

An inevitable American Tragedy

The killings at Kent State
breed rage, platitudes and
an effort to understand

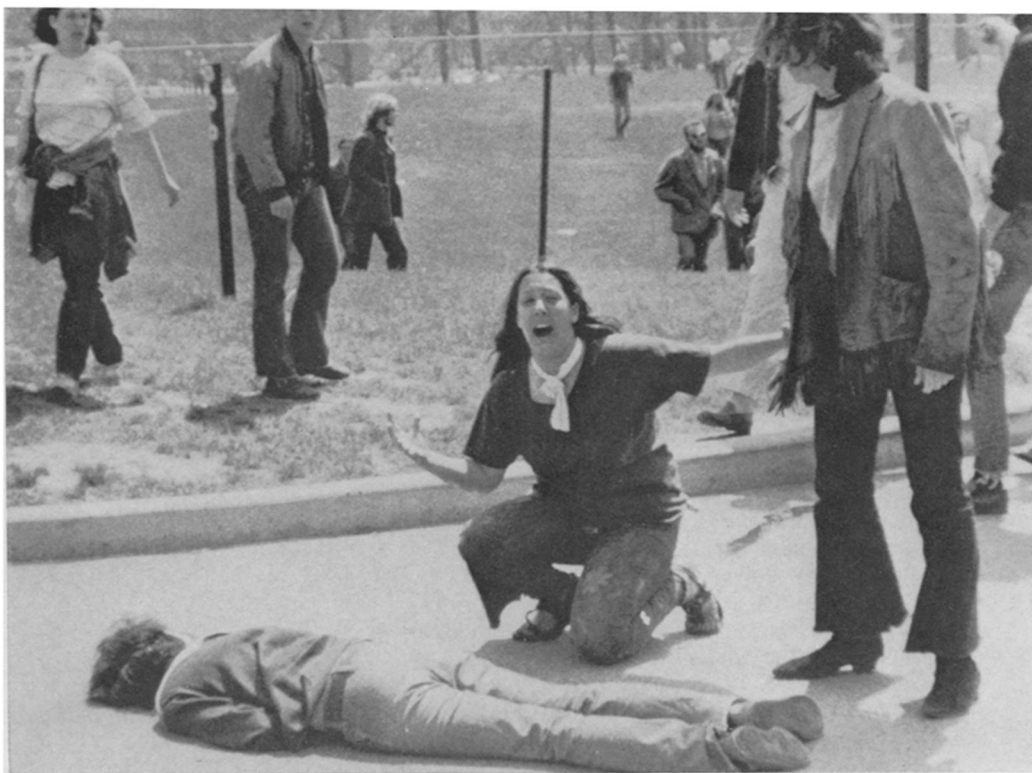
The death of four students and the wounding of 11 others at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, this week, where Ohio National Guardsmen fired on 1,000 antiwar demonstrators of a student body of 19,000, intensified already boiling dissent on the nation's campuses. It may have been inevitable.

"By the laws of probability," says Dr. Lewis S. Feuer, University of Toronto sociologist and author of a book on student violence, "this had to occur."

Whether the Kent State incident was an accident, a necessary response by the National Guard to student violence or an irresponsible and emotional act by hostile guardsmen is unknown. But Dr. Feuer believes that the very nature of the increasing frustration of students and increasing hostility toward them must result in such incidents. And he is convinced the Kent State killings will certainly inflame student radicalism.

There was widespread reaction to the Kent State tragedy: In Washington, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) said the students were "slain in the heart of Middle America by the violent temper of our society"; Sen. William B. Saxbe (R-Ohio) spoke from another point of view when he said radical students must learn that "the rules have been changed" and that student violence will no longer be tolerated.

In the aftermath, police lined the sidewalks in front of the White House, where 175 demonstrators rallied nearby to protest the killings. Fears of violence across the country increased because of the Kent State killings and because of a potentially violent Washington, D.C., antiwar protest scheduled for Saturday. Local, state, university and Federal offi-



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Kent State University: Confrontation suddenly becomes a deadly affair.

cially everywhere at midweek were devising tactics to deal with it, while social and behavioral scientists continued their efforts to understand the processes which led to it.

Riots and protests may be new phenomena on United States campuses. But they are a well-established, almost ritualized, feature of Latin American campus life, and they have also been common at European universities since medieval times. Japanese students have viewed demonstrations as a means of expressing their needs for years. But protests in these countries have been aimed either at the implementation of a clearly defined revolutionary goal—as with Marxist students in China and Russia before the revolutions in those countries—or at expressing specific demands.

But in the United States the protests do not have the disciplined quality of a coherent revolutionary movement, and increasingly they are not aimed at specific goals within the existing structure of society. "We in the United States have had a marvelous freedom without the need for mass uprisings," says Dr. Charles P. Loomis, Michigan State University sociologist.

Student protest became a large-scale phenomenon in the United States in the early and mid-1960's. Since then, student protest has proliferated until now there is scarcely a campus that has not been affected. The protests have centered around a variety of grievances, including the alleged impersonality of the multiversity, racial discrimination, environmental problems and, most often, the war and the draft. But the violence has generally been restricted

to nonlethal forms until the Kent State incident.

"We've had student uprisings of the boys-will-be-boys variety in the United States even in the 19th century," says Dr. Kenneth Boulding of the University of Colorado. "But these didn't have political overtones. The current discontent is a product of a feeling of impotence and powerlessness in the face of the war and the draft." Dr. Boulding believes that increasing awareness of the horror of war, partly because of television and the mass media, has caused the frustration on the part of the students to be far greater than it would be otherwise.

