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THE BATTLE OVER THE KENT STATE SHOOTINGS AND
THE MONOPOLY OF MEMORIALIZATION

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THE BATTLE OVER THE KENT STATE SHOOTINGS AND
THE MONOPOLY OF MEMORIALIZATION

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“It is quite possible that we are descending into an age in which two and two will make five when the leader says so.” George Orwell

“When an individual is unable to face his own past and feels compelled to build his view of himself on a total denial of it and on the creation of myths to put in its place, this is normally regarded as a sign of extreme neurosis.” George Kennan

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” William Faulkner

In the United States a battle rages among various elements in the political and cultural arenas. Fueled by the New Right and New Left that emerged in the 1960’s, conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats, compete to influence the course of the present and the future of American history, by controlling the American past. The Kent State shootings of May 1970 are illustrative of this larger ideological struggle that has often polarized American society, and one emblematic of the current discourse and prominence in dictating the modern U.S. political landscape. From the immediate aftermath to today, a dividing line has existed over the liberal version of student martyrdom and the conservative description of student blame and defense of the National Guard. The events of May 1-4 are central to understanding the sixties and the legacy of that turbulent decade. Why is this so important? As David Farber noted,

“Amercians cannot seem to let the sixties go gently into the night…we make politicians take a decades-old drug test and scrutinize their position on the
Vietnam War...we wonder if black power marked the end of a great man’s dream of a color-blind nation or the beginning of a multicultural society.”

The shootings at Kent reveal how historical memory of the sixties is contested, with competing versions of the events emerging immediately afterwards and continuing through today. Simultaneously, we begin to notice that one singular memory and memorialization has gained momentum over the other- the conservative dictum of events. Both liberals and conservatives use the Kent State shootings, and by extension the events of the sixties, to shape the discourse within U.S. political culture. In addition to analyzing how the sixties continues to shape this political-cultural environment, an examination of the Kent State shootings and their legacy adds to the scholarship on the sixties that emphasizes the connections between the liberal and student-radical elements, but also the differences. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) continuously clashed with the liberal scions of the Democratic Party on many policy issues although ultimately converging in agreement on Kent State. Furthermore, conservative radicalism, so often overlooked by historians, is accorded its proper role and given greater prominence here, illuminated by the Kent shootings. Until the 1990’s historians had ignored the conservative movement of the sixties focusing instead on Leftist radicalization. However, with the durability of the Reagan revolution and the popularity of mass evangelical conservatism as represented by Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority, this has invited a reinterpretation of the decade.

This thesis proposes that conservatives are currently ascendant in the battle over Kent State’s memory given the degree of pro-National Guard/anti-student fervor that exists in Kent and Ohio, as evidenced by examination of local newspapers and letters. Furthermore, despite the existence of memorials to the events of May 4th on the Kent campus, which would seem to indicate a liberal tilt, I stipulate that these are neutralized by ambiguity and confusion, which contributes to conservative hegemony. This is also reflected in the sentiment of Kent State University (KSU) itself who has neither embraced nor adequately promoted the legacy of the shootings, oftentimes under pressure from conservative and Republican administrations. This work seeks to present the ideology of both conservative and liberal factions and place Kent and its memorialization into this schism of American history. The fact that the shootings are still contentious with even basic facts open to different interpretation is proof positive of this struggle over memorialization, which is evident through policies and politics and sources such as letters, newspapers, photography, film, song and memorials. Why should we care about this as regards Kent State?

“If the Kent State shootings will continue to be such a powerful symbol, then it is certainly important that Americans have a realistic view of the facts associated with this event...Kent State and the Vietnam War remain controversial even today, and the need for healing continues to exist. Healing will not occur if events are either forgotten or distorted.”

Some may argue that to heal psychologically, one must forget and move on- this is certainly the path that conservatives have followed in order to promote their uber

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nationalist-patriotic memory, as well as explaining KSU’s arm’s length policy towards the tragedy. Despite some differences that are noted here within liberal-Left groups and the conservative Right, I have decided to portray both factions as single unanimous entities; thus the terms ‘liberal’ or ‘liberal-Left’ and ‘conservative’ are used extensively to describe such diverse organizations as the Democratic Party, SDS, Republican Party and Young Americans for Freedom (YAF). Some may question the use of these labels but they remain so prominently utilized in modern American discourse, and continue to feature so significantly in shaping the nation’s political and cultural landscape that they cannot be ignored or invalidated. As James D. Hunter comments, “one does not quite exist in public if one cannot be identified ideologically in the never-ending, ever-changing struggle for power.”

It may be problematic to assign such labels generalizing these political-cultural movements and various decades, but it is unavoidable given that these labels exist in modern society, and it is within these parameters that Kent State and the sixties are defined. It would indeed be negligent to not try and fit this study into what is understood as liberal and conservative, whether it is seen through Democrat, Republican, New Left or New Right prisms. Civil Rights, the Vietnam War, political assassinations, the proper role of government all conspired to polarize conservatives and liberals to opposite extremes, but the terms essentially remained the same. True, the definition of liberal became expanded thanks to student criticism and likewise, conservatism developed a certain radicalism via the New Right, but both terms survived, indeed incorporated these diverse elements. This is why the usage of both liberal and

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conservative perspectives to describe memorialization debates is valid. KSU’s own precariously ‘neutral,’ most often conservative position is examined within this context.
CHAPTER II

MEMORY, MEMORIALIZATION AND KENT STATE

As Michael Kammen has observed, the idea of memory is “a term which directs our attention not to the past but to the past-present relation. It is because the past has this living active existence in the present that it matters so much politically.” Hence, Kent’s symptomatic divisiveness in the sixties and post 1960’s period; the Kent shootings remain politicized in the U.S., Ohio and on the KSU campus. The problem arises in the specificity of recall which is prejudiced by political opinion and belief, hence refuting the impossible notion of historical objectivity. This is why the Kent State shootings are memorialized so differently by competing ideological interests- conservative and liberal. This does not destabilize either argument but enhances both since history is composed of competing influences, but the Republican-conservative case rings loudest, thus proving conservatives dominate nationally. This monopoly is exercised by conservatives who apportion traditional American values as their own. As historian Lisa McGirr notes:

“They cast themselves as the true heirs to the ‘national heritage’ and framed their political agenda as an effort to preserve this ‘heritage’ for their children. Their mythic vision of the nation’s past represented an effort to legitimize themselves as the true upholders of national good.”

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Memory of course is not the same as memorialization. The former is an individual or collective consciousness whereas the latter represents a physical process and visible representation-distillation of the effects of memory. Memorialization in theory should be an easy idea to grasp but it proves to be an elusive concept. It represents “the crucial element in the construction of an imagined community through which disparate individuals and groups envision themselves as members of a collective with a common present and future.”

The problem remains that there are two distinct communities, two quite different invented traditions of Left and Right. Kent State certainly fails to fit the prevalent conservative narrative. It is no wonder that the Kent student victims stand little chance of appropriate remembrance in American national memory since it is dominated by conservatives. They did not die for the nation but against it, protesting as they were American involvement in Vietnam. Therefore they cannot fit into what has become the mainstream model of American virtue-the conservative sculpt of American patriotism. Furthermore, conservative memorialization has gained traction not only from political differences but also a “legal vacuum” that has failed to apportion any solid responsibility to any of the parties involved in the events of May 4, such as the lack of prosecution within the National Guard. Thus, since there is no definitive or legal cause of the shootings, private memory and public memorialization reflect support of the Guard or at the very least grants them the benefit of the doubt and

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7 Faculty Letter dated May 4, 1978, Craig Blazinski Papers, 1977-1980, Box 56, Kent State University Archives-May 4 Collection, Kent, OH.
withholds them from any serious criticism. Therefore, conservatives gain from this ambiguity.

The shootings need to be dissected, not only for the greater good of the nation but Kent State University itself. An internal school report commissioned by the university to judge the impact of the shootings indicated the need for catharsis, when it stated that “there is an intangible, almost indefinable gray cloud hanging over many departments-no sense of adventure, or genuine joy in learning and research…this stems directly from May 4, 1970.”\textsuperscript{8} The report is fascinating in that it highlights differences amongst KSU faculty, staff and administrators that mirror national uncertainty. The report presents KSU as a divided entity that regards the events as having a mostly negative impact, accompanied by the notion that the school should just move on! How does this reconcile with KSU’s pursuit of memorialization? Well, the school has sometimes been pushed towards remembrance, having been accused by liberals of not doing enough, while listening to the conservatives accusations of doing too much. The report also highlights the differences between personal opinion and public pronouncement. Even though most faculty, staff and administrators personally believe that KSU should decline further commemoration of the shootings, publicly their conviction is eroded. Thus, there is a fundamental divergence between what faculty state as their private thoughts and public utterances- too much memorialization over KSU versus a more muted public response that almost veers on acceptance of the shootings commemorative qualifications, featured in table 1 (Appendix A). Whether these differences are brought about by immense

\textsuperscript{8} Anonymous, \textit{Organizational Analysis # 15}, p1, 1997, 30\textsuperscript{th} May 4 Commemoration Committee, Records.
national liberal-Left pressure that condemns an anti-memorialization stance is unclear. But that could seem a likely instigator in the modification of opinion experienced by KSU personnel.

Whereas liberals believe in maximum martyred memorialization deifying the four students slain, and the conservatives favor minimal observance and a pro-National Guard stance, the KSU administration is split between the two. This confusion is further clarified by more data surrounding the 30th commemoration of the shootings. Table 2 (Appendix B) offers the most frequent responses to the Kent State shootings by KSU officials in numerical order, starting with the most commonly proposed solution. These are followed by an elaboration or explanation of the statement which bears some surprising comments.

This table is a smorgasbord of KSU attitudes that combine views inherent in both Right and Left ideology. Although not overtly conservative or liberal, these views have become co-opted by both factions and therefore represent an important elemental linkage between factionalism and the shootings. The elaborations also bring to surface many points that will be dealt with in due course. This includes the polarization of attitudes, the comparison of Kent State with the Boston massacre, and the controversy discussed later surrounding George Segal’s commemorative sculpture entitled *In Memory of May 4, 1970: Kent State- Abraham and Isaac*, that was rejected by Kent State. What is patently obvious is the battleground laid out by both sides of the political spectrum with KSU caught in the middle. The existence of Leftist sentiment amongst KSU staff is not surprising, but the abundance of conservative attitudes to the shootings indicates a complexity that has not been acknowledged. Like the KSU student body and the general
political climate of the Sixties, there existed greater layers to the parable than just Leftist radicalism as will be explored later; as historian Rebecca Klatch has noted, a re-interpretation of the decade is certainly in order.

Is memory then simply reducible to propaganda in which the dominant ideological campaign that emerges victorious dictates remembrance- history written by the winners of historical debate? Kim Sorvig, an entrant whose design for a Kent State memorial was rejected, described competing memorialization as “the loudest and best financed wins.” This certainly reduces history to a remote footnote subject to the whims of ideology and money. Sorvig’s design utilized John Filo’s infamous picture of Mary Vecchio kneeling over the dead body of Jeffrey Miller as a centerpiece, “flanked by [two walls with] icons of the Left and Right.” Sorvig’s depiction of Left versus Right represented an interesting list; individual rights versus social order, protest versus maintenance, revolution versus repression, freedom versus duty, pacifism versus militarism, counterculture versus traditional culture. Sorvig admitted his own Leftist biases served as a foundation for the design and criticized KSU for eventually constructing “a totally innocuous monument, watered down to avoid all controversy.” Whether one supports Sorvig or dismisses him as a frustrated crank, he does encapsulate the problems inherent in memorialization, for “there is no pleasing everyone…in

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10 Sorvig, *To Heal Kent State*, 37.


12 Sorvig, *To Heal Kent State*, 69.
designing for an emotion-laden project such as the Kent State Memorial…[memorialization is a] confrontation to secure values.”13

What is certain is that both public memorialization and private memory need analysis, and this study utilizes not only physical structures such as Bruno Ast’s memorial, but the personal thoughts of individuals via letters and newspapers. This is in stark contrast to the collected essays in Commemorations, edited by John R. Willis, whose sole “focus is on public rather than private commemoration [even] though the parallels between the way identity and memory operate in personal and public life are striking.”14 This is why it is crucial to examine both the private as well as public arenas to gage how one has influenced the other in the battle over memorialization of Kent State, and between conservatism and liberalism.

