



# **67 Shots: Kent State and the End of American Innocence**

*Howard Means*

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At midday on May 4, 1970, after three days of protests, several thousand students and the Ohio National Guard faced off at opposite ends of the grassy campus Commons at Kent State University. At noon, the Guard moved out. Twenty-four minutes later, Guardsmen launched a 13-second, 67-shot barrage that left four students dead and nine wounded, one paralyzed for life. The story doesn't end there, though. A horror of far greater proportions was narrowly averted minutes later when the Guard and students reassembled on the Commons.

The Kent State shootings were both unavoidable and preventable: unavoidable in that all the discordant forces of a turbulent decade flowed together on May 4, 1970, on one Ohio campus; preventable in that every party to the tragedy made the wrong choices at the wrong time in the wrong place.

Using the university's recently available oral-history collection supplemented by extensive new interviewing, Means tells the story of this iconic American moment through the eyes and memories of those who were there, and skillfully situates it in the context of a tumultuous era.

## **67 Shots: Kent State and the End of American Innocence Details**

Date : Published April 12th 2016 by Da Capo Press

ISBN : 9780306823794

Author : Howard Means

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History, Politics, Crime, True Crime

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# **From Reader Review 67 Shots: Kent State and the End of American Innocence for online ebook**

## **Valorie Hallinan says**

If you want to know what happened on May 4, 1970 at Kent State, this is the book to read. Excellent, even-handed writing by Howard Means. Remembering those students today, and reflecting on those events long ago and their place in my memoir on Books Can Save a Life. <http://wp.me/p28JY1-2DK>

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## **Patricia says**

I was 10 years old and lived 40 miles away from Kent State University when the campus shootings happened on May 4, 1970. I clearly remember seeing the iconic picture of the grieving young woman in the paper the next morning. But I never really understood what happened. The author of this book did a good job of presenting balanced viewpoints and plausible explanations for the actions of the students and the National Guard and others associated with the tragedy. Even after 46 years there are contradictions in testimony that render a definitive understanding impossible. It does seem clear that these deaths further eroded support for the war and hastened the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam. And it also seems clear that it is almost miraculous that more people did not die or get injured in the powder keg that erupted that day. It is worthwhile to revisit this sad event so that we can take lessons from what happened for the future.

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## **Sue says**

On May 4, 1970, four college students at Kent State University were killed by the Ohio National Guard after several days of protest about the Vietnam War. This book by Howard Means gives the background of the shooting, tells us about the people who were shot and the aftermath of the shooting. I had just finished college when the Kent State shootings occurred and thought that I understood all about them but I learned so much in this book that I either didn't know or had forgotten. But even if you weren't alive in 1970, this book is one that you should read - it gives a clear picture of the state that the country was in at this time, the way the town's people felt about the college students and the way the college students felt about the war. The author does a fantastic job of giving the facts but also humanizing the story to make it very readable and interesting. It was a sad time in American history and shouldn't be forgotten. (I received this book from NetGalley for an impartial review)

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## **Steven Z. says**

On May 4th, 1970, 28 people died in actions related to the war in Vietnam; 24 on the actual battlefield, and 4 on the campus of Kent State University. My memories of that day are quite clear as I was a student at Pace University in New York City. A day or two later I joined a demonstration against the war as Mayor John Lindsay ordered the flag at City Hall Park to be flown at half-staff in remembrance of the 4 student who died at Kent State. Almost immediately construction workers who were working on the World Trade Center site marched up Broadway beating anyone who seemed to be against the war, while New York City's finest did

nothing to stop them. The next day my US Army Reserve unit was activated on the St. John's University campus in Queens to deal with demonstrations. My experience reflects the split in American society at the time and the total deterioration that existed between generations, and the attitude of many toward the Nixon administration. Howard Means' new book 67 SHOTS: KENT STATE AND THE END OF AMERICAN INNOCENCE captures that time period as he reevaluates events leading up to the shootings, the actual shootings themselves, and how people reacted and moved forward following the resulting casualties.

