

The View From Kent State: 11 Speak Out

Like many of the nation's rapidly expanding state universities, Kent State University, until last Monday, was flourishing in an obscurity out of all proportion to its size. In an instant, the obscurity was ended by a volley of rifle fire that killed four students.

To find out more about the event itself, the university and the students who go there—and what their experiences may mean to other young Americans—The New York Times invited a diverse group of 11 young men and women to a discussion. Most of the students described themselves as moderate and uninvolved politically before the shootings; two are veterans, one a former lieutenant in the Green Berets.

The following text was taken from the transcript of a conversation of nearly four hours with three reporters, Joseph Lelyveld, John Kifner and Robert M. Smith.

LUCIA PERRY: I was there. I was mainly curious. I heard about the rally and I wanted to find out what was going on, because like helicopters had been buzzing in my dorm all night, and everywhere you went there were National Guard. I wasn't particularly interested in throwing any rocks or anything like that. But I was very much against what he [President Nixon] did in Cambodia and I was hoping the



Lucia Perry and Jeff Tetreault, students at Kent State, during the roundtable discussion

The New York Times (by Michael Evans)

rally would produce something, you know, really true.

Anyway, I soon realized that maybe this wasn't, you know, just a rally. It may sound corny, but I promised my mother that I wouldn't get involved. So I thought, well I better get home instead of getting stuck in it. And then I was walking past and there was a hill with trees on it. And there was a kid standing in the trees with his legs spread apart and he threw a rock at one of the guardsmen. And the guy was so mad—he had a mask on,

but you could tell from the way he acted, he was infuriated—that he shot at this boy and hit a tree. It nearly hit me.

Q. This was with what?

LUCIA: With a rifle. With a real bullet. Cause I saw the bullet when it ricocheted off the tree. And I know this sounds ridiculous to anyone who's been in a war, but I was just literally scared to death. And some boy was standing at a door there and said, "Get in here." And I did, but I knew I had to get out of the building because

I was afraid I'd get trapped and be arrested for doing nothing besides walking past. There was an entrance on the other side of the building, and I went out and was standing on the veranda when the shooting took place. So I saw everything. I saw the men firing, and I saw the kids fall, and I looked out at the crowd and there were people carrying, you know, people with blood all over them down the hill, and I just couldn't believe it. I've never

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seen people so mad and so horrified.

Q. As who?

LUCIA: As the kids in that crowd. Everything you could think of, those kids were shouting at those men: "You've killed them! You've killed them!" I don't know how, there's no way to describe the pain that I saw in people's faces or in their voices.

ELLEN GLASS: There was nobody on campus in the morning. It was a relatively quiet campus. And then what they did was let the kids get into a huge group. And the kids were really unenthusiastic anyway, because they couldn't even keep up a chant more than a couple of seconds. You know, they would have gotten hungry and something would have happened, and they would all have left, if the Guard had stayed where they were. Instead, they made this big play, started throwing tear gas, and the movement of the crowd was mostly out of fear.

Display of Power

Q. Did you think the Guard was seeking a confrontation?

ELLEN: I think they wanted to show the kind of power they had. I can't believe they were that stupid.

YVONNE MITCHELL: There's one thing that should be said here. It was noon-time. And lunchtime. And a change of classes. There were people who were just curious. And there were some kids who were really just trying to go to class. And the last thing in anyone's mind was that anyone would be getting shot. That's the sad part. There weren't just kids messing with the National Guard, or radical kids, or conservative kids. There was just, like I say, an integration of everybody. I heard so many times people say, "Well, if you're straight, if you're not starting anything, they won't bother you." Well, I'm here to tell you, they didn't care who you were. If you were in the way, you just got run down.

BUZZ TERHUNE: Out there you had superstraight Joe Fraternity and ultraradical Joe Freak. I mean, it was from all points of student feeling.

YVONNE: You know, I felt

some war zone. Because all of a sudden the campus I had been on for over two years had become a battleground for a fight that was totally unnecessary.

Q. What was the similarity to Vietnam?

YVONNE: The unnecessary violence, the fighting and killing people.

