

COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

On the Tragedy of Kent State

Four students at Kent State University were killed in May 1970, when National Guardsmen fired on a crowd protesting America's recent invasion of Cambodia. The event triggered strong reactions from the American public, some taking the side of the students, and others supporting the guardsmen.

As you read the passages below, try to envision how each side perceived the other.

FOR THE STUDENTS

Parents of Jeffrey Glenn Miller, one of four students killed at Kent State, Life magazine, May 15, 1970

I didn't exactly agree with Jeff. I don't believe in demonstrations. . . . Jeff stood up for what he believed and he didn't believe in violence. He did more with his little life than I or any of my friends have.

President Nixon wants people to believe Jeff turned to violence. That is not true. What kind of sympathy is this? When four kids are dead he gave no comfort. Nixon acts as if the kids had it coming. But shooting into a crowd of students, *that* is violence. They say it could happen again if the Guard is threatened. They consider stones threat enough to kill children. I think the violence comes from the government.

The Louisville Courier-Journal, December 16, 1973

It doesn't take too great a leap of the imagination, in fact, to wonder whether this man [an armed undercover FBI and police photographer at the scene of the shootings], a self-confessed "gun nut," might not have been among those working in J. Edgar Hoover's now-revealed 1968–71 campaign to "expose, disrupt, and otherwise neutralize" the New Left Movement in this country.

Parents and neighbor of Allison Krause, one of four students killed at Kent State, Newsweek, May 18, 1970

I can't blame 18-year-olds for not wanting to go to Cambodia and be killed. Look, I had a daughter and now she is dead.

May her death be on [Nixon's] back. [My daughter] resented being called a bum because she disagreed with someone else's opinion. Is this a crime? Is this a reason for killing her? Have we come to such a state in this country that a young girl has to be shot because she disagrees deeply with the actions of her government?

You have no idea how this has brought the whole thing about the war and campus dissent home to this neighborhood . . . no idea at all. If someone like Allison is killed, my God . . .

Kent State faculty, Newsweek, May 18, 1970

We hold the guardsmen, acting under orders and under severe psychological pressures, less responsible for the massacre than are Governor Rhodes [governor of Ohio] and Adjutant General Del Corso, whose inflammatory statements produced these pressures.