

May 4: Understanding Broader Connections

Introduction

This poster presentation aims to depict the global and national events of the 1960s and 1970s which relate to the events that occurred at the Kent State University Campus on May 4th, 1970, leading to the untimely deaths of four students and injuries of nine others.

Vietnam Conflict

The Vietnam War lasted from 1955 to 1975 and centered on the prevention of US-backed South Vietnam being overtaken by communist North Vietnam. In 1975, at the fall of Saigon, American troops exited Vietnam and the North reunified the nation.

As this conflict progressed, the peace movement blossomed in the United States and individuals began vocalizing their moral opposition to the war. Continuing to gain momentum, the antiwar effort served to incite resistance to continued American involvement in Vietnam.

May 4 Shooting at Kent State

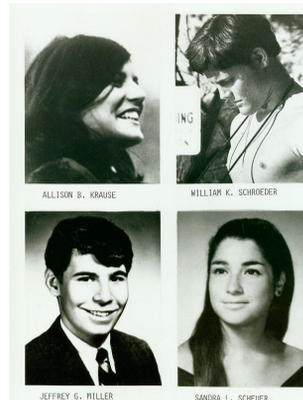
On April 30, 1970, President Nixon announced the expansion of the war into neutral Cambodia in a speech delivered on national television. This declaration exacerbated anti-war sentiments and sparked nationwide protests among university students, among them the demonstration at Kent State on May 4.

In the days following the speech and leading up to the shooting on May 4, tensions continued to build, manifesting on the university campus and in the city of Kent. On Friday, May 1, students held an anti-war demonstration on campus, during which a copy of the Constitution was buried, symbolizing its downfall since war had never been officially declared by Congress. Following this demonstration, a rally was set for Monday, May 4. Later that evening, in downtown Kent, events escalated to violence, resulting in damage to building and police cars. As the weekend progressed, Governor Rhodes called in the Ohio National Guard and the ROTC building on the KSU campus was set ablaze by individuals who remain unknown.



On Monday, May 4, 1970, students at Kent State University congregated on the university Commons to hold a rally. Approximately 3,000 individuals gathered in the area; demonstrators, supporters and spectators. Shortly after noon, shots were fired into the mass of students by members of the Ohio National Guard. As a result of the shooting, four students Jeffrey Miller (20), Sandra Scheuer (20), William Schroeder (19) and Allison Krause (19) died. Nine others were wounded.

In the aftermath of this event, students across the nation went on strike, which forced many educational institutions to close temporarily and caused the public to become even more critical of American involvement in Vietnam.



Jackson State Shooting

The Gibbs-Green Shooting occurred on May 15, 1970 on Jackson State University's campus. The shooting centered around the invasion of Cambodia, the shooting at Kent State, and the local



racial tensions. Similar to the events at Kent State, the days following up to May 15 at Jackson State foreshadowed the events of May 15.

May 15 at 12:05 a.m. State Troopers and local police fired into the group of students. after 30 seconds, 140 shots were fired from shotguns at distances of 30 to 50 feet, killing two and injuring twelve. Of the two killed were; Phillip Layfayette Gibbs, 21, was a junior pre-law major with a wife, a child, and a baby on the way, he was shot four times and James Earl Green, 17, who was a junior at Jim Hill High School, he was shot in the chest and located behind the line of police and highway patrolmen.

There were no arrests in connection to the students who were killed or injured. The President's Commission on Campus Unrest found the police action was "unreasonable, unjustified overreaction" (Gibbs-Green shooting: May 15, 1970).

Connecting Events

Kent State & Vietnam Connection:

The repeated student demonstrations at Kent State University in the time period leading up to May 4 were connected to a nationwide movement against the United States' role in the Vietnam Conflict. Across the country, and especially among college students, protests and rallies were common as a form of expression.

Jackson State & Kent State Connection:

Both Kent State University and Jackson State University were protesting the invasion of Cambodia and President Nixon's response to the Vietnam War.

The days following the shooting at Jackson State, students at Jackson State held a demonstration protesting the May 4 shooting at Kent State University.

Lasting Impact

Jackson State continues to shed light and openly discuss the events on the Gibbs-Green Shooting. In-coming students are required to take an orientation course about the shooting. Also, students and visitors can continue to see the bullet-ridden Alexander Hall. The university dedicated a space, the Gibbs-Green Plaza, near Alexander Hall in commemoration of the shooting.

Over the course of the last fifty years, there has been a plethora of literature, documentaries, music and other forms of media produced in efforts to educate, analyze, understand, and remember what happened at Kent State on May 4, 1970.

At Kent State, there have been yearly commemorative events for May 4, the university has seen the establishment of the School of Peace and Conflict Studies, the creation of the May 4 Visitors Center, the installment of markers on the sites where the students were killed, the addition of the memorial site to the National Register of Historic Places along with a variety of other forms of remembrance. As time goes on, May 4 carries with it a legacy that remains relevant in our society, ensuring that this tragedy is not forgotten and that we continue to learn from the lessons which stem from it.

References

- Gibbs-Green shooting: May 15, 1970.* (n.d.). Jackson State University. Retrieved from April 15, 2020, from <http://www.jsu.edu/universitycommunications/gibbs-green-shooting-may-15-1970/>
- The Antiwar Movement.* (n.d.) U.S. History. Retrieved from April 15, 2020, from <https://www.ushistory.org/us/55d.asp>
- The May 4 Shootings at Kent State University: The Search for Historical Accuracy.* (n.d.) Kent State University. Retrieved from April 15, 2020, from <https://www.kent.edu/may-4-historical-accuracy>