13 Sorvig, To Heal Kent State, 80.

CHAPTER III
THE KENT STATE SHOOTINGS

On May 4, 1970 Alison Krause, Jeffrey Miller, Sandra Scheuer and William Schroeder became fatalities in a barrage of gunfire unleashed by National Guardsmen on the main campus of Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. The shootings claimed a further nine victims wounded, from a total of sixty-seven shots fired in thirteen seconds. On that day, a crowd of students had galvanized to protest the announced escalation of the Vietnam War into Cambodia, as President Richard Nixon directed American forces to destroy depots that supplied North Vietnamese military. An anti-war movement that had appeared dormant erupted across college campuses, as protestors deemed this ‘incursion,’ as Nixon termed it, an unwarranted invasion. Many students had become radicalized during the 1960’s by political assassinations, racial strife and the unpopularity of Vietnam and the draft. Demonstrations characterized the decade, including those at the Democratic National Convention in 1968, which included the Chicago authorities of Mayor Richard J. Daley violently suppressing student protest. Thus, “Nixon’s Cambodia speech was like a torch dropped on the kindling of academe,”15 for it indicated continued fighting rather than de-escalation of the Vietnam conflict. There resulted many peaceful protests, but some turned into student strikes and others became violent, including Kent

State. At Kent, the ROTC building burned and there were other “campus military installations”\textsuperscript{16} attacked at other schools. Certainly with the tragic slaughter of students at Kent State, including two victims that did not even participate in the demonstrations, Sandra Scheuer and William Schroeder, the massacre represented “the day when the Vietnam War came home.”\textsuperscript{17}

The events that occurred at Kent State remain surrounded in controversy, as debate over details illustrates larger political divisions over the legacy of the 1960’s. One of the key issues is the role of the National Guard. There have been questions as to the necessity of calling out the guard to Kent. The Mayor of Kent, Leroy Satrom, and Ohio Governor, James A. Rhodes deemed it necessary; the thirty man Campus Security force, twenty-two member Kent Police Department, one-hundred and twelve Portage County Sheriff’s personnel, and one-thousand and seventy-five strong State Highway Patrol\textsuperscript{18} were not considered adequate. In the light of other nationwide violent protests, they may have been correct. However, the Governor’s over-reliance on the Guard is well documented- “he had called out the National Guard forty times during the preceding two years…Ohio’s expenditure for National Guard duty is said to have exceeded the total for all other forty-nine states during 1968-1970.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} Spofford, \textit{Lynch Street}, 26.

\textsuperscript{17} Philip Caputo, \textit{Thirteen Seconds: A Look Back at the Kent State Shootings} (Penguin Group, 2005), 7.

\textsuperscript{18} President’s Commission on Campus Unrest, \textit{The Report of the President’s Commission on Campus Unrest} (Arno Press, 1970), 239.

Certainly the situation on the Kent campus had deteriorated after Nixon’s Cambodia speech on April 30 and the shootings were the culmination of four days of conflict and tension. Students had organized to bury a copy of the Constitution on May 1, engaged in bottle throwing and bonfires in downtown Kent the same day, and on May 2 may have set fire to the ROTC building. The last point is contentious. Even the President’s Commission on Campus Unrest concluded that “of those who participated actively, a significant portion were not Kent State students.”\(^{20}\) The existence of the FBI’s COINTELPRO program complicates the picture. This umbrella acronym served to describe “covert operations…targeted against radical political organizations…designed to neutralize…civil rights, anti-war, and many other groups,”\(^ {21}\) including Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The relevance of this to Kent State was COINTELPRO’s use of agent provocateurs to infiltrate SDS and incite violence; to this day many claim prominent outside involvement in burning the ROTC building, a claim that the Left has supported and the Right opposed. Either way, the confluence of all these events along with greater SDS presence in Kent and the nationwide disquiet, precipitated a certain perception of student radicalism that heightened tensions. This led Mayor Satrom to declare a dusk to dawn curfew from May 1 onwards. The events also invoked an inflammatory speech on May 3 by Governor Rhodes, hence his portrayal by the Left as the real instigator of the shootings, who embroiled in the midst of a U.S Senate campaign, thus tried to appeal to law and order pangs that did nothing to ease the tension.

\(^{20}\) President’s Commission, 251.

“We are going to employ every force of law that we have under our authority...we are going to eradicate the problem...we are not going to treat the symptoms... (they are) worse than the brown shirts and the communist element...they are the worse type of people that we harbor in America.”22

On May 4, 1970, students and Guardsmen clashed with rocks and tear gas on campus. It seemed that guardsmen were moving away and many students assumed the confrontation had ended. As author Peter Davies claims, “the students were [also] leaving the commons and few were harassing the Guard.”23 This is a point of concurrence between many scholars who have studied the situation such as William A. Gordon, Philip Caputo, Joe Eszterhas and Michael D. Roberts. Even James A. Michener, who distributes blame equally among the University, Governor, Mayor, Guard and students alike, disputes the claim of some Guardsmen being surrounded.24 He is certainly correct in his notion that “far from being surrounded, the Guard had empty space on all sides.”25 Nonetheless, at 12:24 pm Troop G turned and fired with their M-1 rifles into the students in the Prentice Hall parking lot.

Was there an order to fire? Like many other details no definitive conclusion emerges. Troop G certainly huddled together before they discharged their weapons. Authors James Michener and William Gordon concur that no order emanated from the Guard, while Peter Davies, Joseph Kelner and James Munves disagree. The initial reason

22 President’s Commission, 253-254.


25 Michener, Kent State, 338.
given for the use of force by Adjutant General Sylvester Del Corso, who dispatched the National Guard to the Kent campus on Governor Rhodes orders, was the presence of a sniper that fired on Guard units. This was a similar rationalization given for the Jackson State shootings in Mississippi. FBI and the President’s Commission investigators saw no evidence of shots fired at the National Guard. More likely reasons for the shootings derived from the general disorganization of Guard tactics headed by Robert Canterbury, the disorientation of Guardsmen being heckled by Kent students and Guard overwork having just been deployed during a trucker’s strike in the Akron area. The students were not blameless but the Guard was clearly derelict in its duty. The President’s Commission summarized the causes.

“The actions of the some students were violent and criminal…the indiscriminate firing of rifles into a crowd of students and the deaths that followed were unnecessary, unwarranted, and inexcusable…the Guard fired amidst great turmoil and confusion, engendered in part by their own activities…the general issuance of loaded weapons…is never justified.”

The conservative Right viewed National Guard actions as legitimate riot control, a defensive posture, whereas liberals perceived these actions as murderous, resulting from offensive measures. The students were viewed as either an imminent threat to physical security or a harmless retreating crowd. This is important since it colors the aftermath of response at local and national levels, and the ensuing attempts to forge appropriate memorials or even to hinder them. The battle for Kent State’s place in the historical memory begins here.

26 Caputo, 56.

27 President’s Commission, 289.
CHAPTER IV
CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS

The intertwined relationship between power and memory is defined by Mike Wallace as “a ferocious attempt to eradicate memory [and] an implacable determination to preserve it.”\(^{28}\) He is correct in this description in which conservative interests wish to curtail memorials to the Kent shootings, while liberal groups promote the idea of mourning. Certainly conservatives have not argued for a memorial to the Guard, they only oppose one to prevent glorified memorialization of the students. However, the Right has also fought for protection of its own memories of May 4, that of pro-Guard and justification, while the Left has argued for the destruction of memories that do not fit its own paradigm, such as those that take an anti-student stance and detail student violence. As stated at the outset, conservatives are currently winning this battle over memory, exercising a monopoly of memorialization. One may ask how this can be the case since memorials to May 4 exist on Kent’s campus? My argument is that these memorials, particularly Bruno Ast’s design, are muted, impotent, indeed confusing to visitors, a conclusion supported by Kathryn Weiss’ study as well as KSU’s own internal documents to be detailed later. In fact KSU’s submission to conservative-Republican policies has resulted in their own ambiguity towards, oftentimes outright rejection of the events of

May 4. Thus, the memorials’ effectiveness is blunted which renders them peripheral, almost non-existent, lending credence to conservative dominance. Further conservative hegemony is illustrated by their monopoly over private memory that overwhelmingly favors the National Guard’s interpretation of events over the students. Again, this will be explored in due course.

Wallace is correct in tying power and memory together and so it is vital to examine the two dominant power structures of post-World War II America that have sought to create memories in their respective mirror images—liberalism within Democratic ranks and conservatism within the Republican Party. Democratic liberalism buoyed by Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal coalition which comprised Northern pro-government whites, Southern anti-statist segregationists, trade unions, and minorities dominated the political scene until 1968 with the exception of two Eisenhower administrations in the fifties. Unlike today’s expansive polarity that seems to permeate every aspect of political culture, there seemed to be little actual difference between the mainstream Democratic and Republican candidates who espoused anti-Communism and America’s commitment to foreign alliances and aid in order to counter this threat. For example, in the 1960 Presidential election between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, differences in foreign policy were slight, the major divergence occurring over Castro’s Cuban revolution. Eisenhower’s moderate Republicanism also seemed to be an extension of New Deal and Truman’s Fair Deal policies. It was not until the 1960’s that increasing polarization over issues such as communist containment, the Civil Rights movement, affirmative action and welfare programs, urban riots, political assassinations and the Vietnam War propelled both parties on opposite trajectories. The Democrats leaned Left with
increasing influence being exercised by SDS and other New Left organizations, resulting in these groups altering the party nomination process thereby allowing greater voice to the “New Politics” associated with liberal Senator George C. McGovern. As Ronald Radosh comments, “that very coming together of the two elements [liberalism and New Left]…would produce the eventual decline and growing isolation of the once-proud Democratic Party,”29 beginning with McGovern’s overwhelming defeat at the polls in the Presidential election of 1972. This would be devastating for decades to come with the identification of the Democrats as “a radicalized organization far removed from the needs of mainstream America.”30

Even though the Republicans went through a similar radicalization albeit with moderates like Nelson Rockefeller being overtaken by conservatives such as Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan, and the increasing influence of YAF and other New Right organizations, this went relatively unnoticed, overshadowed by the very public upheavals affecting the Democratic Party personified by the violence of the 1968 National Convention. As we have noted, conservatism became the new American nationalism; an attack on conservative values of religion, anti-Communism, limited government, low taxation, pro-life, anti-welfare state and the ‘benign neglect’ of race became tantamount to an attack on America itself. “Conservatives moved increasingly into the respectable mainstream, while the mainstream moved toward them.”31 As David Cressy notes about


30 Radosh, Divided They Fell, 131.

31 McGirr, Suburban Warriors, 186.
Great Britain’s own conservative political traditions, “manipulation of memory would have been more difficult without [this] receptive environment.” This is just as easily applicable to post 1960’s America. The Republican Party has illustrated this symbiotic relationship between conservatism, the general population, nation and patriotism brilliantly since 1968, none more so than Reagan’s re-election in 1984 which represented the apogee of synonymous unification between conservative Republican and patriotic American ideals-to criticize Reagan was to disparage the basis of the entire Republic.

