

*Letters to the editor*

WHEN Harold Walker left the field of the dead, he suspected that on his many rolls of film he might have captured some compelling shots, but like John Filo, he could not be sure until he saw them developed. So he did what he had been taught in journalism: 'If you think you have a scoop, get in touch with the newspaper you know best.' In his case it was *The Gazette and Daily*, of York, Pennsylvania, one of America's real odd-ball journals. Operating in the heart of the conservative Pennsylvania-German country and surrounded by people who vote Republican, it is liberal and outspoken. It is also interesting in that it is edited on a devil-may-care basis, with the editor saying pretty much what he likes. Among the American newspapers from cities its size, it has no peer. That many of its subscribers consider it communistic is a cross it has to bear.

Its reaction to the Walker photographs was typical. Calling Walker on the phone as he worked at Kent State, the editor said excitedly, 'These photos are too good to waste on a small-town paper like this. I've alerted the *Washington Post* and they want you to fly to their offices immediately.'

With some excitement young Walker caught a plane at Akron, and entered the *Post* editorial offices to find the entire staff gazing in bewilderment at the shots which he himself had not yet seen. 'How did you get such photos?' some of the older men asked in admiration, but before Walker could explain, one of the senior editors delivered the crushing decision: 'We're not going to use any of them.'

'Why not?' several assistants asked.

'Because we think they may have been faked.'

'What do you mean?' Walker cried.

'I mean these. The ones showing the National Guard marching up the hill away from the football field.'

'What's wrong with them? I couldn't have got any closer.'

'Yes, but these photos don't show any students following the Guardsmen, and we know from all the news stories that there were students there.'

'Look at the negatives,' Walker pleaded, 'they're in sequence.'

'Yes, but we think you may have spliced in a series of shots taken on Sunday afternoon. There ought to be students visible.'

Walker, exhausted from tension and lack of sleep, looked at his amazing shots of what had happened. Of all the photographs taken that day, they best illustrated the needlessness of the tragedy. Then he looked at the disbelieving experts from the great newspaper. Then he packed up his pictures and went back to York, where they appeared in the *York Gazette and Daily*. It scooped the world.

The York editor came up with the logical idea of having Walker accompany his photographs with a verbal account of what had happened, and the young newsman ended his essay in the way most sensitive men his age would have done: 'I think that when people look at the situation—students shot without warning; the dead and the wounded—there will be sympathy across the nation, no matter what the political beliefs. As for the city of Kent, the whole town seems to be in sympathy with the students.' He concluded: 'I believe the incident may bring the student and the adult communities together. It may bring about mutual understanding.'

Never in his future career as newspaperman will Harold C. Walker, Kent State 1970, be more completely wrong, for even as the paper in York was printing these hopeful and constructive words, the newspaper in Kent was being forced to find space for what will be remembered as one of the most virulent outpourings of community hatred in recent decades. It seemed as if everybody in the Kent area suddenly wanted to unburden himself of resentments against young people, colleges and education which had been festering for years. The paper had to reserve a full page, day after day for several weeks, for this violent outburst, and anyone who wishes to explore the Kent phenomenon more deeply than this book allows, is directed to those terrifying broadsides, printed solid in compact type. They give a portrait of Middle America at the beginning of the 1970's that is frightening. The first group requires no comment.

Authority, law and order are the backbone of our society, for its protection. Would you want authorities to stand by if your home were

threatened? Well, Kent State is my home by virtue of taxes spent funding it. What's more, it's their home by virtue of tuition paid. Playful children destroying a disenchanting toy.

How dare they! I stand behind the action of the National Guard! I want my property defended. And if dissenters refuse to obey the final warning before the punishment, hurling taunts, rocks (stones, they say), sticks, brandishing clubs with razor blades imbedded, then the first slap is a mighty sting.

Live ammunition! Well, really, what did they expect, spitballs? How much warning is needed indeed.

Hooray! I shout for God and Country, recourse to justice under law, fifes, drums, martial music, parades, ice cream cones—America, support it or leave it.

Ravenna housewife

When radical students are allowed to go through a town smashing windows, terrifying the citizens, and are allowed to burn buildings belonging to the taxpayers to the ground, I think it is high time that the Guard be brought in to stop them—and stop them in any way they can.