The climate at Kent State was heated long before President Richard Nixon went on television on April 30, 1970 to announce the American "incursion" into Cambodia to root out North Vietnamese sanctuaries that were used to attack American troops. This announcement exacerbated tensions between the administration and the anti-war movement that was labeled as "bums" by Nixon and his Vice President Spiro T. Agnew. Means was able to reconstruct events at Kent State through numerous interviews of many of the actual participants as well as conducting research at Kent State's archive. This allowed Means to weave his narrative encompassing the actions of students and members of the National Guard and try and determine whether the Guardsmen were under enough of a threat to open fire on the students, or did the climate that existed on campus from May 1-4 make the tragedy inevitable.

Tension on campus was brought to a head when students burned down the ROTC building on May 2nd, and later that day the National Guard was summoned by Governor James Rhodes and deployed on campus. One of the most important questions that Means explores was why was the Guard called upon when it lacked the training in crowd control, and the use of M1 rifles, when the Ohio Highway Patrol was trained and ready to intervene. Means places a great deal of the blame for events on Governor James Rhodes who was running for the US Senate against Congressman Robert Taft, Jr. and wanted to strike a tough persona to enhance his election bid as he stated on the morning of 5/3 when things seemed to be calming down, that he "would eradicate the disease of student unrest, not merely treat the symptoms."

The inevitability of a crisis at Kent State resulted from disparate forces-the high spirits of the student body (about 4,000 of 21,000 students who participated in the demonstrations), the spring like weather, the war in Vietnam, Nixon's Cambodia speech, campus radicalism (about 300 students), the exhortations of Jerry Rubin, local anxiety, the generational divide, and growing tensions between the town and the university. Means argues effectively that outside agitators were not responsible for May 4th, as events were fostered by Kent State's student body. Supporters of the National Guard argue that SDS was responsible for organizing students which was not true. Means presents a frame by frame picture of May 4th and concludes that the shootings did not have to take place. The National Guard spokespersons argued that there was a sniper who threatened the soldiers, but there was no evidence that one existed. Further, the students did not rush the soldiers who claimed their lives were in danger. The problem throughout the crisis was the lack of communication and coordination between the National Guard, the university, and town officials. Means based his conclusions on evaluating the statements of the main participants and the interviews he conducted over many years. For Means it is clear that the National Guard was not protecting itself from "imminent danger, instead, there seems to have been a strange mix of intentionality, horrific judgement, terrible luck, preventability and inevitability." The generation gap, the Age of Aquarius, all came together on May 4, 1970.

Means describes the moods of students and guardsmen and the shock and outrage that followed the shootings. He points to the heroes, like Major Don Manley of the Ohio Highway Patrol who convinced the National Guard commander, General Robert Canterbury to allow faculty marshals additional time to convince students to disperse, before further damage could be done. Other heroes include Geology professor Glenn Frank, a former marine who convinced students to leave when the National Guard reformed and were getting ready to fire again. However, most townspeople and guardsmen felt that the students brought the

shootings on themselves and they got what they deserved. It is amazing that the actual firing took 13 seconds to unleash 67 bullets!

Means does an excellent job describing the actions and statements of the Nixon administration as well as taking the reader into the White House. He argues that Nixon became unmoored by events at Kent State that led to his famous 2:00am visit to the Lincoln Memorial to engage young people. Means also examines the culpability of all the major players in this drama; from university president, Robert White; Kent mayor, Leroy Satron; Governor James Rhodes, and National Guard Commander Robert Canterbury and his officers. Means explores the legal actions that followed and the Scranton Commission that investigated the shootings. What emerges is that the death of 4 students and 9 wounded should not have occurred. It was due to poor training, a lack of communication, and a political climate that was on edge. Means has written a well-documented account of events and for anyone interested in one of the most iconic tragedies of the Vietnam era, this book is well worth consulting.

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### **Susan Berry says**

This rating is really 2.5 stars, rounded up.

The author gave an impression that students, including those who were killed or wounded on May 4, 1970, somehow share blame with the National Guard, Kent State University administration and the Ohio state government. That "every party to the tragedy made the wrong choices at the wrong time in the wrong place."

He discusses at length the destructive behavior of young people (not necessarily students) on and off campus during the days prior to May 4. Why. I hope it isn't because he believes it is relevant to the murders. There is absolutely no justification whatsoever for the random shooting and maiming by the National Guard at Kent State that day. None. The book provides no reasonable explanation about why the shootings were appropriate, and I wanted the author to be more fervent in his discussion about responsibility and lack of accountability.