Liberals have never recovered from the ascendancy of this new political realignment. Even victory for Jimmy Carter rested more on repudiation of Nixon and the Watergate scandal than any reversal of conservative momentum. Likewise the poor economy and third party candidate Ross Perot contributed to Bill Clinton’s victories in the 1990’s. Many conservatives in the 1960’s “felt that Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, with its substitution of government programs for individualistic reliance on self-discipline, hard work, and free enterprise, had sapped America’s will and blinded it to the eroding effects of liberalism.” By the 1990’s conservatives had succeeded in making liberal a dirty word and even Democratic politicians such as Clinton had to borrow from the conservative playbook to get elected, adopting policies such as welfare reform. The longevity of conservative ideology over liberalism was reflected by Gingrich’s seizure of power in the House of Representatives and Clinton’s shift towards policies of the Right


such as welfare reorganization. Lisa McGirr refers to the “Right’s staying power”\textsuperscript{34} and it remains to be seen whether Barack Obama’s election triumph signals another repositioning this time in the Democrats’ favor. The 2008 election could signal Republican “internal political turmoil and ideological conflict reminiscent of that which had dogged the Democrats.”\textsuperscript{35}

What has this shift to the conservative paradigm meant for the Kent State shootings? It is obviously difficult to memorialize those events that do not fit into the national-conservative archetype. Furthermore Ohio’s own brand of conservatism is crucial to understanding why the Right is winning the war vis-à-vis memory and Kent State. The region’s brand of politics gravitates towards a Republican leaning bias that has voted for the Grand Old Party in ten of the last sixteen Presidential elections as well as dominating the statehouse and Governorship: Bill Clinton became the first Democrat in the post World War II era to win Ohio in two successive contests while four Republican Presidents have managed the feat- Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan and George W. Bush; and with the exception of former House Speaker Vernal G. Riffe and former Governor Richard F. Celeste, the pantheon of important political figures in Ohio history is choc full of Republicans- Hanna, McKinley, Bliss, Rhodes, Voinovich and the Taft family. James A. Rhodes is particularly influential in Republican circles given such examples as his “personally schooling Ronald Reagan in how to carry Ohio and the industrial Midwest [through]…a highly effective television commercial outside…the

\footnote{McGirr, Suburban Warriors, 273.}

\footnote{William C. Berman. America’s Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 163.}
Youngstown Sheet and Tube [works].”36 Even one of the most notable Democrats, Frank Lausche, is lauded for his conservatism rather than liberal tendencies, “as popular with Republicans as with Democrats, thanks to his tight grip on the state payroll and purse strings.”37 In fact the attraction of conservative thought in Ohio is so embedded that KSU has always had to look over its shoulder regarding the influence of Columbus politics; since the school is a state funded institution, they dare not question state directives most of which are coming from conservative-Republican administrations who literally in some cases have asked the university to minimize May 4 commemorations, according to some members of the May 4 Commemoration Committee.38

However, this alone does not explain the traction of Ohio conservatism or expunge KSU from any blame. Ohio’s grassroots activism usually favors conservatives who have accomplished a far better job of mobilizing their constituencies of economic, social, foreign policy and religious ideologues than their liberal counterparts’ core of minorities, trade unionists and intelligentsia; and KSU’s own resistance to these conservative influences has hardly been vociferous. George W. Knepper describes “Ohio’s large reservoir of conservative sentiment”39 as very influential, and since Nixon, Republicans remain dominant in pure electioneering with the exception of the most


38 This sentiment was communicated by Kent faculty during the annual Akron-Kent Symposium, December 4, 2008, where I presented a portion of this thesis.

recent Obama triumph. “Republicans [are] better organized and disciplined in statewide elections [and] seem to benefit from Ohio’s underlying conservatism.”[^40] The Republican appeal to traditional conservative ideals of low taxes and “the essentially conservative Ohio voting public’s traditional, almost visceral dislike of [high] taxes and politicians who support them,”[^41] as well as minimal government, law and order, pro-defense and religion finds a resonance in Ohio more often than not. Even in the city of Cleveland which is usually a bastion for liberals and Democrats, there exists this sentiment. Just before the Kent shootings at the Veterans and Memorial Day celebrations in 1968 and 1969, “speakers…told crowds of about ten thousand on the public square that they must defeat ‘subversion’ and ‘aggression’ wherever they existed.”[^42] This was directed against anti-war and student protestors.

Kent is in Portage County, which despite pockets of industrial presence continues to be a relatively rural area compared to the manufacturing strength of neighboring Stark, Summit, Trumbull and Mahoning counties. Because of this, Portage is overshadowed in importance by its neighboring counties on both Eastern and Western peripheries. This does not mean that the aforementioned Ohio counties are also not susceptible to conservative thought, but Kent and its immediate rust-belt environs are particularly vulnerable. It is no wonder that there still lingers a town-gown split between the city of


Kent and Kent State University over the events of May 1970. Many residents continue to believe that the school had given in to liberals and radicals that did not speak for the community as a whole illustrated by letters at the time of the shootings and even twenty years afterwards; the vehemence of those feelings still resonate which in turn influenced the creation of an emotionless and intangible memorial on the University campus.

Furthermore, Kent is part of a larger culture war that intensified in the Eighties and Nineties. “We Americans would like to imagine ourselves to be somehow above and beyond the possibility of serious civil strife…but…conflicting claims…competing ideals of community and national identity”\(^{43}\) have produced this cultural conflict. This environment has led to constant battles over the teaching of history in schools and the depiction of historical exhibits in museums. The most controversial recent debate centered over the Enola Gay display at the Smithsonian in the mid nineties. Remnants of the American aircraft that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima in World War II were to be put on display along with analyses that depicted Japanese aggression, varying American motivations from saving U.S. lives in an invasion of Japan to flexing military muscle in front of the Soviets, and detailing the human effects of the bomb on the ground. What seemed a perfectly reasonable exhibit turned into a war zone of competing ideologies that insisted historians had gone too far in attacking American patriotism or not far enough. Like the Kent State shootings, conservative dogma began to dominate:

“the Smithsonian’s managers and curators as well as the historians on whom they relied were subjected to increasingly angry charges: they had ‘hijacked history;’ they were ‘anti-American;’ they were practicing ‘politically correct’ curating;

\(^{43}\) Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins*, 227.
they were projecting the ‘countercultural values’ of the Vietnam era onto America’s last good war.”

Eventually, as with Kent State, conservatives triumphed. The result was a watered down Enola Gay presentation that lacked depth, historical discussion or contextualization, a similar ambiguity displayed in Bruno Ast’s Kent memorial. Like the Enola Gay, Kent’s legacy remains contentious, a victim of current conservative domination that equates history with American triumphalism. Although Edward T. Linenthal is referring to the Enola Gay controversy, he may as well be citing the events of May 4 1970, Ast’s memorial and the gym controversy discussed below. “The exhibit…would become a lightning rod in a bitter contest over the relationship between memory and history, as well as between celebratory and critical stances toward the American experience.”


CHAPTER V
NEW RIGHT VERSUS NEW LEFT

The violence of Kent in May 1970 and subsequent debates over memory and memorialization have roots in the political climate of the 1960’s. Daniel Marcus concurs, stating that “they [conservatives and liberals] have relied upon representations of the country’s cultural and political past to provide historically rooted justifications for their own present-day politics.”\(^{46}\) On campus student activism centered on New Left’s SDS, while conservatives argued through the YAF. Liberalism came under siege not only by New Right conservatives, but also New Left organizations; indeed it was a “three-way confrontation”\(^{47}\) that contributed more than just the usual conservative-liberal dichotomy. For example, SDS criticized liberals for their gradualism on Civil Rights, especially liberal Democratic politicians’ “habit of placating the segregationists in their party. Liberals were also the architects of the Cold War, which had turned America into a ‘Warfare State,’ instead of a welfare state…liberals only gave lip service to necessary


Indeed the Vietnam War as well as the Civil Rights Movement pit liberals against the New Left, but these splits have been overstated. David Steigerwald states that “as an ideological matter, liberals and young radicals largely saw eye to eye.”

Thus, liberal and New Left memory of the Kent shootings is not that different with both sides blaming the National Guard and defending students. So while it is appropriate to document the divide between liberalism and Leftism, ultimately it matters little when discussing Kent State memorialization. Furthermore, even outside the issue of Kent there emerged similarities. SDS President, Carl Oglesby “admitted that he thought of himself as a liberal” and liberalism and Leftism merged within the Democratic Party with the ascendancy of the McGovernites, which allowed “many politically minded radicals to find common ground with party progressives.” Therefore, despite the schism between liberals and SDS, the differences were not irreconcilable, and in terms of Kent State were not applicable, as liberal-Left thought predominated venerating the slain students and castigating the Guard.

Kent became symbolic of the battles of the 1960’s and the event has continued to serve as a touchstone for debates over the meaning and memory of this controversial


50 Steigerwald, “The Liberal-Radical Debates of the 1960’s,” in Debating the 1960’s, eds. Michael W. Flamm and David Steigerwald, 47.

51 Steigerwald, “The Liberal-Radical Debates of the 1960’s,” in Debating the 1960’s, eds. Michael W. Flamm and David Steigerwald, 54.
decade. The Kent State shootings continue to remain a fundamental element of contention between the liberal-Left and conservatives as one will detail, as well as forming a crucial aspect of political culture; the May events in Ohio are inseparable from the larger question about the meaning of the sixties, and what relevance should be accorded to them? This answer to this question may seem constrained since only two side are assigned to this debate, especially since fissures did occur within conservative and liberal movements and between New Right and New Left, as well as the aforementioned intra-conflict between liberals and New Left. But the two paradigms of conservative and liberal thought, rightly or wrongly, remain the twin standards by which history and memory are judged. Thus, their exclusivity is justified and their inclusion merited.

When President John F. Kennedy uttered his famous proclamation “that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans,” the question remained which one? He was referring to himself yet the statement can be applied to the young generation of Americans coming of age in the sixties. Among white college students, two groups formed which embody the emergent Left and Right in the decade, SDS and YAF. These two groups competed for preeminence in the decade, although “when people think of the sixties, they commonly associate the era with civil rights protest, with the student, antiwar, and feminist movements, and with the rise of the New Left. Yet the untold story of the 1960’s is about the New Right.”

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The New Right is often overlooked during the decade and yet it has dominated the political landscape since the 1970’s, holding the reins of power in the Nixon, Reagan and both Bush administrations, as well as Congress with the Contract for America under a Democrat President no less; all this while exercising enormous influence over the Republican party. One has to “recast the way people think about the 1960’s by viewing the decade as a time of ferment for the right as well as the left.”53 Because “a new narrative of American politics that fully incorporates this new scholarship on postwar American conservatism remains to be written,”54 this could explain the underestimation of the pervasiveness of triumphalist, thus conservative memorials. If historians remain the interpreters of a nation’s past, as well as active participants in present day memorialization, by overlooking the New Right they have excluded this group from current historical debate and consequently misjudged their immense influence on present day and future memorials; the conservative-New Right coalition has a distinct advantage in spiritual memory for the hearts and minds of ordinary Americans as will be highlighted in due course, as well as physical memorialization. Finally, historians such as Lisa McGirr, Rebecca Klatch, William Berman and Donald Critchlow have begun documenting conservative imprints on the sixties. This recent scholarship has occurred mostly within the last fifteen years as American New Right conservatism has proved to be more than just a passing fad. In turn, this has led to a greater understanding of American memorialization, inspired by conservative triumphalism and uber patriotism.

53 Klatch, A Generation Divided, 2.

The New Right differentiated from traditional conservatism in that a greater unity created a more harmonious and unified economic, social and religious philosophy, distilled from individuals with various socio-economic backgrounds from lower class workers to upper class intellectuals, and the “YAF represented the most prominent student group at the conservative end of the spectrum.”\footnote{Klatch, \textit{A Generation Divided}, 17.} There were of course other different groups within this New Right framework such as the Religious Right, a term that “its own members used…to speak of themselves, as a way of distinguishing themselves \textit{slightly} from their ideological forebears, the self-described New Right.”\footnote{Martin, \textit{With God on Our Side}, x.} But these components all fitted more comfortably together under the conservative-New Right umbrella compared to their liberal-New Left counterparts.