The sooner the students of this country learn that they are not running this country, that they are going to college to learn, *not teach*, the better.

If those students don't like this country or our colleges, why don't they go to the country from which they are being indoctrinated?

Concerned citizen

A surprising number of the writers referred to property rights and taxes. If there had been any doubt as to what values many citizens in this part of Ohio placed in paramount position, these letters settled that question.

We are paying a large percentage of our hard-earned money to support and educate these young people. For what? To let them burn and destroy property that more of our tax money has paid for? Who paid for the hose that was cut while our firemen were trying to stop a fire, set deliberately, all the while being pelted with rocks. Some innocent person's home could very well have burned while our firemen were busy fighting a fire on campus.

Concerned resident

I, and thousands of other old-timers, have been paying taxes for many years—even before some of the present troublemakers were born. These taxes were used, and are being used, to erect and equip modern campus buildings and to pay the salaries of professors (even those who support and condone the actions of the troublemakers) who have such a vital role in the educational process. How many buildings were erected and equipped from taxes paid by campus vandals? How many professors and other university personnel received salaries from taxes paid by campus vandals? This property does not belong to them. It belongs to me and thousands like me who have paid taxes for twenty, thirty and even forty years to provide the money for these facilities. We are lending them OUR facilities and we expect them to take care of OUR property. We do not expect these temporary occupants to burn, damage or destroy that which they have borrowed. We will gladly pay for these buildings, but we see red when OUR property has to be repaired or replaced because of the actions of a few irresponsible misfits who only want to damage or destroy.

A concerned old-timer

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Only a small percentage of the letters printed in that period can be reproduced here, but each one chosen represents a score or more. On no subject was the comment more unanimous than on the right of the National Guard to do whatever was required to enforce discipline.

Some have questioned the need of the National Guard on campus and throughout our city. However, I shudder to think of the condition of our city today had they had not been present to protect and preserve what so many have labored endlessly to build.

Kent citizen

Are we the citizens of this fine town going to sit back and allow certain officials to persecute the National Guard for doing their duty? Are we going to accept the theory that these ones involved in this rioting and burning were JUST children?

Since when is rioting, looting, burning, assaulting a town called academic freedom? Is it freedom of expression? Why do they allow these so-called educated punks, who apparently know only how to spell four-lettered words, to run loose on our campuses tearing down and destroying that which good men spent years building up?

I plead with the citizens of Kent to take a stand, don't allow these tragic deaths to go for naught. Make your voice heard. Do not let the National Guard be blamed for something they did not create.

Signed by one who was taught that 'to educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society'

Congratulations to the Guardsmen for their performance of duty on the Kent University Campus. I hope their actions serve as an example for the entire nation. The governors of our states cannot waste the taxpayers' money playing games. These men were alerted as a last resort to control mob action.

I extend appreciation and whole-hearted support of the Guard of every state for their fine efforts in protecting citizens like me and our property.

Mother of Guardsman

Not included in this sampling are the numerous letters, submitted by committees, with hundreds and even thousands of names, approving the behavior of the Guard. One of the most interesting themes was the recrudescence of an idea that had been born many years ago and which had enjoyed frequent revival through the decades. In April, 1933, at the depth of the depression, Representative William R. Foss, of the Ohio legislature, proposed that in view of the current oversupply of teachers, more than four thousand of whom were unable to obtain work, it would be a good idea to convert one of the four large colleges—Ohio State University was excluded—into a mental asylum. 'We intend to investigate this proposition thoroughly,' Foss warned, 'and to determine which college can most readily be converted. We're not bluffing.'

After a visit to Kent on May 4 of that year, Foss reported: 'Kent State has the finest, most modern buildings and, therefore, is most adaptable to welfare work. There would be no fire hazard in connection with the structures, and this is an important feature.' Later, referring obliquely to Kent, he said that 'one of the institutions visited was so adapted to welfare needs that it would be difficult to distinguish it from those built for that specific purpose.' The proposal came to naught and Kent State was spared.

However, two years later the idea of converting the college into an asylum surfaced again, and once more, serious consideration was given to closing down the college, but an improvement in the economy saved it. Now, after the riots of 1970, the project was reopened.

