhere on the memorial is there any identification of what it is representing and nowhere do the names of the victims appear. Only later were two plaques placed in the area of the memorial. One plaque contains the names of those responsible for the construction of the memorial and the other names the dead and wounded students. The original decision to not include the names of the students angered many.

I know a lot of townspeople that couldn't understand why they had a problem with putting the victims' names on the memorial. I mean, that is why it's there. That's why it's going in. Even now, they're talking about putting it off to the side, so that it's not actually on the memorial. I think that's crazy. I think it should be right there. I mean that is the reason for the memorial. It's because of the four dead and the nine wounded.<sup>53</sup>

The design of the May 4th memorial differs greatly from the Vietnam Memorial Wall. At the Vietnam Memorial the names of fallen soldiers are displayed boldly allowing reflection over the loss of each individual. The wall does not ask for the visitor to learn or inquire about the Vietnam War but rather to identify with the individuals so that the life of those soldiers becomes more than just a statistic.

The May 4<sup>th</sup> memorial was officially dedicated on May 4, 1990 and a daffodil was planted for every United States soldier lost in the Vietnam War. The dedication took place during the annual May 4<sup>th</sup> memorial events and to the surprise of all, Ohio State Governor Richard Celeste appeared and offered the first official state apology to the victims and their

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<sup>52</sup> Special Collections and Archives, “May 4 Memorial Design Competition,” <http://speccoll.library.kent.edu/4may70/exhibit/memorials/m4mem.html> (Accessed June 14, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> Diane L. Williams, interviewed by Deborah Woodson, May 4 Shootings Oral History Collection, April 29, 1990.

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families. An apology that Governor James Rhodes, the governor at the time of the shootings, said would never happen.

Many who have visited the memorial site find it difficult to understand the meaning of the different aspects of the memorial. The memorial does not use recognizable “symbols of violence and pain” like the thorns and brambles used in the Fosse Ardeatine memorial.<sup>54</sup> Nor does it use a haunting visual such as the empty chairs of the Oklahoma City Memorial. Instead the designer chose to use abstract design concepts that require a written explanation in order to interpret.

Oral histories taken of those who have visited the site show visitors frustration with the memorial itself. In one such oral history the gentlemen interviewed stated, “The Memorial that is up there--help me understand what it represents. What it symbolizes in common-sense terms. For me, art should be able to communicate to most people when they see it. I see some interesting structures, but I don't know what the artist was thinking.”<sup>55</sup> The purpose of a memorial is to create a space where a specific event or individual can be remembered. When the memorial is dealing with a tragic event such as the May 4<sup>th</sup> shootings it is hopeful that the memorial itself will assist with the healing process. When a memorial is difficult to interpret, an individual cannot identify with it and therefore it does not help with the healing process.

In 1998, during the annual May 4<sup>th</sup> candlelight vigil, the university president received letters from the families of the slain victims asking for the university to close the parking lot spots where the victims had fallen. In 1999, under further pressure, the university created the Prentice Hall Permanent Memorial Markers. The markers outline the sections of the Prentice Hall Parking Lot where each of the four individuals had fallen. The markers consist of a granite rectangular outline

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<sup>54</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome*, (Palgrave Macmillan, New York), 241.

<sup>55</sup> E. Timothy Moore, interviewed by Craig Simpson, May 4 Shootings Oral History Collection, May 14, 2009, [http://www.library.kent.edu/drc/oral\\_histories/item\\_detail.php?search=search\\_keywords&itemId=196](http://www.library.kent.edu/drc/oral_histories/item_detail.php?search=search_keywords&itemId=196) (Accessed May 24, 2010).

with small lit pools surrounding it. Located in the corner of each marker is a plaque that contains the date of the shootings and the name of the victim who fell there.



For thirty years the university allowed traffic to drive over and park on the sites where the students had fallen. The decision to create a space that openly recognizes the victims “represents a decisive official acknowledgement that the shootings occurred”.<sup>56</sup> The markers themselves allow for the individual victims to be mourned publicly in a permanent space.

For decades the university attempted to remove the May 4<sup>th</sup> shootings from its history. The story of the creation of the memorials represents the universities evolution to deal with the May 4<sup>th</sup> shootings. “The university administration has moved from building over the site in the 1970s, to shrouded woodland memorials in the 1980s, to discretely marking the site itself in the 1990s.”<sup>57</sup> Former University President Michael Schwartz’s thoughts and reflections on the memorials show just how deeply the events have impacted the university.

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<sup>56</sup> Weiss, 79.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

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You know, if you back out of it, it was all part of a piece. It was the creation of this enormous great saga, almost like an Icelandic saga. A great heroic story that was developing, and it has developed to the point now where it is such a massive part of that's now the legend of Kent State. Never mind the reality of it, its part of the legendary Kent State. I never really thought about it too much while it was happening, but it sure did occur to me, while it was happening, that something like that could happen. And it did, and I'm sure that it still arouses all kinds of feelings on both sides of the event... You can like it, not like it, doesn't matter. But I think it's now so part of the university that it ought to be understood as that. As the great saga. And we go forward.<sup>58</sup>

Recently the university has moved a step forward in commemorating the events. In February of 2010, the site of the shooting was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. After this designation was given, the university created a walking tour of the site. Currently, the university is working to establish a visitor's center which will include a permanent exhibit, virtual visitor's center, online educational exhibit, educational programs, and special lectures and events.<sup>59</sup>

The addition of the May 4th Visitor Center turns the memorial into what Edward Linenthal, one of the foremost researchers of historical memory, interpretation and conservation, calls "a new species of activist memorial environments."<sup>60</sup> These memorial environments are created to not only remember an event but also place "emphasis on names,

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<sup>58</sup> Schwartz.

<sup>59</sup> May 4 Visitors Center, Kent state University  
<http://www.kent.edu/about/history/may4/visitorscenter/what.cfm> (Accessed May 24, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, "Violence and the American Landscape: The Challenge of Public History," *Magazine of History*, 16 no. 2, 13.

faces, [and] life stories”.<sup>61</sup> Kent States movement towards the creation of a complete memorial experience shows how university officials have finally accepted that the May 4<sup>th</sup> shootings will forever be a part of the legacy of Kent State.

Individually, each of the memorials presents a unique perspective. The positioning of the Hillel Marker and the Prentice Hall Permanent Markers allow visitors an opportunity to reflect upon the events from the vantage point of where many of the protesting students were standing. Their location in the Prentice Hall Parking Lot, coupled with the addition of the names of the victims of the shooting, create a space where one can mourn. This differs greatly from the May 4<sup>th</sup> Memorial which is located off of a path in a secluded area. The space for this memorial is to do exactly what the words inscribed say to do “inquire, learn, and reflect.” This space was not created to mourn the individuals but rather the event. When analyzed as a whole and in conjunction with the addition of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Visitor Center the memorial becomes complete.

Some will always complain that the memorials for the Kent State shootings are not large enough and others will state that they are too large. However, “when controversy rages over memorials, it does not mean that something or someone is wrong, but that memorial processes open as many wounds as they close.”<sup>62</sup> Through the study of memorials, such as these, public historians can see need to create complete memorial space where the public can reflect upon and educate themselves about the individuals and events.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.



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