The 1960 Sharon Statement, which launched the first meeting of YAF on September 11, crystallized their guiding principles in a document which declared that “political freedom cannot long exist without economic freedom.”\footnote{“Young Americans for Freedom, The Sharon Statement”, \textit{The National Review} (September 24, 1960): Reprinted in Eric Foner, \textit{Voices of Freedom} (W.W. Norton, 2008) 285.} As well as representing free market enterprise, the group epitomized anti-Communist and minimal government beliefs. Like SDS on the left, the YAF employed a multiple issue platform, mobilizing “on many issues diametrically opposed to SDS; against campus demonstrators, unions, and expansion of the welfare state, and in support of the war in Vietnam.”\footnote{Klatch, \textit{A Generation Divided}, 17.} Of
course, there were ideological divisions within the New Right. For example, libertarians strongly promoted individual rights and perceived McCarthyism, the military draft and consequently Vietnam, as threats to personal liberty, thereby contradicting the views of traditionalists in their organization. Like the rest of the conservative movement, this rift has not been adequately examined as feverishly as the fissures between numerous New Left organizations, but was serious enough for libertarians to be expelled from the New Right, as YAF and other similarly minded groups sought to perpetuate their grip on not only the conservative movement but also the Republican Party. At the same time, many of today’s Neoconservatives started out in New Left movements but became upset by the “student Left’s critique of bureaucratic rationality…professional and administration prerogatives on university campuses, as well as by…antiwhite, anti-Zionist, and anti-Semitic strands within the Black Power movement.”\(^59\) Despite these complexities, for the purpose of this study it is practical to concentrate on the traditional wing of the New Right personified by the YAF and William Buckley, since they did emerge as the dominant force within the movement, as well as their subsequent absorption into and influence on the Republican Party.

While the New Right represented by the YAF inspired its membership with anti-communism, laissez faire and the presidential campaign of Barry Goldwater in 1964, the New Left emanated from support for civil rights, opposition to the Vietnam War and participation in a larger peace movement. Preeminent historian of the sixties, Van Gosse

\(^{59}\) Marcus, *Happy Days and Wonder Years*, 138.
describes the New Left as “a movement of movements”⁶⁰ that was distinct from the Old Left because of its focus “on ending racial oppression, militarism, and male supremacy or patriarchy,”⁶¹ as opposed to working class distinctions and concerns. Their alternative to the Sharon Statement, the Port Huron Statement produced in 1962, espoused a “search for truly democratic alternatives to the present, and a commitment to social experimentation”⁶² in order to lift the veil of American complacency, hypocrisy and racism in the Cold War world. SDS represented the vanguard of leftist opinion diametrically opposed to the YAF. It too would cease to exist within a few years but with remnants exercising tremendous hold within the Democratic Party a la Tom Hayden and the McGovernites.

The New Left had its own internal divisions that caused organizational fissures that proved unsalvageable. Here multiple groups fought within SDS and the Left for domination; the feminists railed against the sexism in the movement; Progressive Labor (PL) advocated Marxist beliefs; while Weatherman and the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) proffered armed struggle militancy to achieve goals. This coincided with the overwhelming growth of the organization which consequently caused tensions between local and national affiliates.⁶³ The FBI’s COINTELPRO program complicated this intricate and tenuous relationship since it placed enormous stress on the New Left

⁶⁰ Van Gosse, Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretative History (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5.

⁶¹ Gosse, Rethinking the New Left, 29.


⁶³ Klatch, A Generation Divided, 136-145.
through its techniques of surveillance, harassment and infiltration. All these tensions “contributed to the explosive national convention of 1969 [in Chicago], an event that signaled the organization’s demise.”  

At this SDS gathering between October 8 and 11, following the uproarious Democratic Party Convention the previous year, further chaos ensued. Despite the clamoring of SDS newsletter *Caw!* which encouraged SDS affiliates to bring the war home and the Kent SDS mantra of “dare to struggle, dare to win,” a battle became waged within the movement rather than directed at its opponents.

Despite these divisions within both spheres of the political spectrum, the remnants of both YAF and SDS remained strong on college campuses, including Kent State. As Mary C. Brennan notes, “Young Americans for Freedom [continued] …the radical trend on college campuses by holding public rallies in favor of Vietnam and by utilizing radical methods for conservative ends.” Indeed, Kurt Schuparra quoted Ronald Reagan that YAF might engage in “counterviolence against left-wing campus militants.” Conservative writer Gene E. Bradley added his voice to those looking to win the hearts and minds of American youth.

“The New Left ideology is dangerous because it couches its appeals in idealistic terms… it gains its support by relating to the legitimate aspirations of sincere

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65 Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Papers, 1965-1974, Box 107, Kent State University Archives-May 4 Collection, Kent, OH.


young Americans. If we are to be successful in combating this false faith, we can be no less effective in relating our message to their concerns.\textsuperscript{68}

SDS influence exercised solid traction and mobilized effectively at Kent State, despite having its charter revoked in 1969 for demanding abolition of ROTC on campus. Many commentators such as Phillip Caputo have described Kent as apolitical, but this grossly underestimates a vocal minority on campus that wielded immense sway. Black Union Students (BUS) staged a mass strike and walked out of Kent State in 1968 due to police recruitment on campus; previous anti-war demonstrations had occurred between 1968 and 1970, including a campaign to end Project Themis grants at KSU, a military program that developed liquid crystal technology to aid body heat detection,\textsuperscript{69} and Stephen Ogilvie, a former Kent student, served as the first President of the national SDS organization.\textsuperscript{70} Furthermore, “the collapse of SDS [as a national organization] had no effect on the antiwar movement,”\textsuperscript{71} thus SDS’ core elements, its local affiliates and sympathizers still manifested tremendous authority over events at Kent.

How can one be certain that these protestors were in the minority of KSU’s student body? We have already noticed the complexity of opinion amongst the school’s staff, the students represented the same variations. Certainly many students identified


\textsuperscript{69} See \textit{Counter Insurgency: End Project Themis Grants} Flyer, 1969, SDS Papers.

\textsuperscript{70} Joseph Kelner and James Munves, \textit{The Kent State Coverup} (Harper & Row, 1980), 30.

\textsuperscript{71} Gosse, \textit{Rethinking the New Left}, 101.
themselves as sympathetic to conservative beliefs even if they did not mobilize politically for the YAF. Students such as Paula Marx and Connie May believed they spoke for the majority and “this majority wishes to return to school and do what they intended to do-learn.” They did not want “a few foolish students to stop the functions of KSU.” Student Wayne A. Olleila seemingly spoke for the conservative majority when he criticized the Leftist radicals as “those that are demanding their rights are taking mine away.”

It is no wonder with KSU staff and students representing such diverse opinions, that the school floundered for many years in terms of memorialization, caught between conflicting conservative and liberal histories of May 4. This has always been a no win situation for KSU. Even as recently as 2000, an editorial in the *Akron Beacon Journal* criticized the university for “trying to distance itself from the event,” while in the same year local residents attacked KSU for over-promoting the shootings for business gain. This prompted a reply by then KSU President Carol Cartwright, that she “certainly would not characterize this [30th anniversary] as promotion…[but] as comprehensive commemoration.” Obviously there remains a fine line between the mobilization of memory as historical truth and memorialization as conduit for profit. The question still

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72 Paula Marx and Connie May to President White, May 12, 1970, Horace A. Page Papers, 1970, Box 69, Kent State University Archives-May 4 Collection, Kent, OH.

73 Marx and May to White, Page Papers.

74 Wayne A. Olalla to President White, Undated, Page Papers.


76 Byard, “Kent State Accepts Past.”
remains whether this “comprehensive commemoration” satisfied liberals and to what extent it upset conservatives. And despite President Cartwright’s pronouncement, KSU’s ambivalence towards the events of May 4, 1970 is still palpable, hence the lack of education provided to incoming freshmen regarding the role of the shootings and the presence of the Ast memorial.77 Kathryn Weiss in her dissertation argues that the university failed to reflect any strong pro-student sentiment in its memorialization of May 4, and this despite the physical presence of the memorials themselves, represents a victory for conservatives. Weiss counters President Cartwright’s “comprehensive commemoration,” accusing KSU of “institutional ambivalence.”78 More of Weiss’ study will be profiled later when discussing the actual memorials.

The polarization that emerged on Kent’s campus since the 1960’s exemplifies the larger divisions that continue to define American political life. According to Van Gosse, “the main consequence of the polarization of the late 1960’s was a backlash on the right [and]…an equally important result, that much of the center moved to the left.”79 Klatch sees this a little differently with the conservative New Right playing a more assertively independent role rather than just reacting to the Left, as well as still noting marked differences between the center and SDS. This polarization began in the 1960’s before

77 This statement was echoed by many of KSU’s professors, including Dr. Kenneth J. Bindas, Chair of the History Department, at the joint Akron-Kent Symposium on December 4, 2008, where I presented a portion of this thesis. Also by my own wife who is a Kent graduate. She has stated frequently that no mention was made regarding the shootings or memorial during student orientation.

78 Kathryn Weiss, “Preconceiving Material Rhetoric: Literacy Beyond Language at Kent State’s May 4 Memorial” (PhD diss., Kent State University, 2006), ix.

79 Gosse, Rethinking the New Left, 103.
Kent State with the Civil Rights movement, inner-city riots, the Vietnam War and the
election of Republican Nixon, continuing into the seventies with George McGovern’s
unsuccessful Democratic campaign, and accelerating with the Reagan revolution. As
some former members of SDS helped move the Democratic party to the left of the
political spectrum, the YAF and later the American Conservative Union (ACU) brought
even greater influence and success to the Republicans as they dominated political
proceedings from the right. The reason for the Right’s triumph over the Left is simple, at
least in campaigning and electioneering; “unlike leftists or libertarians, most
traditionalists became integrated into mainstream politics.”

“The ascendancy of conservative politics…think tanks…organizations…ideas and candidates,”
has left the liberals behind in the battle to manipulate memory and memorialization over Kent State.
This ideological warfare has been waged through letters, newspapers, film and memorials,
as both sides have tried to present their definition of the events that occurred May 4, 1970.

The conservative-Right ascendancy has allowed their memorialization of events
of May 1970 to dominate, that the student radicals were ultimately to blame for the
shootings. The letters to the Mayor, opinions and editorials in certain newspapers
overwhelmingly subscribed to this conservative viewpoint, then and now. Furthermore,
even liberals “too say they felt discouraged by the backlash against the gains of the

1960’s, disheartened to see how the changes they fought so hard for were so easily undone.”\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{82} Klatch, \textit{A Generation Divided}, 316.
Searching through the correspondence sent by ordinary Americans to Kent’s Mayor Satrom, it is undeniable that the majority believed that the authorities had ample justification in their violent reaction to student protests. Most letters such as those of the Declue family, H.R. Bright and Frank Beraducci proclaimed congratulations to the Guard and a regret that more students had not been shot. They called for “Americans everywhere [to] applaud the action of the commander of this National Guard unit and his troops.” The letters’ universal tone in criticizing and belittling the Kent students identified them as bums, subversives, communists and even black sympathizers. Most, like C. Marshall, referred to the “illegally assembled mob of rock throwing, obscenity screaming militants, who…throughout the United States, are doing their level best to turn the whole country into a state of anarchy.” Others such as Mrs. Robert L. Kale attacked the background and class of the students as “children born in plenty, denied few pleasures,

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83 Frank Beraducci, H. R Bright, Mr. & Mrs. David Declue to Mayor LeRoy Satrom, May 5-11, 1970, LeRoy Satrom Papers, 1955-1976, Boxes 8-10, Kent State University Archives-May 4 Collection, Kent, OH.


getting everything their parents never had, taught few responsibilities, less respect.”86 All agreed with Carl W. Shallenberger who proclaimed “it is time that the rights of the majority take precedence over the rights of the minority.”87 This correspondence was sent either directly to the Mayor or published in the Record Courier in the days following the shootings, both being found amongst his personal collection. That newspaper located in the Ravenna-Kent-Stowe area and published by Kent University Board of Trustees President Robert Dix, typified the conservative media’s reaction in Ohio to the tragedy along with the Cleveland Plain Dealer, Youngstown Vindicator, Canton Repository, Columbus Dispatch and Cincinnati Post. The Youngstown area became particularly vocal in its denunciation of the students with thirty-five residents of the area, along with those residing in the surrounding vicinities of Warren, Cortland, Poland, filing their grievances with and support for Nixon, Governor Rhodes, Kent’s Mayor Satrom, KSU President White, and the National Guard.88

Just how deep and broad is this view? Some may argue that opinions formed on unsubstantiated fact and rumor, such as a student sniper firing on the National Guard misled ordinary Americans to blame the students. However, this does not explain letters that continued to arrive in the Mayor’s office and to these newspapers days, months and

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even years after the shootings that expressed similar sentiment. The conservative attitudes rising in influence across the nation found their expression in the correspondence and editorials critical of students and supportive of the Guard. A 1971 Canton Repository editorial criticized those that called for an official investigation of the shootings, stating that there was

“no useful purpose in probe… [nothing] to be achieved by resurrecting all the sordid details of that unhappy day… [and] there is no doubt that the appeal for federal intervention in the case is designed to embarrass the Ohio National Guard…we trust it [Justice Department] will close the case once and for all by refusing to intervene.”