MICHAEL STEIN: Governor Rhodes said, "We will meet them with the heaviest force necessary." And the kids, I think, felt, "Look, this is our campus." Perhaps not even belligerently felt that, but resented the intrusion of force. Most kids are very strongly opposed to violence. But when you have guns with fixed bayonets, it represents something that's quite shocking. Well then they moved into the kids and asked them to leave. But every student probably felt he would be shirking his responsibility to leave.

Q. What responsibility?

MICHAEL: Well, as if one were giving up and giving in to a kind of military take-

over of your campus. You know, I've read about the Communist take-over in Czechoslovakia and about the Nazis and about when the French police went into the Sorbonne. At least I felt that to leave would be sort of to condone their actions.

ELLEN: Rhodes and Nixon and Agnew and Mitchell have a get-tough policy with students. They think that if you scare kids they're going to react and go home and pick up their books like nothing happened. But when you kill four students, those things don't happen.

Q. You link what happened to national politics?

ELLEN: If any more moderate man were in the White House, he would not condone such an act.

The Whole System

Q. And you think Mr. Nixon did condone it?

ELLEN: I'm not saying he gave the direct order. But I'm saying he was sympathetic to those people who wanted something to happen. It's his general attitude toward students and his general attitude toward dissent.

TOM DIFLOURE: He ignores it. He just ignores it. But it's not just Nixon. It's the whole system.

BUZZ: You want to jump up and scream, "Do something. Somebody do something." But the somebody we scream to is Mr. and Mrs. Front Porch America, who haven't done anything for the last how many years. When I came home from Vietnam, I was very much for mother, dad, country, apple pie and that sort of stuff. But too many things are happening in my mind and this country and I can't deny that they're happening.

And now I feel like I've stood by too long and haven't done anything. I'm not a militant. The first time I saw the North Vietnamese

flag when I came home, I wanted to make the guy eat the thing, because I had seen it in Vietnam when 200 men were coming at us and we had only like 50 or 25 guys. But I can't see where anybody can sit still and let Nixon and his boys cook another Vietnam in Cambodia. I remember a history book in high school that showed Uncle Sam in a police uniform, patting people on the back, the Vietnamese or whatever. But now he's that guy in the Dodge advertisement. You know, "Hey boy, what kind of car you got there? This is him now, with a billy



Wayne Bragg and Yvonne Mitchell

club and tear gas. And I don't want this, and I'm going to do everything I can to change it.

Q. President Nixon referred the other day to some student radicals as "bums" and the boys in Vietnam as "the greatest." Is there really this dichotomy?

BUZZ: That's bunk. In 15 months his bums on campus are going to be drafted and they'll be his great boys in Vietnam. All of us, we've had it up to here, being told to shut up, that we're a bunch of long-haired freaks and things like that. It's black and white and Puerto Rican—everyone. In Vietnam you talk to guys and you say, "How short are you buddy?" Which means, "How much time do you have left?" And the guy says, "I've got 15 days," or whatever. Well, there was this one black soldier next to me and I said to him, "Hey buddy, how short are you?" And he said, "I'll never be short." At first I didn't understand what he meant. Now I know.

WAYNE BRAGG: It's like we're all living in a candy box world. You don't realize what can happen unless it happens to you. Just like all of us here, or all those that were there, they didn't believe it until they saw it. And then, just like Buzz. You know, all of a sudden he realized what's coming off.

ELLEN: The black hard-core ghetto community knows what violence is. They know to be afraid of policemen and the National Guard. I don't think the white middle-class community ever realized what could happen. But now they're beginning to shoot indiscriminately into white crowds as well as black crowds. And more people are beginning to understand.

A Lot of Riot Duty

Q. Ron, you've probably had the most military experience of anyone here. What do you think of the National Guard's policy of carrying live rounds in the chambers of their rifles?

RONALD ARBAUGH: I had a lot of riot duty in Okinawa and you were never allowed to carry live rounds, blanks, tear gas or anything. The only thing we had was bayonets and they had sheaths on them. We weren't even allowed to have vehicles.