I have one possible solution to the problem. Build a fence completely around KSU, put President White and his 550 faculty members inside along with all the agitators that they understand so well and let them do their thing. We could also change the name from KSU to 'Idiot Hill.' Then Dr. White and his faculty and students could assemble and throw rocks at each other and play with matches and burn things down, because they understand each other's reasoning and don't want to be bothered. So be it! I have more ideas, but what's the use. In fact, who needs KSU? Not me.

Kent taxpayer

Letters abusing student behavior were numerous. Their endless and bitter barrage startled the students and saddened the professors, who felt that a whole society was turning against the youth who would soon be constituting that society. One of the reasonable complaints against students follows:

Last night on TV were several shots of protesting students and a leader of these talked for some time about continuing the protest into the summer. The TV program showed pictures and named the student leader.

This student leader was not a student during 1968 and to October, 1969. Girls, wild parties, filthy living conditions and failure to pay bills featured this man; an acme of unreliability. Another man, said to be a leader of Kent SDS, lived with him for a time. His fine parents came to pay the bills he owed us when he disappeared. Word is that other creditors in the area were not so fortunate. Yet, this man is shown as depicting an important trend in our times.

Ravenna citizen

A surprising number of the letter-writers, and among them the most vehement, referred to themselves as members of the silent majority. Two examples follow:

When is the long-silent, long-suffering majority going to rise up in force to show the militant minority on the KSU campus exactly how

they feel about them? It's hard to believe that the surly, foul-mouthed, know-nothing punks that have raised so much hell in this town the past few days are speaking for all of us, or half of us, or even one tenth of us. Yet, like any mob, they've got you outnumbered, and any sort of ideology is completely lost in the sadistic pleasure of sheer destruction. In other words, the would-be heroes are behaving exactly like the criminals they are.

As a person young enough to be more a member of their generation than that of their parents, I reject these creeps.

Anti-violent

Kent has tolerated these so-called misunderstood students long enough. The city of Kent should be off-limits to students. Keep them on the university grounds, and when they have completely destroyed it, they can go home and we will be rid of them.

If the National Guard is forced to face these situations without loaded guns, the silent majority has lost everything. The National Guard made only one mistake—they should have fired sooner and longer.

As for the parents of the dead students, I can appreciate their suffering, they probably don't know the truth. A dissident certainly isn't going to write home about his demonstration activities. Parents are learning the hard way and others should take heed. The high school photos that appeared in the paper were all very nice, but how do you explain the mother who refused to identify her own son at the hospital because of his appearance. This same boy had refused to go home on holidays.

I only hope the National Guard will be here the next time we need them. I am fully prepared to protect what is mine—property, home and life—at any cost against these mobs of dissidents in the event our law enforcement is prohibited to do what is necessary.

Ravenna citizen

Numerous letters spoke of the need for instituting some kind of vigilante movement to combat the students. Sometimes this was intimidated; often it was spelled out.

There has been no other issue in recent years that has raised my wrath as much as student demonstration, including SDS leadership, against the Vietnam war and against anything else that occurs to the demonstrators.



So, it was refreshing to see a group of hard-hatted construction workers in lower New York do something about it. They went through those demonstrators like Sherman went through Atlanta, leaving sixty or seventy injured. That's exactly what we need . . . a harder line with demonstrators, not the easy, 'pat on the wrist' punishment for their crime.

I'm for raising a counterforce to neutralize the efforts of sometimes silly, and sometimes dangerous, and always unthinking students who want to go to a school without abiding by its rules.

Aurora citizen

My first reaction, and again I have been thinking of this for some time, was to arm both my home and my office. But during moments of more rational thought, I realize that probably all I would accomplish is to shoot myself in the foot. I abhor violence and I have no desire to traipse all over the country protecting other people's property. However, I feel an immediate and compelling responsibility to protect my own locality. I am thinking in the direction of a kind of citizens committee, under appropriate professional direction, who would bear arms against these people to protect our families and property. Further, I will support taxation to raise the funds to provide a capable effective force to deal with this problem.

Kent citizen

Many persons in the Kent area felt that students who dressed oddly or who wore their hair long ought to be disciplined. In fact, the bitterness which such appearance created was one of the recurrent themes in discussing the shooting. Several intimated that the penalty for non-conformity should be death.