This conservative reaction, echoed by the Plain Dealer and Youngstown Vindicator, constantly referred to the students as militants. William Hickey wrote continuously in the Plain Dealer criticizing the liberal media, such as NBC news anchor David Brinkley, for undertaking

“a blatant assault on the National Guard, with no regard for the particular circumstances its members faced that fateful day…one gathered the impression that a troop of National Guardsmen invaded the campus without cause, provoked the students…and then fired into their ranks at will.”

A typical response is that of Albert Bricker, Business Editor of The Columbus Dispatch and former KSU alumnus, writing to KSU President Robert I. White;

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89 Letters located in Mayor Satrom’s papers, including those originally published in Record Courier, actually extend to 1976.


“why can’t you university presidents weed out the kooky-type, longhaired, hairy-faced professors and instructors who are behind much of your trouble...why can’t you merely reject the oddballs, the wild-looking, unkempt gorillas, the freaks, the hippies...these people...are enemies of the American way of life...I ask that you request a show of intestinal fortitude.”

As David Farber has noted, “the thought of disruption scared Middle America, whose more conservative press responded with almost breathless reports about imminent revolution.” At least in Ohio, this view certainly pre-dominated and shows why liberal-Leftist memorialization of Kent has been so weak.

The divergent views of Right and Left continued to be felt on the Kent campus in the years after the shootings. In 1977, the university proposed constructing a gym annex partly on the site of the massacre, supported by YAF and its affiliates. Conservative students distributed various literature entitled Move the Protestors not the Gym, Remember Kent State- Build the Gym, We Want Our Campus Back and I'm Tired of the Bullshit in which they tried to impose their historical interpretation of Kent, allegedly speaking for “the vast [silent] majority of Kent students [who] see no connection between the erection of a building nearby and the events of 1970.” This campus counter demonstration which extended into “support for ROTC and recruitment of conservative faculty,” railed against elements of SDS that remained on campus and who now

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92 Albert D. Bricker, to KSU President, Columbus Dispatch, May 7, 1970, Palsa Papers.

93 Farber, The Sixties, 273.

94 Timothy Wayne Viezer Papers (KSU Student), 1977-1980, Box 58, Kent State University Archives-May 4 Collection, Kent, OH.

95 Viezer Papers.
organized into the May 4 Coalition, led by wounded student Alan Canfora. This group announced four demands: that the gym be moved, classes cancelled on May 4, four buildings be named after the students killed, and for the university authorities to acknowledge the injustice of the shootings.\textsuperscript{97} One of the most striking images of their campaign was a \textit{Jam the Trustees Meeting} flyer that featured a skewed cartoon version of the famous John Filo photograph of Mary Vecchio screaming while kneeling over the dead body of Jeffrey Miller; here Vecchio was shown looking bemused as Kent basketball players skipped around her in their new gym complex.\textsuperscript{98} Canfora and the May 4 Coalition have caused debate since the gym controversy by warring with other groups besides conservatives, even like-minded organizations such as the May 4 Task Force which arranges yearly remembrances. Craig Blazinski, former Task Force Chairperson resigned his position due to the

\begin{quote}
"extent to which the Task Force and its programs are being used as a platform for certain partisan political ideologies...many students are disinclined to join because of the way in which the Task Force has been politicized...we can no longer work with Alan Canfora...[who] has used his sacrosanct position as a wounded student to subvert every progressive cause."
\end{quote}

The YAF countered these coalition demands with a propaganda campaign of its own, using an interesting yet negative connotation that has become omnipresent in

\textsuperscript{96} Klatch, \textit{A Generation Divided}, 101.

\textsuperscript{97} Viezer Papers.

\textsuperscript{98} Viezer Papers.

\textsuperscript{99} Craig Blazinski to May 4 Task Force, April 1979, Blazinski Papers.
America today, declaring the May 4 Coalition as terrorists. Statements were made to this effect by both Cliff Kincaid, Director of Campus Affairs for Ohio YAF and Tim Singleton, Chairman of YAF-KSU Chapter. Furthermore, YAF inspired groups such as Students Maintaining and Advocating Cooperation and Constructiveness at Kent (SMACCK), authors of the aforementioned literature supporting construction of the gym, battled Canfora’s group point by point, defending Governor Rhodes and demythologizing the memorialization process. This latter position de-romanticized the Prentice parking lot where “all the fatalities occurred [by indicating that]…it is well known by now that these spots have been driven over and parked on.” The conservative mantra of outside agitators or ‘us versus them’ was on display after the shootings and during the gym controversy. Conservatives echoed Governor Rhodes and critiqued SDS and the May 4 Coalition as “outsiders [who]…are not truly concerned nor empathetic with the wants, needs, and feelings of the student body.” With both sides trying to control the interpretation of the past in order to dictate the present and shape the future, the battle over memorialization remained in full swing in Kent, Ohio reflected in its extension from local to national opinion and media as will be discussed.

Pervasive right wing ideology continued to flourish during the ten and twenty year commemorations of the shootings. Again, the Plain Dealer led the way proclaiming

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in 1980 that the University suffered from “an image problem.” In 1990 the *Columbus Dispatch* and *Cincinnati Post* joined the chorus with editorials endorsing letters that proclaimed Leftist media bias responsible for unfairly blaming the National Guard, and that the newly constructed Ast memorial disrespected Vietnam Veterans. The 1990 letter from Charles H. Stockman in Columbus reflected this sentiment, claiming “he was sick and tired of the liberal media distorting what happened…the blame for the incident fell primarily on the demonstrators, not on the National Guard.” Harold Vick wrote from Cincinnati that “the campus protestors had depreciated the sacrifices of those men [veterans].” That these opinions were expressed not in 1970 but 1990 clearly illustrates the power of conservatism in that it continues to shape the interpretation of the shootings. My own personal experience is testimony to this; when my father-in-law heard of my inclination to embark on this project, his initial reaction mirrored one of indignant resolve that I not waste time with the ‘liberal communists’ of Kent. Given such opinions that have lingered for four decades, it is not unreasonable to assume that the Right has won the war of memory over May 4, at least in Ohio. Even a center left-leaning publication such as *Newsday* ran an article bemoaning the decline of student activism on the Kent campus and across the country as early as 1973! However, liberals have not faded quietly into the night, and their own pro-student memorialization

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of Kent has gained some traction through newspapers, photographs, films and most importantly, the memorials that stand on the Kent campus today. But this has proven inadequate since a closer look at the memorials, particularly the ineffectiveness of Ast’s design, clearly indicates some failure. And given the position of ordinary Americans, certainly most Ohioans, the battle for hearts and minds has been lost as well.

There remained a lone dissenter amongst Ohio’s conservative press. The *Akron Beacon Journal* represented a more liberal leaning voice amongst Ohio newspapers, questioning certain pro-Guard conservative tenets. It also brought into the debate a comparison between Kent and the Boston Massacre. As early as May 5, 1970, the paper’s editorial reported that the Guard’s lives had never really been threatened by Kent students, quoting a Guardsman as saying “I really didn’t feel my life was in danger.”\(^\text{107}\) It continued to refer to the incident as murder.\(^\text{108}\) Furthermore, in its first anniversary piece, it reflected the liberal-Left mantra “of the Kent confrontation [as] militarism, imperialism, repression…it likens May 4 1970, to March 5, 1770, when British troopers fired on rock-throwing New England rebels, killing five and giving Sam Adams’ agitators the Boston Massacre.”\(^\text{109}\) The paper’s comparison between 1970 and 1770 is important. The ideas of blood sacrifice and the co-option of American Revolutionary tradition can be found in other primary sources. Even though most letters to Kent’s Mayor Satrom reflected conservative ideology as we have seen, some disagreed. Murray Vidockler wrote that


\(^{108}\) “Kent was Murder…If Guard Shot First,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 8, 1970.

Kent represented “a destination for sightseers of the future that will be as famous as the site of the Boston Massacre.” Gordon H. Smith reiterated that “this outrage takes its place in history with the…Boston Massacre.” There existed even a stage production of the Boston Massacre televised by the Public Broadcasting Service in 1971, starring Kent State faculty who had been present on campus at the time of the shootings, such as Gerald Lewis, Jim Minard and Jim Crocker, which further cemented the liberal-Left synergy of events between 1770 and 1970. Of course conservatives have attempted to utilize these same Revolutionary traditions to make its own argument of patriotism and allegiance to the Republic, which it accused the Kent students of lacking. The Guard represented American Revolutionary traditions not the students by trying to maintain peace through proper law and order that was being negated by hostile anti-American forces (after all the students were demonstrating against U.S. policies), in the form of the Kent protestors. Thus, in the war over Kent’s memory conservative and liberal forces both looked to the very core of the Republic in the form of the American Revolution for ammunition.

For the 30th anniversary of the shootings in 2000, the *Akron Beacon Journal* congratulated itself on its factual reporting, criticizing other local newspapers of distorting events, or at the very least, not confirming pertinent information. It became especially critical of the *Record-Courier*, for reporting that of the “four dead, two were

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10 Murray Vidockler to Mayor LeRoy Satrom, May 9, 1970, Satrom Papers.


12 Jerry M. Lewis Papers (Professor of Sociology), 1968, Boxes 19-20C, Kent State University Archives- May 4 Collection, Kent, OH.
National Guardsmen” as well as countering false information of a student sniper. The Beacon-Journal was so instrumental in illustrating the “divide between town and gown, between those whose views of the Vietnam War were in sharp contrast,” that police protection became a requirement for the paper’s premises and staff. Many condemned the paper’s emphasis on student martyrdom at the expense of the National Guard. The Beacon-Journal invited readers to share their experiences of the shootings. Edward R. Miller wrote poetically in a letter that “the students memorialized, the Guard empty-handed, Kent State painted rosy and the Guard, villain branded.” Even those that supported the paper’s pro-student stance condemned the publication, “for continually stirring old memories of that era”.

Outside Ohio, the East and West coast media establishments countered the conservatism of most Ohio papers. In the immediate aftermath of the shootings the New York Times ran a startling advertisement that listed casualties for Vietnam, Cambodia and Kent State, with a note that these figures were subject to change! The headline proclaimed What Next? The same newspaper ran advertisements that backed a Peace Ticket, “a way to support Senatorial and Congressional candidates pledged to end the


114 Giles, “A Day Like no Other.”

115 Edward R. Miller, letter to the editor, Akron Beacon Journal, undated, from Akron Beacon Journal: Remembering May 4-Responses from Readers, 1990, Box 74, Kent State University Archives-May 4 Collection, Kent, OH.


