

The Hidden Complexity of Memorials Related to the Kent State Shootings

Author's Statement

This essay was written for *76-106 Writing about Literature, Art, and Culture: Campus Activism*, taught by Professor Catherine Evans, as an analysis of *Kent State: Four Dead in Ohio* by Derf Backderf through the lens of another text. I chose John Fitzgerald O'Hara's *Postwar Memory* to explore the complexities of memorialization and the role of counter-memorials in shaping public memory. The course emphasizes the intersections of literature, art, and activism, and through this project, I examined how Kent State May 4th memorials continue to serve as a lesson on the power—and fragility—of campus activism.

Through this analysis, I sought to understand how artistic and literary representations of trauma shape public memory and influence activism. I was especially drawn to the ways in which institutions, through memorials, can both preserve and suppress history. My research revealed that remembering and forgetting are deeply intertwined processes, impacting how societies heal from violent events. The essay reflects on the evolving role of student activism and the ways in which state authority continues to respond to it.

The relevance of Kent State's history remains urgent today, as political shifts once again amplify student activism. Understanding how past events were memorialized—and sometimes forgotten—offers insight into how we process and resist institutional violence in the present.

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