Q. What were your orders?

RON: Never to shoot anybody unless you were actually being shot at—and know you were being shot at. And then, try to avoid it. You weren't trying to kill



Photographs for The New York Times by MICHAEL EVANS
Michael Stein and Ellen Glass

11 Participants at Kent

Some of the Kent State students who participated in the discussion with The New York Times were selected because it was thought they represented a particular point of view or element in the student body. Others were selected at random. The participants were:

RONALD ARBAUGH, 22 years old, of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio; a sophomore and former first lieutenant in the Green Berets in Southeast Asia; a self-described "conservative."

WAYNE BRAGG, 23, of Akron, class of 1969. He plans to study journalism in the fall.

TOM DIFLOURE, 21, son of a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force; a political science major; in his words, "pretty far right when I first came to Kent, now pretty far left."

ELLEN GLASS, 23, of Cleveland; a senior art major.

YVONNE MITCHELL, 21, of Akron; a senior majoring in early childhood education; "an average student, not greatly involved in anything, but concerned."

LUCIA PERRY, 18, originally from Kentucky; an art major, hopes to be an artist; "not too politically involved."

MICHAEL STEIN, 30, of Cleveland Heights, Ohio; a graduate in art history and an artist; found the shootings "the most shocking experience in my whole life."

TOM STEPHAN, 21, of Canton, Ohio; a senior and English major specializing in secondary education; a moderate.

BUZZ TERHUNE, 22, of Chagrin Falls, Ohio; a Vietnam veteran; a biology major; a moderate.

JEFF TETREAULT, 20, of "Wyoming, North Carolina, Ohio and overseas"; a sophomore and biology major who feels, "It's a society where might makes right."

JEFFREY ZINK, 21, of Canton, Ohio; a senior who plans to go to law school; a member of the student Senate.

the innocent. Because if you did kill one person that's all they'd need. They'd have their martyr and all hell would break loose.

Q. Well, how were you affected by what happened at Kent?

RON: When I came back from the service I didn't even have enough hair to scratch. I was beautiful. You know, a soldier—haircut, attitudes, policies, everything. If an order was given—I don't care what it was—I'd do it. No problem. For 18

months, I had been isolated. Like in a vacuum. I read Stars and Stripes and, you know, it was great man, you never lose. But then I moved back into the world and I couldn't cope with it and it was embarrassing for me. I didn't know how to react.

Q. How far had your adjust-

ment gone by last week? Where were you then and where are you now?

RON: Last week, I suppose I didn't have any views pro or con to a great degree. I didn't go for the war but it was there and I more or less accepted it. I was pretty apathetic. Then came Nixon's speech on Cambodia and I thought, well, for crying out loud, I voted for the guy because I wanted to get it over and then he turns around and makes it bigger. But anyhow, I was still going to my classes at Kent.

I was leaving my economic class on Monday and there were riot policemen and ambulances going up the hill, so I figured something must have happened. So I asked a kid and he said the National Guardsmen shot some kids. And I said, "Oh, you guys are just trying to start something. I can't buy that." Then everybody started saying it and it sunk in. I saw a couple of girls who were half-way hysterical and for the first time in my life I felt I really ought to do something. There was a bunch of eight guardsmen, exactly eight, just where the powerhouse is behind a white rope. And I felt like tearing up the damn rope and grabbing the first guardsman I could find and beating the guy's head in. I knew I wasn't going to do it

but if a couple of others had tried, I might have gone across there with them. I just felt like it. I had to do something to relieve my tension so I just reached out and held up the rope for some highway patrolmen who were going by. When the last one was going through, I dropped it, deliberately, and he tripped. He stopped and gave me a look, you know. Later on I called a guards-

man a "pig" and then I felt better.

Q. A graduate of Fort Benning calls a guardsman a pig?

RON: Well, I did and I felt very mean about it. I almost had tears in my eyes. I felt that disappointed and mad. I just filled up with all kinds of emotions. Most of them distress over what's going to happen now.

Q. What do you think is going to happen?

RON: The true radicals now have a definite cause. They're going to get a lot of people now.

Q. Is the answer to what happened something relatively simple like good riot training for the Guard so they can handle these situations better in the future? Or do you think it goes deeper?