Asian war.”118 Tom Wicker wrote that President Nixon’s statement categorizing Kent as violent dissent inviting tragedy was “obtuse and heartless…Nixon’s blurted condemnation of bums on the campus…a true revelation of his inmost feelings.”119 *Rolling Stone* honored the dead in Ohio with a blistering piece that attacked government and university authorities during the one-year commemoration as “waiting for the revolutionaries to set it off once again, the Outside Agitators, Commies, pinko-perverts, waiting for the sniper shot which the Guard…heard in the gutted echo chambers of his mind whenever he was asked to justify ‘The Incident’.”120 The magazine, especially satirical of the local conservative newspaper, the *Record Courier*, scathingly derided its incessant use of the word “commie” as its sole “daily insight into the hairy roots of Communism.”121 Like conservatives, liberals continued their same theme during ten and twenty year commemorations. In 1981, the *Los Angeles Times* continued to rail against the Ohio National Guard and the fact that “there have been no convictions in the Kent State case.”122

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Liberals did possess a very powerful weapon in its arsenal that the Right did not: John P. Filo’s Pulitzer Prize winning photograph of teen runaway Mary Vecchio screaming in stunned horror, whilst leaning over student Jeffrey Miller’s lifeless body. This allowed liberals a route to convey their views of the events, that the shootings represented government sanctioned murder and student martyrdom at Kent, countering the conservative opinion of students as bums. As we have seen, this image has been effectively integrated into the Left’s message, namely during opposition to the gym controversy in 1977, where this iconic representation was juxtaposed against basketball players, in an effort to derail gym construction. The picture taken with a 43-86 zoom lens featured in virtually every major newspaper and periodical, nationwide and internationally and enjoys legendary status even today. If Kent State is recognized, Filo’s photograph is usually the starting reference point. Given the ascendancy of this cultural symbol, it is still remarkable that liberal ideologies have not kept pace with conservatism, which has been the more powerful politically of the two groups in the 1980’s and 1990’s, and thus has maintained hegemony in memorialization.

The Left has appeared to profit from films such as NBC’s Kent State screened on American national television in 1981 that further cemented the theme of sacrifice of the students for a greater cause. However, as Howard Rosenberg’s article in the Los Angeles...
Times conveyed, along with being criticized by conservatives as an instrument of liberal propaganda, the film was also berated by segments of the liberal-Left. For example, Rosenberg critiqued Director James Goldstone’s remark that President Nixon had wanted to “make an example of Kent. But Goldstone added it doesn’t make that much difference. Not much difference!”

Rosenberg opined in his editorial that this seemed to be a central issue that should have been explored in the movie. Also, the article condemned the perpetuation of myth within the film, that the shootings resulted “from overzealous Guard officers and guardsmen who were confused green kids- in truth, nearly all the shooters were veterans with riot control experience.”

Rosenberg disparaged the movie’s ambivalence in attempting to provide for both the Guardsmen and students an equally sympathetic voice. Conservatives may comment that this is only fair, but the incident reinforces another problem with memorialization, the dangers of taking a neutral stance as per Kent State University. The film came under criticism by both sides of the political divide; conservatives thought it went too far in terms of liberal bias, liberals believed it did not go far enough. Even the movie’s historical consultant, Gregory Payne advocated an improved sequel “with gloves off.”

Liberals also possessed another avenue in an attempt to break conservative monopoly of Kent’s memorialization: song. Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young’s 1970 composition of Ohio provided another cultural touchstone that served as an instrument

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123 Rosenberg, “Controversy Follows NBC-TV’s Kent State.”

124 Rosenberg, “Controversy Follows NBC-TV’s Kent State.”

125 Rosenberg, “Controversy Follows NBC-TV’s Kent State.”
both literally and figuratively, in propagating a liberal-Left depiction of Kent as Greek
tragedy complete with murder and martyrdom. The lyrics by Neil Young “captured the
fear, frustration and anger felt by the youth across the country,” fuelled by
conservative-New Right missives such as Ronald Reagan’s “if it takes a bloodbath, let’s
get it over with.”

What if you knew her and found her dead on the ground?
   Tin soldiers and Nixon coming,
   We’re finally on our own.
This summer I hear the drumming
   Four dead in Ohio,
   Gotta get down to it
Soldiers are cutting us down
Should have been done long ago.

Neil Young set these lyrics “to a lumbering D-modal death march that hammered
home the dread” of Kent State, simultaneously a respectful funeral dirge for the
victims and battle hymn for protestors, solidifying liberal ideology but not cultural
hegemony. Even though conservatives found it difficult to respond to this kind of
musical denouement, especially given the intense environment which had seen the
deconstruction of political and musical America, both symbolically combined by Jimi
Hendrix’s rendition of the Star Spangled Banner, this did not infiltrate the triumphalist
description that conservatives had co-opted. Thus, despite these cultural tributes, the

126 “Ohio- Neil Young Lyrics Analysis,” Thrashers Wheat,

127 Thrashers Wheat.

128 Thrashers Wheat.

129 Thrashers Wheat.
meta-narrative of American unity and patriotism remained dominant. Crosby, Stills and Nash have since performed the song in 1997 at the annual commemoration ceremony. The May 4 Task Force which organizes the yearly remembrance, calls *Ohio* integral to Kent State, “woven into the fabric of the people, the feelings and the pictures of May 4.”

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130 Thrashers Wheat.
CHAPTER VIII
KENT STATE MEMORIALS

The existing memorials seemingly illustrate the power of liberal-Left ideas symbolizing both outrage and sacrifice, but this is illusory, especially when applied to the main Ast memorial on campus. One of the first dedications to the tragedy involved the annual candlelight walk and vigil established in 1971, beginning “with people positioned in the spots where the four students were killed.”131 Two particular organizations have dedicated themselves as living, evolving memorials to the deceased students since 1971: the Center for Peaceful Change, now renamed the Center for Applied Conflict Management, and the May 4 Resource Center. Both entities advocate studying and responding to the shootings “through teaching, research and public service.”132 The Kent Four sculpture designed by Alastair Granville-Jackson in 1971 and located outside the School of Art is another paean to Kent State, as well as a marker that highlights the Jewish ancestry of three of the four students killed, personified by a plaque donated by the B’nai B’rith Hillel Jewish Services Center of Kent in 1971.

An official day of remembrance created in 1977 involves the recess of classes every May 4 between noon and 2 p.m., and construction of memorial windows in the


132 Kent State University History, “Memorials and Observances of May 4, 1970.”
May 4th Room of the Kent State University Library was completed in 1979. These were four stained glass windows designed by Theodore Lewis Abel, portraying light and intelligence personified by the sun, diminished by death and bullet holes; “the bullet holes increase with each panel, so as to obliterate the sun, piercing the shield (yellow to orange to red)”), signifying death. The windows are surrounded by the outlines of the university shield which is inverted to symbolize “the university turned upside down on and after May 4, 1970.” Scholarships named after the four slain students were established in 1990, and there have been numerous workshops and symposiums since then that seek to examine the lessons of the tragedy such as In the Footsteps of History, Legacies of Protest and Experiencing Democracy.

In 1990, the main monument to the shootings by Bruno Ast was dedicated and rests on a wooded site overlooking the commons, comprised of four granite disks and four pylons with a merging walkway connecting halls of residence and the rest of the Kent campus. Whereas these disks symbolize the four students killed, there is a fifth disk on the southern periphery of the plaza which indicates an impact more extensive than the four dead in Ohio. Ast’s memorial plaza is surrounded by an “abstract border symbolic of disruptions and the conflict of ideas. Its fractured edge suggests the tearing of the fabric of society.” A granite wall indicates the entrance to the memorial as a place of

134 Abel Notes, Viezer Papers.
reflection and “representative of both shelter and conflict.” There are only two inscriptions that decorate the site; embedded in the stone floor of the plaza are the words “Inquire, Learn, Reflect,” and on a single side of the wall is the name of the designer and date of dedication. None of the victims’ names are to be found on the memorial. There is a plaque to the north of the site bearing the names of the four students killed and nine wounded, but this becomes problematic since it is physically and thus emotionally detached from the main site. Most pointedly, the memorial is encircled by exactly 58, 175 daffodils representing U.S. Military personnel killed during the Vietnam War. The plaza is a failure in that it falls short in reflecting the shootings as a seminal event in Ohio and American history. This has long been the goal of liberals but has met with little success.

In 1999, individual student markers were installed in the Prentice Hall parking lot around the area where the Kent Four had been gunned down. Finally, in 2007, the state of Ohio officially recognized the tragedy with an historical marker detailing the Vietnam War, student protests, the shootings and the conclusions of the President’s Commission, that Kent State represented an “unnecessary, unwarranted, and inexcusable” tragedy. But again, this plaque is isolated, away from Ast’s memorial and thus disengaged emotionally from the main site. The fact that it took thirty-seven years for history to be recognized is in itself a reflection of conservative domination of the memorial process. And state recognition does nothing to overcome the hegemonic narrative of triumph and unity,

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136 Kent State University Library, “May 4 Memorial.”

co-opted by the Right, that still continues to exclude the shootings from proper commemoration.
CHAPTER IX  
PROBLEMS IN MEMORIALIZATION

Given the existence of all these memorials, it would appear that a Leftist-liberal view occupies a triumphant position vis-à-vis its pro-student interpretation of Kent State and national consciousness. However, this is not the case. In fact these memorials confirm conservative castration of pro-student Kent memory symbolized by the emotionless Ast site and the university’s ambiguous attitude. In other words, they do not condemn the federal and state authorities and they reject reverence towards the students. In her important analysis of the memorial, Kathryn Weiss argues that KSU’s “site…contains material traces of a struggle between the desire to remember and the impulse to move on,” basically the “institutional ambivalence” she alludes to throughout her work. Weiss questions whether the memorials on KSU’s campus are epideictic, whether they blame or praise any one party. Particularly interesting is her examination of Ast’s main memorial and the literature located at this site. Weiss systematically deconstructs any advantage liberals may be attaining from the memorial with a portrayal of KSU as hopelessly caught between both sides of the political spectrum, an almost Swiss-like neutrality. For example, the mixed messages that are portrayed in a brochure that serves as a guide/map to the site are revealing. “Simply put, the four-day


account (May 1-May 4 narrative) suggests that the community was a victim of the dissenters and the single-moment account (May 4 map of the shootings) suggests that the dissenters were victims of the authorities.”140 KSU’s literature lumps regular students together with activists which is important since two of the victims, Sandra Scheuer and William Schroeder were not participating in the May 4 protests. The National Guard’s actions and motivations are not explained. Ignored are the reactions of Kent citizens who overwhelmingly cried for more students to be shot, while University officials’ actions are not detailed at all. Furthermore, the brochure is simply entitled *May 1-4, 1970*, with no mention of any language that indicates violence or confrontation such as ‘shootings’ or ‘massacre’. This absence of language is just as important as the mixed idiom that permeates the brochure. This is undoubtedly not a victory for liberal pro-student sentiment. Weiss further elaborates on this KSU ambiguity in table 3 (Appendix C).

Conservatives are obviously happy with the university’s emphasis on student misconduct and the lack of attention given to the victims, but upset at the absence of emotion attributed to the Guard. However, liberals, while praising KSU’s negative depiction of Guardsmen utilizing force, are equally irate over the lack of positive action assigned to the students. Both the Right and Left are dissatisfied with language that renders university officials blameless. Weiss is correct in stating that “this multiple authorship, predictably, generates multiple versions of the historic event commemorated, which may escalate, counter, or complicate deception.”141

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141 Weiss, “Preconceiving Material Rhetoric,” 150.
Weiss not only condemns the existing language of KSU’s memorial literature with its resultant diverse interpretation of May 4, but also the absence of language at the site itself. There exists no embedded script that is constructed into the physical memorial such as the victims’ names, thereby depriving the viewer of an emotional connection that exists with other sites such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Even though there is the plaque to the north of the memorial with victims’ names, because of its physical separation from the main site, it does not register emotionally. The same applies to 2007’s Ohio Historical Marker, donated after Weiss’ study, since it is also located away from the central memorial between Taylor and Prentice Halls. Furthermore, Weiss conducted an experiment involving twelve people visiting the KSU memorial whereby she concludes that “visitors who remember the shootings and know the terrain seem to experience a site differently than those unfamiliar with the history or the place.”

Despite deviations in reaction, this same experiment resulted in one similar universal response with the twelve visitors overwhelmingly being confused by and emotionally detached from the main site. For example, nobody knew what the fractured border of the plaza represents or for that matter the granite wall. The visitors could not say for certain whether the four granite disks and pylons symbolized the four students killed. What did the fifth disk mean? Why the literal reflection of oneself as you stand on the disks? They found no definitive answers to these questions at the memorial.