The book covers an important event and raises awareness of what can happen. This tragedy should not be forgotten. It feels like it was just yesterday, and it also feels like it could happen today given the polarization and animosity at play in our country.

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### **Nancy says**

On May 4, 1970 the Ohio National Guard and student protesters engaged in a conflict that resulted in four students dead and nine wounded. It was the culmination of days of increased emotional conflict that began when President Nixon announced that American troops were going into Cambodia to cut off supplies to the Viet Cong. He thought it would help end the war. Students at Kent State University did not see it that way.

Fueled by 3.2 beer, the fine spring weather, high emotions, and a culture of idealism, students began protesting. They burned down the campus ROTC building. The Ohio governor called in the National Guard and the campus was put under a military take-over. Students protested the military presence, attacking the Guard with curses, throwing stones and bricks and bags of human feces and urine. And at some point the Guard felt vulnerable, and either were instructed or emotionally reacted with use of force. And 67 shots from

military grade rifles splattered the crowds--the innocent and the threatening, and those walking to class and the merely curious.

In May of 1970 I was a senior in high school and the heady last weeks of school activities and parties betrayed my inner life, my deep sense of loneliness, self doubt, and a longing for connection. My diary pages are filled with everyone I talked to, joked with, every event I attended, poetry, dreams, mentions of books I read. But the greater world is not present.

I was aware of the cultural and political climate, but I resented the confusing conflicts of the world; I was a girl still trying to figure myself out. The body counts, protests, generational war, violence, hate, distrust, drugs--these were scary. While the events of May 4, 1970 at Kent State University occurred I was avoiding television news and hoping someone, any one, would ask me to the senior prom. It was as big a problem as I could handle. I was seventeen years old.

I have never had any illusions about the 1960s being the 'best of times' to grow up. For years I avoided thinking about those days. Starting with the Cuban Missile Crisis to The Ballad of the Green Berets, the War on Poverty to Hell No, We Won't Go, and sit-ins and Hippies and Earth Day-- it seemed I grew up in one long arc of culture and political wars. There were the assassinations and the brutal response to Civil Rights workers. We went from the bubble gum silliness of I Want To Hold Your Hand to Hey! Look! What's that Sound! and the drop out idealism of The Age of Aquarius. On May 6 anti-war protesters at Memorial Park in my home town of Royal Oak, MI marched to the local draft board; it turned into a melee. In August the park was the scene of riots between thousands of youth and the police. The national discord had come to my hometown.

I requested 67 Shots: Kent State and the End of American Innocence by Howard Means because, nearly fifty years later, it was past time I dealt with those days and understood what had happened. It was a painful trip, like witnessing a horrible accident you can't look away from.

Howard Means' book is thorough and detailed, including newly available oral histories. He recreates the events that escalated fear and high emotions, politicizing students who reacted in visceral hate against the overwhelming military presence on the campus: 1,317 Guardsmen with bayonets on their powerful M1 rifles, hundreds of trucks including armored personnel carriers, mortar launchers, and helicopters. Rumors spread fear. Town residents boarded up businesses and family men kept armed watch over their homes.

Human beings, young men and women in their late teens and early twenties, lost their identity and became bums, pigs, commies, traitors, hoodlums, hippies. The students were no longer 'our children', they were the enemy. Rational thought was lost. Compassion was dead. The opposing forces were just a bunch of kids, really, scared armed boys and angry kids yet to understand the deadly earnestness of this escalating local war.

After the shootings the students could have easily been sucked into the moment, charging the Guardsmen, resulting in more deaths. Thankfully, four men stepped in. A highway patrolman, Major Don Manley, convinced General Canterbury of the National Guards to give students time to disperse before further action. Graduate student Steven Sharoff met with Gen. Canterbury and was told to move the students off. Sharoff told the students to sit down and popular geology professor Glenn Frank, an ex-Marine with a flat-top haircut, addressed the students with anguished voice and in tears, pleading for them to disperse before there was a slaughter. He convinced them, saving lives. The Guard who had surrounded the students made exits and the students slowly left.

The aftershock rocked the country. Protests and student strikes rocked the country. People tried to understand what had happened and how it had happened, who was to blame. The President for taking the war into Cambodia? The Ohio governor for sending in the National Guard? The Kent State leadership for its 'appeasement' when the students burned down the ROTC? The protesting students who threatened and cajoled the Guardsmen? The Guard for ordering fire? Guardsmen who were scared and reacted viscerally in self-protection?

