Connecting the Story of May 4 to Today’s Headlines

The May 4 Visitors Center (M4VC) is observing its 10th anniversary this spring. Following a “soft” opening in fall 2012, the center was officially dedicated as part of the May 4 Commemoration in 2013. The center was created through the efforts and passion of Laura Davis, BA ’73, MA ’76, PhD ’87, Professor Emerita of English, and Carole Barbato, BS ’71, MA ’75, PhD ’94, professor of communication studies, who both were Kent State students in spring 1970. Davis was an eyewitness to the May 4 shootings. Barbato, who died in 2014, wrote several books about the events of May 4.

Lori Boes, MLS ’11, who has been affiliated with the center since its beginning, now serves as interim director. She says Davis and Barbato were inspired to create the center after attending a presentation by anti-war activist Tom Hayden. “He said, ‘It’s now time for you to tell your story.’” Laura and Carole took that as a call to action. They thought, ‘If we don’t tell the story, who will be here to tell the story?’”

DEVELOPING THE CENTER AND ITS MISSION

Davis and Barbato inspired the center to tell the story of May 4, and that mission has evolved. Davis says the center began as a way to explore and better understand the events that took place on that day, the context and impact of those events, and their meaning for today.

“We believe that the 26th Amendment passed in 1971 because of the shootings here,” Boes says. “And it’s important for Kent State students to know that voting at 18 happened because of what happened here on May 4. Nixon felt that if they lowered the voting age, the students would stop protesting. I think our job now is to relate what happened more than 50 years ago to current events.”

—Lori Boes, interim director of the May 4 Visitors Center

New Exhibit Offers Fresh Context for May 4, 1970

In 1969, at least 2 million Americans joined in nationwide protests against the Vietnam War, including Moratorium Day (Oct. 15), the March Against Death (Nov. 14) and the March on Washington (Nov. 15).

This spring, a temporary exhibit at the May 4 Visitors Center, The Vocal Majority: 1969, depicts the anti-war demonstrations that led to the events of May 4, 1970. It highlights an assortment of anti-war artifacts from that era, including posters, photos, videos and other memorabilia such as buttons and armbands.

“The title contradicts what President Nixon believed they represented the majority of Americans, and they took to the streets of D.C., San Francisco, Kent and many other cities to show it.”

—Mateo Martin, senior public relations major from Youngstown, Ohio

Wrisley researched the 1969 protests for a writing seminar last spring, and Lori Boes, MLS ’11, interim director of the May 4 Visitors Center, encouraged her to turn it into an exhibit. To help with the design, they brought on Jen Goubeaux and Ariel Bradford, senior visual communication design majors.

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—Skylar Wrisley, graduate student in history