Weiss’ experiment is important in that it highlights the problems with Ast’s memorial. This knowledge leads us to ponder how Kent may reclaim its memorialization of the shootings; in other words how the university can reverse its hegemonic dissipation,

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since it has lost ground in the commemorative process to other institutions such as Emerson and the State University of New York (SUNY) which will be discussed later. For example, it might be interesting for KSU to add to Ast’s main memorial in order to blunt emotionless reaction to the site and clarify more clearly what the monument stands for, thereby reducing confusion. Ideas to consider range from a background exhibit on specific Guard and student motives, to similarities and differences between Kent State and Tiananmen Square, to today’s absence of student activism vis-à-vis the Iraq War. The three soldiers sculpture was added to the Vietnam memorial to accentuate its impact, although it proved to be superfluous since the black granite wall proved powerful in its own right. But the Kent memorial is obviously lacking focus and clarity and needs contextualization. As of this writing KSU was further developing the operations and responsibilities of the May 4 Resource Center to provide additional insight into the shootings, a welcome and overdue improvement. However, as Thomas J. Schlereth notes, “military conflict is well represented in museum material-culture collections, exhibits, and battlefield sites, but domestic conflict and violence in the American past receive little notice.”143 The absence of memorials to the great industrial unrests of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is testimony to this analysis.

One of the main criticisms of the memorial is that it is too abstract with no solid connection of the shootings to the 1960’s as a whole, let alone any correlation to international events or the present day. Of course “controversial exhibits are less likely

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to find sponsors to fund them,”¹⁴⁴ but there is precedent in “the Holocaust Museum’s spectacular drawing power…the latest evidence that even the most difficult and disturbing material does not automatically alienate potential visitors.”¹⁴⁵ Despite Edward T. Linenthal’s argument in The History Wars, that examines the Holocaust Museum’s focus on American anti-Semitism as well as American liberation, the museum is still more adaptable to the American triumphalist and patriotic memory than Kent State; ultimately Jewish victims died at the hands of an American enemy whereas Kent students were gunned down by America itself. The former fits into the benign paradigm of the United States, especially given Jewish migration to America, and the latter questions that model. Thus, Wallace although correct about the Holocaust Museum’s unsettling nature, is mistaken about comparing it to acts of American violence perpetrated against its own citizens. The Kent State shootings can never hope to occupy the same memorial space that fastens and aligns American memory to the Holocaust.

Kent State could easily become the center of a permanent museum dedicated to the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement, a huge vacuum that needs to be filled, and as Wallace states would illuminate other occurrences of the period such as “ghetto uprisings…feminist or ecology movements…Watergate.”¹⁴⁶ If nothing else, KSU should make Ast’s memorial a combination of the human and physical, adding victims’ names to either the disks, pylons or granite wall which has worked so effectively for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Aesthetics are important, so further commemoration in the city of

¹⁴⁴ Wallace, Mickey Mouse History, 122.
¹⁴⁵ Wallace, Mickey Mouse History, 125.
¹⁴⁶ Wallace, Mickey Mouse History, 152.
Kent, an actual physical memorial in downtown as opposed to just the KSU campus, may heal the town-gown split. As Bodnar writes, even *fictionalized* monuments such as Abraham Lincoln’s log cabin birthplace, a reproduction that is inaccurate, generates more passion than Ast’s Kent memorial, with “most visitors left believing that they had truly seen the original setting as it was at the time of the President’s birth;”\(^{147}\) an honest, heartfelt reaction, which can either approve or disprove of the memorial but nevertheless elicits an emotional response that is missing from Kent.

Historian David Glassberg counters Weiss’ “institutional ambivalence” argument that “since it is nearly impossible to reach a consensus on the public interpretation of a historical event…the public historical representations such as an exhibit…memorial, or commemorative ceremony are often *deliberately ambiguous* to satisfy competing factions.”\(^{148}\) In other words, what else did we expect from Kent’s main memorial? However, Glassberg’s argument smacks of inevitability, the historian’s hated term, which does nothing more than provide KSU with an inappropriate escape clause, simultaneously depriving the scholar of an examination of the factors behind the university’s decision making. Weiss is justified in her analysis that Ast’s memorial is a disappointment, even an evasion, given the immense controversies regarding the shootings, embodied by the conservative-liberal dictum. Sorvig’s proposed design depicting walls of conflict, of Right versus Left, would have been more fitting.


The location of the main memorial site accentuates its lack of emotionality engendering further confusion. Weiss is certainly correct in criticizing the physical setting of Bruno Ast’s design. “The most obvious impediment to accessing the memorial is its location. The entire structure is tucked into a wooded area...Just as the map...is easy for a reader to miss, a visitor could easily bypass the woods where the memorial is hidden.”

Weiss’ opinion is supported by Gordon Vars and Shirley Wajda, both members of the May 4 Commemoration Coordinating Committee, “pointing out visually the absence of signs leading visitors from one [memorial] to the other.” The university’s own internal memo parallels Weiss’ case and consequently upholds the conservatives’ monopoly of memorialization.

“The memorial’s] interpretation- by signage, by docents, by audio-visuals, by models, by hands-on, by hand-outs, by labels, by charts, etc-is in need of work! Its lesson for learning and for application are yet to be fully tapped. There is no clear directive to visitors as to what to see, where to go, what’s there-needs an overall plan. Once there, it’s still confusing.”

Wajda elaborates on Weiss’ and Vars’ viewpoints and confirms conservative castration of liberal pro-student memory by criticizing the university for

“virtual feints and the geographical deflections away from the 4 May 1970 site-no signage...[and despite] its verbal embrace of Inquire, Learn, Reflect, the

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149 Weiss, “Preconceiving Material Rhetoric,” 89.

150 Gordon F. Vars to Barbara Meek (WEWS News Channel 5), May 4, 2001, May 4 Resource Room Papers, 1974-2004, Box 192, Kent State University Archives-May 4 Collection, Kent, OH.

university cannot be seen as anything else but unwilling to carry out its stated mission to the greater public it serves.”

Obviously the Kent State memorials are not as liberal-Left driven as they appear on the surface, but rather reflect conservative castration of any real pro-student voice, symbolized by the ambiguity of KSU and the abstract main memorial site. The fact that Ast’s memorial represented the second choice of KSU with the disqualification of Ian Taberner’s design because of his Canadian citizenship, further muddies the university’s position vis-à-vis memorialization. This and the gym controversy has tested KSU along with George Segal’s sculpture, *In Memory of May 4, 1970: Kent State-Abram and Isaac*.

Segal designed a memorial to Kent State which featured a middle-aged man (Abraham) holding a knife to the throat of a semi-naked younger male (Isaac) who is shown bound and pleading for leniency. Then KSU President, Brage Golding in a letter to Segal, rejected the design concerned that “viewers will see your Isaac as a student-victim and your Abraham as a National Guardsman-assassin.” Despite protests by the artist as well as numerous students, the sculpture does not adorn KSU’s campus but sits on the grounds of Princeton University’s chapel. Liberal elements were obviously disappointed at Kent’s decision while conservatives felt vindicated. This is further proof of the University’s ambiguity and even conservative leanings, caught between both

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152 Shirley Wajda, email message to 30th May 4 Commemoration Coordinating Committee, Nov 21, 1999, 30th May 4 Commemoration Committee Records.

153 Brage Golding to George Segal, June 28, 1978, Miscellaneous Memorials/Protests at Other Campuses, Box 90, Kent State University Archives-May 4 Collection, Kent, OH.
political ideologies, constructing memorials to May 4 but not really committing to them, or in Segal’s case, issuing an outright rebuff.

Ironically, other educational institutions have taken up memorialization of May 4 more energetically such as Boston’s Emerson College, which has organized numerous conferences on both the Kent and Jackson State shootings. Emerson’s 1995 event marking the 25th anniversary of the killings brought together John Filo and the subject of his infamous picture, Mary Ann Vecchio, meeting for the first time.154 Note that this historic rendezvous did not occur at Kent, and Emerson’s own symposium of historians threatened to eclipse KSU’s commemoration-indications of Kent’s hegemonic dissipation that I mentioned earlier. The university has lost all credibility on an issue that it should be controlling and championing. Another example involves KSU’s candlelight vigil which dates back to 1971; even here the university has lost ground to the State University of New York (SUNY), Plattsburgh, which initiated May 4th commemoration in 1970. A newsletter advertising their 1994 ceremony stated that “SUNY Plattsburgh is the only campus that annually remembers the tragic events that occurred;”155 a not too subtle condemnation of Kent’s uncertainty of how to memorialize the shootings. Even though the main memorial at KSU may be lacking characteristics of Guard denunciation that liberals had intended, it seems other schools have subscribed to the liberal-Left’s philosophy. However, this is not enough to dislodge conservative anti-student sentiment

154 See New York Times Metro, April 25, 1995, Miscellaneous Memorials/Protests at Other Campuses.

or penetrate the conservative-national narrative of triumph and unity that still holds the monopoly of memorialization.
CHAPTER X
AFTERMATH

The events at Kent are important in illustrating the larger ambiguity and conflict that continues over the 1960’s. As evidenced by letters and newspaper accounts even twenty years after the shootings, there lingers a strong presence of anti-student feeling and public endorsement of the National Guard as advocated by conservatives. Even though liberals and Leftists use the term “massacre” to describe Kent State, akin to the Boston Massacre, this has not successfully permeated the national consciousness. The fact that many of the current population persist in blaming and admonishing the students for the confrontation in 1970, as evidenced by the letters pouring into newspapers in the 1990’s commemorating the twentieth anniversary, testifies to the enduring appeal of right wing ideas.

Some historians incorrectly propose a third route that suggests neither side won since numerous people, including “many in the silent majority…were dedicated middle-of-the-roaders…as dismayed over polarization from the right as from the left.”\textsuperscript{156} Complexity did characterize the political environment of the time, but as Lisa McGirr stated earlier, this mainstream moved towards the conservatives as much as the Right co-opted the silent majority, thus preserving conservative hegemony. Some voters did

\textsuperscript{156} David Steigerwald, \textit{The Sixties and the End of Modern America} (St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 291.
express dismay at the Nixon “administration’s handling of the Kent State shootings…Nixon’s response to the tragedy…offered nothing in the way of conciliation…no calming words, no empathy for the families”\textsuperscript{157} which ultimately played a role in the Democrats maintaining control of Congress, as well as increasing their overall vote in the 1970 elections. Yet just two years later, Nixon won reelection in a landslide victory over his Democratic challenger, George McGovern, sweeping all but one state, including Ohio with sixty percent of the votes cast. “The magnitude of the victory convinced him that the silent majority shared the intensity of his hatreds and would approve of dealing with protestors, radicals, and establishment opponents by any means necessary.”\textsuperscript{158} Of course many other factors besides Kent may have influenced the votes against Nixon in 1970 and in his support in 1972, such as inflation and foreign policy respectively. But, this third tier of non-committants to the conservatives and liberals should not be completely ignored for they voiced equal anger at conservative and even some liberal cliques that supported Vietnam as well as those liberal elements that opposed the war. As David Farber notes, this segment of the American population “could not stomach the idea of the nation not only being run by corporate elites but also listening so seriously to the clamorous claims of the corporate elites’ privileged children.”\textsuperscript{159} This again illustrates the underlying manifestation of class which portrayed both Right and Left as advantaged.

\textsuperscript{157} Steigerwald, \textit{The Sixties and the End of Modern America}, 291.

\textsuperscript{158} Steigerwald, \textit{The Sixties and the End of Modern America}, 291-292.

\textsuperscript{159} Farber, \textit{The Sixties}, 297.
Who has triumphed in the monopoly of memorialization of Kent State?

Conservative sentiment dominates the memory of ordinary Americans who support National Guard heroics in confronting student misconduct. Conservative belief has rendered the Ast memorial ineffective, and denied Kent State the proper commemoration because the violence of May 1970 does not fit the American narrative of unity and patriotism that conservatives have co-opted as their own. Americans killing fellow Americans does not communicate national harmony or loyalty thereby rendering the American narrative prone to criticism. Thus, the Kent shootings cannot be given proper recognition or commemoration. There is a possibility that re-habilitation could occur but this seems unlikely. Public and private memorialization has embraced conservatism as much as the Right has welcomed them—the relationship is input-output, cause and effect on both sides. In other words, the Ast memorial has undoubtedly been influenced and ultimately silenced by conservative ideology and individual letters bear the hallmark of conservative thought, as much as the Right has incorporated patriotic and unifying ritual, thus triumphalist memory, into its own message.