JEFFREY ZINK: It goes deeper. In my home town—that's Canton, Ohio—people were saying, "Well, we ought to machine-gun them all. They should have killed them all right there." Or, "They deserved it. It's about time." Monday night in Canton—the night of the shooting—I was in a bar and people were saying they should close all the schools and shoot all the rebels, that Kent was nothing but 3,000 or 5,000 rebels. I had seen it and I knew what had happened. So I got disgusted with what I was hearing and I went over and sat down and said, "Can I sit down and talk to you people?" There were four or five of us and we sat down. Then we went from one group to another to the next. Well, there was one group that we finally got to understand a little bit. But the others, they just said, "Shoot them all."

The next day I was around town and I listened. And there were some people who were really concerned and who wanted to know what I felt happened. But there were so, so, so many more who just thought, you know, you should shoot them all.

I think that's where the whole thing is coming from. And I'm just so totally confused by now.

An Average Student

Q. Jeff, let me push you a bit further. You've been very active in student government. And you're pre-law. Has all this shaken your sense of your future?

JEFF: I'll have to ramble on here a second. Sunday night they changed the curfew from 1 to 11 and a friend of my younger brother—a very average Kent student—got arrested at 10 after 11. They handcuffed him and took his money and they held a 45 to his head, cocked it and said, if you move one inch we're going to kill you. Then they took him to jail, mugged him, printed him and everything, took his shoelaces and his belts and told him he had no rights under martial law. Then with about 15 other kids they shoved him in a 7 by 7 cell and left him there for 28 hours.

Now this is a typical, average American kid. He's no rebel. He's in the Reserves. The whole lot. And he and his friends are bringing guns back to school be-

cause they said if a guardsman comes after them, they'll kill him. And I'm not talking about a Jerry Rubin [one of the Chicago Seven]. I'm not talking about a nut. I'm talking about a kid who's afraid for his own life. These are average kids but they are so mad.

A Poll Is Taken

Q. Now relate that to the question.

JEFF: Okay. I still believe in working through the system and I still believe that the only way you can do something is through the law. And I personally feel that if we can show what I am sure is true—that a commander of the National Guard gave that order to fire—then that guy should be prosecuted and can be prosecuted under the law. And I will personally push to the fullest extent to see that he is prosecuted.

Q. What if you felt it was being whitewashed?

JEFF: They aren't going to be able to whitewash this. The kids will never stop until they settle this.

OTHER VOICES: I don't think that. Sure they will.

Q. Well, let's have a poll. Can this be whitewashed? What's your feeling? I'll give you three choices — white-

wash, uncertain and no holds barred. Okay. Whitewashed? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—nine. Uncertain? Two. No holds barred? Zero.

LUCIA: You better believe they won't ever tell anybody the whole truth about it. You can go to every channel possible that's open to you legitimately and they'll never tell you the truth. They'll lie and send you around corners and make you dig and scratch and you'll never find out.

Q. What makes you think that?

TOM: It's the way the political system works. What choices did we have in the Democratic primary in Ohio? A spaceman and a millionaire.

LUCIA: Tell me they've ever seen what we've seen or what black people have seen or what anyone has seen. Tell me they're really concerned. They're not.

WAYNE: It's too bad what happened, but I'm glad it's coming out because you can't cure anything unless you know what it is. When you see somebody shot, you see the situation, and you say: Well, it's true, you know, there must be something to what black people and all the other minorities have been experiencing all these years. There must be something to that.

LUCIA: If this is a democracy, we're supposed to be involved in it, and frankly I feel about as alienated from my Government as you can get.

JEFF: We're in a little isolated shell and I've said this a number of times. People in the university will say Agnew and Nixon are fools. But the fact is that if you get out of your little shell and out into the general public, you'll realize that Spiro Agnew is probably the most popular man in the nation. If you want to live in a democracy and go by votes, then I'd say, without a doubt, Agnew and Nixon are in the lead. Everybody didn't go to college. Everybody hasn't read the books we've read. They earn their \$8,000 a year and have their own little home, their car and their job and they don't really care about anything else. That's the majority.

ELLEN: I think that a basic problem with this country is that it's a world power and sees itself as a policeman of the world. And I think this country has to be reduced to something other

than a world power.

Q. Mr. Nixon said he would rather be a one-term President than see this country become a second-rate power.

TOM DIFLOURE: We shouldn't care whether our flag flies from the highest pole at the U.N.