As a result, in the United States protests are coming more and more to resemble the self-destructive and nihilistic kinds of student revolts that occurred in Russia and Eastern Europe in the 1870's and 1880's. In the face of what the students view as a totally unresponsive society, they are increasingly willing to throw themselves blindly on the barricades. Suggests Dr. Feuer: "Thus they will do immense harm to themselves and to the country. They are provoking an extreme kind of repression."

And in the views of Drs. Feuer and Loomis, this is exactly the aim of the student radical leaders. Despite the appearance of lack of discipline on the part of student rioters in general, a militant group exists that wants nothing more than to create incidents such as occurred in Ohio.

Student radicals are angrier than ever before over involvement in Southeast Asia, especially since President Nixon sent United States troops into

Cambodia. Rancor against radical students by establishment figures such as Vice President Agnew has also increased. And although President Nixon, the day after the Kent State incident, tried to inject a conciliatory note by saying he approves of nonviolent protest, the bloody confrontation is bound to increase student discontent.

"These shootings are exactly what the New Left wants," says Dr. Feuer. "The overwhelming majority of students didn't take part, but this is bound to swing a large number of students in behind the radicals." He suggests that student dissent now will move from a localized problem to a possibly widespread student strike that could close down many universities.

And in this sense, violence on the part of police or troops plays into the hands of the radicals. At Michigan State, says Dr. Loomis, there is a high degree of police professionalism that has enabled student demonstrations to be handled with a minimum of force and emotion. "Our police in the United States generally haven't learned to handle civil disorder with restraint and as highly trained and respectable officers," he says.

Dr. Feuer points out that a high degree of hostility toward students on the part of police and troops who often have working-class origins exacerbates this problem. But Dr. Loomis suggests that with highly professional training this kind of hostility could be overcome—as he says it has been in Europe where there is a longer history of dealing with student uprisings.

The future of student activism in the United States is difficult to predict. Dr. Loomis points out that the increasing polarization between those who want the police to be less restrained and the students, who are increasingly identified by their long hair and outrageous costumes, is bound to grow. This, he suggests, is a very different situation from earlier radical movements where revolutionaries aimed at identifying themselves with broad segments of the population, Lenin with the workers and Mao with the peasants, for example.

The student radicals, although they collect more campus followers each time there is a violently repressive act, are thus bound to become more separated from the general processes of American life, and their sense of hopeless frustration is bound to grow. This in turn will cause more violence and provocation. There is little doubt the Kent State killings, whatever caused them, will have such an effect.

"The thing may become self-terminating when we have to close down large numbers of universities," says Dr. Feuer. "When they are reopened, maybe we can restore sanity." □

Ferment among the physicists



National Bureau of Standards

Establishment and nonestablishment types share the floor at APS meeting.

The American Physical Society was founded in 1899. For 71 years it has functioned as a learned society, holding meetings at which physicists could tell each other about their work and publishing journals in which they could write about it.

In the years before World War II, when physicists formed a small and mostly academic group, and during the war and the flush years since, no need for any wider sphere of activity on the part of the APS was felt. In recent decades the physics community has been led by an establishment of elder statesmen, the people who persuaded the Government to support science during the war and guided the postwar development.

But when the society came to meet in Washington, D.C., last week, it was becoming clear that the establishment's cow has dried up. The leaders, who are not threatened as their younger colleagues are, found their credentials being re-examined, mainly by the younger and the less renowned.

The younger physicists feel a need for a vigorous furtherance of the professional status of physicists and for the enunciation of political stands on behalf of the physics community. And two new organizations—the American Physicists Association and Scientists, Engineers and Students for Political Action—have arisen to fill those needs.

"The establishment in physics has run the show and led us to this situation," says Dr. Richard Smith of Boulder, Colo., one of the organizers of the APA. "They're too high up and don't know what's with the lower level," where reduced budgets, lower salaries and unemployment are major problems.

Dr. Arnold A. Strassenburg, director of the American Institute of Physics Division of Education and Manpower,

reports a 2.5 percent unemployment rate among the Ph.D. classes of 1967, 1968 and 1969.

This is smaller than the general national unemployment rate of 4.4 percent, but very high compared to the total population with advanced degrees.

The APA sees an even bleaker picture. "Strassenburg," says Dr. Smith, "is bound to his questionnaires. Many of the unemployed are too embarrassed to advertise it by filling out questionnaires." The AIP reports that of 2,700 physicists to whom the employment questionnaires were addressed, 1,625 replied.

The current rate at which physics Ph.D.'s are graduated is about 1,400 a year, says Dr. Smith. This rate is expected to drop as universities cut graduate admissions, but in the next five years Dr. Smith figures there will be only about 650 openings created by death or retirement.

The APA intends to lobby for better professional status and higher salaries for physicists. It wants to persuade the Government to adopt long-range planning and budgets for science so that people entering scientific fields will know long in advance what can be expected.

The association also feels that some means of retraining specialists as social needs change should be built into the system. "A milkman can be quickly trained to deliver letters," says Dr. Stephan Ormonde of Quantum Systems, Inc. in Albuquerque, N.M. "A doctor cannot be made into an effective chemist overnight."

The APA does not intend to compete with the APS as a learned society, and its organizers recognize that if the APS became an aggressive lobby, it could lose its tax-exempt status. That would