

The Kent State Massacre:

Tension Between Protest and Authority

Rights

The students had the constitutional right of freedom of speech given to them in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. They had the right to protest their discontent about America's involvement in the Vietnam War.

Thesis

The Kent State massacre on May 4, 1970 revealed a tragic failure to uphold the balance between the right to protest and the responsibility of authorities to respond appropriately. When Ohio National Guardsmen fired into a crowd of unarmed Vietnam War demonstrators, killing four students and wounding nine, it highlighted the ongoing tension between citizens' rights to free speech and the government's responsibility to ensure public safety.

Responsibilities

The guardsmen had the responsibility and duty of keeping the protest peaceful. However, they did the opposite by shooting into the crowd of demonstrators. This responsibility stems from state laws and operational guidelines.

Students had a right to express their discontent, however, it was their responsibility to do it respectfully. The students protested peacefully and although they threw rocks, they posed no real threat to the guards.

Multiple Perspectives

The guardsmen claimed they felt endangered. This is questionable because there was significant distance between the guardsmen and protesters. Many justify the guardsmen's actions of opening fire into the crowd by emphasizing that students were throwing rocks. The protesters were violating their responsibility to keep protests peaceful.

Historical Context

The Vietnam War began on November 1, 1955. The United States invaded Vietnam to prevent a communist takeover of the region.

In 1964, Vietnam War protests began. Men were afraid of being drafted to war. Protesters were used to express dissatisfaction towards the draft and war.

Historical Significance

Protests are still used to express feelings of discontent with events in the world. Protests play an important part of American history.

Short-Term Impact

This event impacted the country by causing hundreds of schools to shut down and a nationwide student strike, which had a direct impact on politics leading to the downfall of the Nixon administration.

Main Event

Students gathered at Kent State to protest President Nixon's draft policy, the Cambodia Campaign, and guards on campus.

The guardsmen were called to Kent State University by President Nixon to suppress anti-Vietnam War sentiment. When protesters refused to separate, the guardsmen shot tear gas into the crowd. They used rifles to shoot towards groups of demonstrators, killing four students and wounding nine.

Long-Term Impact

In present day, students at universities hold protests similar to the protests at Kent State. In 2024, students barricaded themselves in Hamilton Hall at Columbia University in protest of Israel's invasion of Gaza.

There are still protests about the people affected by the Kent State Shootings. This event inspired younger people to become activists.



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