BUZZ: People say we want Vietnam for the Vietnamese but they don't say we also want it for Standard Oil and Esso and the rubber companies. What do we want for them? We say we want them to build themselves up to our level. Do we mean like Republic Steel? Do we mean we want them to have air like the filthy air in Cleveland? We want to set them

up so they can pollute their streams and their air and fight among themselves the way we fight among ourselves. It's ridiculous. You can almost walk across to Canada now, Lake Erie is so polluted. Is that what we're trying to do for them?

LUCIA: The white man's idea always is that since he's white, he's got better ways and everyone is supposed to fall in line. We wipe out whole cultures if they don't fall in line.

Q. What's the solution?

WAYNE: If we made our system work here, we wouldn't have to go around forcing it down other people's throats because they'd steal it, they'd just take it away from us.

Reacting to Frustration

Q. The President also talked about anarchy in the universities. Is that a real menace?

TOM: That's one of the solutions. [Laughter.]

MICHAEL: I think that's a reaction to the coming police state. If kids are arming themselves with helmets, and training in street fighting, it's a reaction to the frustration they feel in a police state. It's the result of an overreaction on the right to an overreaction on the left, which will cause the right to overreact and in turn the left. This country is becoming what people in Europe came here to escape.

TOM STEPHAN: But remember, before the National Guard pulled a wrong move, the prime example of anarchy at Kent was the burning down of the R.O.T.C. building.

Q. How did you react to that?

TOM: My reaction to the



Tom Stephan and Jeffrey Zink

burning down of the R.O.T.C. building was anger. Now I was really put out with that, not for the fact of the building itself because it was an ugly old decrepit building, but the idea behind it. I agree this is happening because people don't listen, or because sometimes the slow, going-through-channels method doesn't work and looks like it never will. But mass hysteria is not a controllable thing and when it sets in, there's not a thing anyone can do. If we can avoid mass hysteria, I believe things can be done. Things can slowly change.

MICHAEL: To say, "Give it time . . ."

LUCIA: That's a cop-out.

MICHAEL: It's such an insane, insane attitude, like mother patting you on the head and saying, "Things will get better, don't cry." It's too late.

JEFF: I consider myself more of a realist because I don't think that by burning buildings down you're going to stop the war. I don't think that by closing the universities down we're going to stop the war.

ELEN: If we're talking about, you know, kids arming themselves on campus, I think the Government would wipe them out. I don't think they could ever win.

Another Cop-Out

Q. Then what can you do about Cambodia?

LUCIA: I really am dead-set against violence. That's also a cop-out. But it's the only way to get the Government's attention. What you're

doing is drawing their attention to you by using the same methods they use. I really am against that. It's horrible that the only way you can get people to listen is to have four kids killed. There was no big blow-up over Cambodia until four kids were killed. You could have all the peace marches that were peaceful and quiet and everyone would pat you on the back and say, "Good little kids. You kept it quiet. Good for you." But nobody would do anything.

JEFF: The question I have is this: There are four people dead, the universities are closed down, and we're still fighting the war, aren't we? So even violence didn't do any good, did it?

WAYNE: You haven't felt the total repercussions of it yet. You don't know. After Kent, Nixon said they'll be out of there by June 30th. We'll have to wait till June 30th to find out.

TOM DIFLOURE: People forget that the American Revolution was small. They told King George or whoever that guy was, "Look, leave us alone." And he said no. And



Ronald Arbaugh

they said, "Come on, leave us alone or there's going to be trouble." And he still said no. So they said, "All right, mother," and they picked up a gun and started killing a bunch of British and tossing tea in the Boston harbor. And that's what's happening here. People are saying, "Give me liberty or give me death."

MICHAEL: Only five people were killed in the Boston

Massacre.

TOM: And now we've got the Kent Massacre and that was four.

YVONNE: I must admit that I'm a very patient person and for a black person to say they're patient is a phenomenon. [Laughter.] But I am. People will wait to see if there's progress. People will try if there's progress. But what discourages people is if you say something to calm people for the moment and then when it comes to doing that certain thing then you say, "Well, I'm sorry but I've changed my mind." That's what creates disillusionment. That's what causes people not to care about their government. That's what creates violence.