Here's the kicker. There is no resolution. No PI, detective, policeman, rounds up the usual suspects, details the series of events, and IDs the murderer. No court case judge found a guilty party. We do not know exactly how the National Guards came to shoot at the protesters.

The great divisions in America have changed but survive. The dehumanization of people who do not fit our world view or philosophy is rampant. I see comments on social media from individuals who have no compunction in announcing they hate so-and-so. When will we learn to talk and listen? To seek common ground? To build bridges and not walls?

Means ends the book with a quote stating that without forgiveness there is no healing and "the murder goes on forever." That does not mean to forget what had happened; the deaths of the four students must serve as a reminder and lesson.

I received a free ARC through NetGalley in exchange for a fair and unbiased review.

"Using the university's recently available oral history collection, Howard means delivers a book that tracks events still shrouded in misunderstanding, positions them in the context of a tumultuous era in American History, and shows how the shootings reverberate still in our national life."

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## **Bob H says**

This is a straightforward, strongly-written and human retelling of the 1970 event, still painful even retold 45 years on. While a detailed account of that day and the campus unrest that preceded it, it also explores the origins -- the invasion of Cambodia and the general protests that followed on that fateful week -- and the social implications afterward. The book does, as perspective, to contrast Kent State with other school shootings, from the University of Texas in 1966 to the Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook tragedies in our time, but also places Kent State in the context of its times. It was one of the pivotal moments in the Vietnam War - and it happened in middle America.

It was a turning point in American society and this work discusses it, the politics, the social hostilities, as well as the various inquests that would follow. Above all, it humanizes, and illuminates, the people caught in this event and is well worth pondering. Highly recommend.

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## **Toni says**

Anyone that was alive in 1970 and remembers this incident should read this book and clear all the rumors, hearsay and incorrect reports that occurred days, weeks, years after it took place. I was a senior in high school, one month from graduation, when this horrible "accident" broke into all news reports that day. It

shocked me then, and haunted me ever since. As I read this book, which I'm pleased has finally been written, I still cannot believe how some people who were there justify the action of shooting and killing unarmed college students.

"They were throwing rocks." Okay, then arrest them; throw tear gas, DON'T SHOOT THEM. "They should have shot more." Unbelievable to me even to this day.

At the time, I grew up in a mid-sized, east coast, college town. That college today is huge, but not so much in 1970. As 18 year old HS seniors about to graduate, we thought it was our right to hang out on this college campus on weekends. Attend parties, dances, athletic events, and see our old friends who graduated the previous year and now attended this college. I don't know why, but most of their anti-war protests went peacefully. We were all shocked when we heard what happened at Kent State.

I don't remember hearing any adults say what some said from the local area surrounding Kent State, ("they should've shot more") but that doesn't mean it wasn't said. The late 60's and early 70's was a tough time with the Vietnam war, the Kennedy and King assassinations, then Watergate and ultimately Nixon's resignation. Our parents, many who had fought in WWII and the Korean war couldn't understand this lack of patriotism, no questions asked; or protesting. Still, we couldn't understand shooting at college students on their own campus, unarmed, protesting a war. Everyone should read this book.

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## **Elizabeth says**

I received this book to review thanks to NetGalley and De Capo Press

I have long been fascinated by the Kent State shootings but my school history books didn't really talk about the Kent State shootings at all. In fact, the school history books would only mention that the Kent State students were protesting the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War and were shot by the Ohio National Guard. That was the extent of my knowledge until I traveled to Kent State in June 2014. I learned a little more about the Kent State shootings by being at the site where it all started. I took photos of the site and the information displayed at the site. The best way to learn about the Kent State shootings isn't through school history books or even visiting the site of the shooting, it is through reading "67 Shots" by Howard Means!

Means details the entire event of the Kent State shooting including everything that led up to the protests and the aftermath, including the judicial hearings and potential of criminal charges. Means is very thorough in his examination of this tragic event. I honestly felt like I was in the midst of the protests while reading this book.

If you want to know everything about the Kent State shootings, then this is the book to read!