Kent State University has remained ambiguous, sending mixed messages in its memorial literature and Bruno Ast’s design, as well as its construction of plaques to the victims yet also a gym complex over memorial ground. Overall the school has bowed more often than not to conservative pressure, not only with the gym but also rejection of the Abraham and Isaac sculpture, as well as a general ambivalence towards the historic memory of the shootings. There still remains no contextualization or direction to the events of May 4th on campus. More broadly, the Kent shootings are representative of an internal Cold War that has turned ‘hot’ in many areas of the American narrative, from the
American Revolution, Civil War to Vietnam and civil rights, involving traditionalism versus revisionism. Either one accepts America in all its glory, or questions the meaning of its society and cultural mores. Why? Because we as a society are forced “to confront the central problematic of the contemporary culture war: on what terms (that is, the truths, values, ideals, and moral commitments) will we order our lives together?”160 This equates to supporting the Guard or students at Kent State and the university has followed mainstream memory in favoring the former; the existence of on campus memorials to the students are misleading, proven by the half-heartedness of Ast’s site. This dichotomy of the traditional and revision narratives also exists because it is a useful framework for historians to filter events, and much like the question of objectivity, has perplexed historians for many years.

What does this mean for the success or failure of the liberal-Left and relevance of the 1960’s? Clearly, conservatives have been instrumental in shaping negative perceptions of the decade by juxtaposing these deficiencies against their idyllic version of the 1950’s. For example, the violence and loose sexual mores of the former compared with the latter’s prosperity and conformity. Marcus is correct in stating that conservatives idealize the fifties as a bastion of stability whereas liberals romanticize the sixties as a touchstone for remonstration, implying marked differences between the two. Although it is obvious that the Right has won by re-classifying the 1960’s in Reaganesque terms denoting liberal elitism that favored Leftist ‘anti-American’ cliques such as protestors and welfare deviants, the fifties were no golden age. There are differences to be sure but they are not as exaggerated as conservatives would have us

160 Hunter, Before the Shooting Begins, 243.

believe or to the extent they have become popularized by the Right. The fifties symbolized not an idyllic ideal but racial strife and Communist hysteria. Likewise, the sixties continued these themes and also amounted to more than just protests. The fifties were more than just culturally conservative for they saw Leftist elements such as the Beats and the sixties had its Rightist ingredients such as Goldwater Republicans. “Rather than separating the 1950’s and the 1960’s into distinct and opposing periods, [Marcus] asserts the link between the two decades, defining the 1960’s as the culmination of political activity begun years earlier.” This illustrates the enormous success of conservatives in re-configuring memory in their favor given that they have transformed the sixties into a radically different and thus negative decade compared to the fifties. The fact that historians such as Marcus are trying to disprove separation between the two decades shows to what extent conservatives dictate and shape memorial discourse. The fact that the National Guard has escaped criminal prosecution in both Federal and Civil court is another victory for conservatives. Add to this the pervasiveness of the Right’s pro-Guard, anti-student interpretation of the Kent shootings, as well as their command of the Ohio and national political landscape, it is no wonder that conservatives assert a monopoly of memory and memorialization, and hegemony in commemoration.

Is there any hope for liberals? Mike Wallace thinks so:

“There is, after all, no such thing as a single historical truth. All history is a human production- a deliberate selection, ordering and evaluation of past events, experiences, and processes. Consequently, there have always been and will

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161 Marcus, Happy Days and Wonder Years, 21.
always be great differences amongst those who issue and defend competing constructions of the past.”

However, what Wallace misses is the presentation of a solitary historical memory as historical truth- the conservative demonization of Kent students and the 1960’s, to the exclusion of other contending commemorations such as the liberal pro-student narrative. In truth, this distinct remembrance that emphasizes patriotism, triumphalism and unity has monopolized American culture and contrary to what Wallace states, manifests itself as the only legitimate version of American history. Conservatives can claim control of memorialization.

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CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

Ronald Reagan stated that “that it was time ‘move on, in unity’ thereby rhetorically relegating a divisive experience to the past.”\(^{163}\) He was referring to the Vietnam War and its accompanying protest culture including Kent State. Keith Beattie’s work looks at how this “ideology of unity”\(^{164}\) functions and that a denial of the Kent shootings as well as Vietnam “was a necessary precondition for the imposition of consensus and unity,”\(^{165}\) or what Richard Handler termed as the embrace of “national homogeneity.”\(^{166}\) In this environment of American triumphalism, unification and similarity, how could the very students that protested against this system be adequately memorialized? The Kent State shootings did not fit this national narrative of accord and harmony instead representing divisiveness. It is no wonder that memory of the 1960’s has become the possession of conservatives such as Reagan, who have successfully merged their narrative with national interests which in turn are popularized to reflect the


\(^{165}\) Beattie, *The Scar that Binds*, 15.

mainstream; “a sense of nationality and social cohesion”\textsuperscript{167} that excludes pausing to remember the victims of May 4th. After all, the Kent students challenge the uniqueness and benevolence of American exceptionalism and the notion that such civil unrest cannot happen here.

Kent State will hopefully remain an important aspect of American history, especially given “the spread of cable television channels, the continuing popularity of [the internet]…the…past of the nation…being newly marketed, on constant display and instantly accessible.”\textsuperscript{168} This may in turn lead to an evolutionist memory of May 4, 1970. As John Bodnar writes, “public memory will change again as political power and social arrangements change. New symbols will have to be constructed to accommodate these new formations, and old ones will be invested with new meaning.”\textsuperscript{169} However, it will be difficult to penetrate or modify the master narrative championing patriotism and unity propagated by conservatives. Mike Wallace argues the conservative-liberal debate is probably healthy for the nation since “the real betrayal of American tradition would be to insist on a single version of history or to make it the property of…any group.”\textsuperscript{170} But what he fails to understand is this is exactly what has occurred with the Right co-opting and creating a singular memorial tradition in the United States, one that has no place for the Kent shootings.


\textsuperscript{168} Marcus, \textit{Happy Days and Wonder Years}, 193.

\textsuperscript{169} Bodnar, \textit{Remaking America}, 252-253.

\textsuperscript{170} Wallace, \textit{Mickey Mouse History}, 308.
Ast’s Kent memorial does not “engage the public and sensitize it to the larger social context that has shaped that history and is in turn reflected in it,”\(^{171}\) along the lines of Sorvig’s rejected monument delineating icons of the Right and Left. This is a result of conservative castration of the opposing faction, whether reflected by American memorial tradition, in letters and newspapers, or national and Columbus politics, that prevents any effective rendering of liberal pro-student sentiment. Furthermore, it reinforces KSU’s failure in embracing and securing its own historical legacy highlighted by constant bouts of ambiguity such as mixed-message memorial literature, and eventual subjugation to dominant conservative forces in terms of gym and half-hearted May 4 memorial construction.

“If a museum exhibition [or memorial] piques visitors’ curiosity…and nudges them toward books, academic historians would be the last to complain,”\(^{172}\) thereby opening new dialogue not only between the general public, but also within the history profession. This would enable some correlation between memorialized and written history as well as closer co-operation between public and academic historians. This new alliance of academic and public historians could then tackle the conservative-liberal-Kent State debate with a fresh perspective such as my study, in detailing the intricate and interdependent connection vis-à-vis history, ideology, memory and memorialization. Until then it is clear that conservatives are dominating and dictating the parameters of debate


by instituting a collective national amnesia regarding the Kent shootings, translated into a ‘let’s move on’ approach, which has filtered through to affect memorialization on the very grounds where the event took place. This is reinforced by the emotionless and abstract Ast memorial. “In this case, amnesia was not deemed a form of dysfunction [as in the opening quote by Kennan]; rather, it was a necessary and healthy precondition for overcoming the wounding impact of [Kent State]…[liberal] memory was enjoined to fail so that [national unification and] healing could be achieved.”

173 Beattie, The Scar that Binds, 27.
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**APPENDIX A**

**KSU SHOULD TAKE FURTHER ACTION TO ADDRESS**

**THE IMPACT OF MAY 4 1970**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>OPINION</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
<th>UNCERTAIN</th>
<th>AGREE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FACULTY</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ADMINISTRATOR</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
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<td>39%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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</table>

*Source: Table 1. Data adapted from Organizational Analysis # 15- The Impact of May 4, 1970, p25, 1997, 30th May 4 Commemoration Committee, Records.*
APPENDIX B

MOST FREquent RESPONSES By KSU OFFICIALS TO MEMORIALIZATION OF MAY 4 SHOOTINGS IN NUMERICAL ORDER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOLUTION</th>
<th>ELABORATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Let it go</td>
<td>a) Stop talking about it! Stop commemorating it. We have heard enough about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) We have commemorated this day long enough- quit living in past and get on with future. Most kids attending Kent now aren’t even aware of what went on back then.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Destroy the monument, forget the event, get on with the business of education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) Begin slowly de-emphasizing the events.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2) Memorialize                                      | a) Get the statue (*George Segal’s Abraham’s Sacrifice of Isaac*) back from Princeton University and acknowledge it as part of the history of Kent as opposed to denying it.  
|                                                   | b) Seek funding for May 4 commemorative museum.  
|                                                   | c) Continue what is being done- May 4 Memorial, vigils, etc. and being open about it- I’m glad the memorial is on the student/campus tour-we can’t run from it.  
|                                                   | d) Establish a national peace prize awarded by KSU or some committee.  
| 3) Build on its positives                        | a) Use it to begin to focus on world event issues, how to deal with conflict, peaceful resolution. We should lead the country in these types of studies.  
|                                                   | b) Mourn the losses but celebrate that KSU is stronger for it.  

<p>| | | |</p>
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<th></th>
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</table>
| 4) Already doing it | a) I can’t think of any steps that KSU hasn’t already taken. 
b) I think we try hard to be as positive as possible- not ignoring, but not over-recognizing. I would say keep going as is. |
| 5) Educate about its importance | a) A course on May 4, 1970 would be a good start. |
| 6) Discuss and learn from it | b) Increase awareness of the polarization of attitudes that led to the killings. |
| 7) Publicize it | a) Maybe we need to use it to our advantage in marketing 
b) Promote the site as a tourist place for visitors to Kent. Like it or not, it is a national shrine, like the site of the Boston massacre. Kent could easily be the most visited campus in Ohio. |
<p>| 8) Acknowledge it happened | a) Acknowledge but do not celebrate it |
| 9) Discourage focus on it | a) Probably the only truly successful venture would be a university name |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>10) Stop feeling badly about it</strong></td>
<td><strong>change i.e., University of Kent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>b) Eliminate student group called May 4th Task Force. It perpetrates crazy liberal image.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>a) Stop feeling guilty—it was a lifetime ago for most students.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>b) Stop making excuses and being embarrassed by the event.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Table 2. Data adapted from *Organizational Analysis #15-The Impact of May 4, 1970*, p35-43, 1997, 30th May 4 Commemoration Committee, Records.*
APPENDIX C

WEISS’ ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE AVAILABLE AT THE AST MEMORIAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements that Construct Group Characteristics</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
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<tr>
<td>References to Students</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Information about Students Who Were Shot</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to Student Activism</td>
<td>241</td>
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<tr>
<td>References to Student/Activist Misconduct Prior to the Shootings</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to Good Conduct from Students</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Students’ Actions Described in Passive Voice</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to Townspeople</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Responses Attributed to Townspeople</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to Guardsmen</td>
<td>238</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptions of Guardsmen Using Force</td>
<td>198</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative Language Used to Condemn the Shootings</td>
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<td>Emotional Responses Attributed to Guardsmen</td>
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<td>Thoughts Attributed to Guardsmen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hint of Errors by University Officials</td>
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*Source: Table 3. Brochure’s Discursive Construction of Participants’ Identities, Weiss, 73.*