Too Much Hate

Q. I'm curious as to whether what has happened generally in the country and specifically at Kent State has shaken up your sense of your own personal future? Do you have a sense of doom?

JEFF TETREAULT: I'm not particularly worried about what I'll be able to do. I think I'm strong in my own self. I've made one decision already. I'm planning to go to Canada, British Columbia, and go to school there and then try to get into agriculture or botany of some kind.

Q. Why British Columbia?

JEFF: I don't like the way

this country's going. There's too much hate in this country, too much control on my life. I don't like all the hate between the blacks and the whites and all the economic oppression.

RON: When I was overseas I was talking to a lot of people who went on R and R [rest and recreation] in Australia and they said it was a new world, a new opening and I still plan on going there, or to New Zealand. I figure you can get a better chance there at making a new life, a new start.

TOM: I've seen other demonstrations where people were hurt but I've never seen anyone killed before. And you walk around, you know, seeing bits and pieces of people's skin laying on the pavement and the blood and all that. But I made up my mind a long time ago that I'm leaving.

Q. Where are you going?



Tom Difloure



Buzz Terhune

TOM: Probably Europe.

Q. Is anybody else leaving?

LUCIA: I will be. It's not that I'm particularly deserting America, but I don't feel that I am a citizen of the United States, you know, blah, blah. I feel that I'm a citizen of the world and I have a right to live where I want to.

ELLEN: A lot of women, young women, are making personal commitments not to have children. It's not the population explosion. I know personally that this is not the kind of world I would want to bring a child into.

LUCIA: I want to have children. It's a fantastic thing, you know, especially for a woman. But partly because of the population problem and partly because of what happened at Kent, I wouldn't want to have children who would have to go to school

and go through what I went through. I really couldn't stand the thought of my children having to go through that and God knows what it will be like by the time they get here.

BUZZ: These kids that are graduating from high school right now, their parents have to be paranoid. And they have to be so lost.

ELLEN: Our parents, it's really difficult for them. I mean, my mother felt such a sense of hopelessness when I came home that day. She didn't know what to do with me. A mother's answer was that she went to the store and bought all my favorite food.

Q. What's that?

ELLEN: Oh, Whip 'n Chill. [Laughter.] She had no other answer and it was really sad, seeing her so upset. She was just sick to think that one of her children had been there. I'm sure that any mother that sends her son to the war would feel equally helpless.

Will It Happen Again?

Q. One last question. Will it happen again? Was this an aberration or the start of a trend?

TOM DIFLOURE: The Governor of Kentucky ordered a curfew on the school down there. He told the troops to use live ammo and bayonets. Now that's kind of foolish following what happened at Kent. But that's what he told them. And you know they've got the Guard at O.S.U. [Ohio State University] and they've got the Guard at the University of Maryland and they've got the Guard at Illinois and Wisconsin.

Q. All right. Let's have another poll. All those who have a definite premonition and dread that this was a turning point and not just a terrible thing that happened, raise your hands. One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight—Nine. Nine out of 11 think it's likely to happen again and get worse.

MICHAEL: You can't re-educate all the National Guardsmen or all the people ordering the National Guardsmen onto campuses. And unless you have a frontal lobotomy on Nixon, you're not going to re-educate him. But until you do those things it's bound to happen.

TOM STEPHAN: I really don't think now that four people have been killed that any more lives, any more student lives are going to be taken.

BUZZ: When I left the service, I just wanted time to formulate my own thoughts. But the Government hasn't

let me. I see four people dead who probably didn't have anything—or want anything—to do with demonstrations. I still don't want any kind of violence. But now I know what can happen. And people are going to come forewarned and fore-armed the next time. I may be wrong, but I've talked to too many people to think there won't be a next time.

Q. Are you talking about Kent State?

BUZZ: I'm talking about Princeton, Yale, Kentucky, Ohio State, Miami . . .

A VOICE: Notre Dame.

BUZZ: Any school you can name that's got people in it who can think and worry about where they're going to be in 20 years. I don't know where I'll be but I hope I'm not in the same shoes my father's in right now. Because the world he's given me to grow up in just hasn't worked for him. And we can't go downhill much further.