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## **Todd Gerber says**

I transferred to Kent State as a sophomore in 1989, and was on campus for the 20th anniversary of the May 4th shootings. I've sought to understand how such a thing could have happened, and have visited those spots involved in this sad event many times. This book is one of the best that I've read, providing interviews from both sides and a chronology unequalled in other publications.

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## **Amy says**

In 1990, I was a junior at Western Illinois University. While pursuing a minor in English, I wrote a paper for a Creative Writing class on WIU's response to the Vietnam War and most specifically, the tragedy at Kent State on May 4, 1970. My professor really liked it and encouraged me to submit it to the Western Courier, the University newspaper, for publication. While researching events surrounding Western's response to Kent State, I contacted a few alumni members whose names I had found in earlier documentation of the times. I can remember very specifically a phone call I had with one gentleman who had been a part of Western's non-violent response to May 4th by peacefully occupying Simpkins Hall for 5 days. He was easily agitated and impassioned...clearly this event was something he still held very close to his heart some 20 years later as we discussed how it all went down. He sternly said to me, "You have no idea what you are trying to uncover here." His response scared my 21-year-old self, but didn't stifle my long time interest in the event.

Now, some 26 years later, I live in Ohio. I feel a deep connection with the state and its history. Kent State seems even more real to me because I live here. Howard Means does an excellent job portraying both sides of an incredibly complex event. Watching the documentaries he cites in his bibliography is also very insightful while reading this book. Thank you, Howard, for taking the time to invest in this deeply sad part of our state history, so that others who weren't there could feel in the pages of this book like they were.

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## **Lindsay says**

I'm glad this book exists. I was a student at Kent State in the mid 2000's, and studied architecture in Taylor Hall, the building shown on the cover of the book, walking past the graves in the Prentice Hall parking lot everyday on my way to & from class. With our own fair share of anti-war protests against GWB's invasion of Iraq during my time at Kent, the May 4th shootings felt especially poignant to many, but I admit I only knew the generalities of the events leading up to the shootings and almost nothing about the aftermath. Thankfully, this book has corrected that. A very detailed, well-researched & accessible account, that tries to be fairly unbiased, or perhaps to fairly apportion both blame & compassion where it is due. Since the book was published so recently it was great to hear about developments & research from as recent as the 2010s, while also placing the shootings into a more present day historical context. I found this book especially timely & thought-provoking, finishing it weeks after the Parklands school shooting & 1 day after the March for our Lives - noticing the many similarities between the (incredibly disheartening) attitudes of the media towards student victims & survivors of gun violence, the government's failure to do much of anything to remedy the situation, and the intense division between conservatives & liberals that was also present during the Vietnam war. As they say, "Those who forget history..."

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## **Matt says**

The tragedy at Kent State took place just two months after my birth, and yet in all the years since I really didn't take the time to learn much about it. It wasn't until my family and I visited the campus a few weeks ago and saw where the tragedy occurred that I was moved to read more. Howard Means has done an outstanding and balanced job of laying out the course of events, laying the blame evenly on all parties, and allowing us to see how all of the matches were stuck together to set off this explosive event. When all is said and done, however, he makes sure we never forget that the shootings of 13 people were tragic and ultimately things could have been done to avoid them. It's a powerful read and reinforces what PBS used as the phrase

to refer to May 4: "The Day the '60s Died."

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## **William says**

Audio When this took place I had been out of the US Army for 2 years and had just started my lower div studies in a Silicon Valley community.

This story oscillates from who and what was responsible for the event. He did this well considering we have a national empathy for student expression.

Two things that were greatly explored which I will judge are:

1--public protest.....my opinion this must limited to legal order

2--use of National Guard.....my opinion is that the NG is currently, and has never been, trained for such civil police force. My first 6 months of my army training was done with NG and enlisted reserves. Unless they went to military police school, they had no business being at the assembly until after violence superceeded what police could handle.

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## **Kirsti says**

Well-researched and compelling account of the Kent State shooting. The author includes some quotations from anti-protesters but is clearly on the side of the protesters here. He believes that Kent State was an important factor in causing young people to turn away from politics and toward their own pleasures, finances, needs, etc. I can see his point--not only were protesters killed or paralyzed, but also many ordinary people said things like, "They should have shot more of them."

I wish the author had said more about the Jackson State shootings, which were not widely reported or analyzed because the news media was unsurprised by and uninterested in the fact that young black people died. You can read more about Jackson State here: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/st...>

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