It is too bad that a small minority of students feel that these damnable demonstrations must take place. If the slouchily dressed female students and the freakishly dressed, long-haired male students would properly dress and otherwise properly demean themselves as not to make show-offs of themselves, such trouble could be and would be avoided. It is difficult to understand why female students must get out and make such fools of themselves as they do, but it is understandable that male students do so largely to get their screwball mugs on television and in the press.

If the troublemaking students have no better sense than to conduct themselves as they do on our university and college campuses, such

as throwing missiles, bottles and bullets at legally constituted police authority and the National Guard, they justly deserve the consequences that they bring upon themselves, even if this does unfortunately result in death.

Attorney-at-law

There were, of course, several letters which challenged the headlong rush to law and order. These writers endeavored to explain that the phrase required careful definition.

Where are the voices of 'law and order' when construction workers in New York City attack a peaceful, non-violent demonstration of anti-war protesters? I would suspect that the lawless action of the construction workers is condoned by the 'silent majority' because they aren't members of the 'effete corps of impudent snobs,' or they aren't 'bums.'

You see, the voices of the silent majority chose to remain silent on those issues. It would appear to me, then, that a double standard exists when people call for law and order—it's a good phrase when applied to young, long-haired dissidents and radicals, but it's a meaningless phrase when applied to the silent majority. I would submit that just as students are not above the law, neither are members of the 'silent majority.'

Ravenna citizen

And from time to time isolated writers would remind the public that four young people were dead, that something had gone fearfully wrong. They sounded like lost voices, except for the eloquence they sometimes introduced into their letters.

I am a KSU student. I am not a radical, but to quote Albert Camus, 'I should like to be able to love my country and to love justice, also.'

The letters I've been reading about the Kent deaths, and the people I've heard saying that the demonstrators deserved to be shot, frighten me. Many justify the slayings because of the property damage that had been done. But the crowd Monday was attacking no buildings. Did they shoot to avenge the burning of the ROTC building?

Revolutionaries and SDSers don't frighten me, nor do squads of police or National Guards. I am afraid of the people who say 'kill the

demonstrators, because they destroyed our property.' I am afraid of these people who value property over human life. I am not afraid for my life, but for my soul, and for the sensitivity and humanity that is slowly being erased from our society.

Jesus said that no one can truly love God if he cannot love his fellow man. You people with the 'mow 'em down' philosophy, can you love God without loving Jeffrey, Bill, Sandy and Allison?

Ravenna student

On Monday, May 4, I witnessed the KSU killings. As horrible and frightening as the memories of those experiences are, they are not nearly so terrifying as the hostility that has been revealed in their aftermath. I am not a radical. I do not believe that arson and violence should go unpunished, but I know of no state in which arson carries a death sentence, and there are certainly none in which 'illegal' assembly is punishable by execution.

I have recently heard a multitude of comments such as, 'They should have mowed them all down' or 'I'll bet they think twice next time' or 'They got what they deserved.' It is in the people who make these statements that the real violence is to be found. They seem to be permeated with an intense desire to see destroyed or shackled anything they do not understand or anyone who does not concisely conform to their glorious social ideals about what is 'American.'

They are to be feared far more than are the campus dissidents, for they would destroy something far more precious than property, or even life—they would destroy freedom! And is not freedom supposed to be what America is all about?

Kent State student

It would be fruitless to reproduce all the savage attacks that were visited upon the faculty. The unfortunate resolution adopted in the Akron Church on Tuesday afternoon was referred to in a score of letters, with citizens rebuking them in harsh terms for their one-sided interpretation of what had happened on the campus. Only three letters need be cited here, a typical one of rebuke, and two reflections by university members on the tragedy that had overtaken a notable institution. They represent the kind of reevaluation that was being undertaken across the nation.

I do not understand why the teacher who was convicted of first-degree riot is permitted to teach at the university during the week

and serve her time on weekends. She shouldn't even be allowed on the campus, much less be permitted to teach.

Ravenna resident

The meeting of the faculty of Kent State University held on Tuesday [in the Akron church] was deeply disturbing to me. The tone of the meeting seemed to me emotional and rhetorical—in short a mob. And I am sick of emotionalism, mobs and violence.

What is truly academic must be personal and humble. As I recall hearing it read, one of the items in the resolution stated that we will not teach under military coercion. Similarly, I don't see how we can teach under the social pressure of our own desire to reach unanimous decisions.

I want my students back, but I do not want to unite them behind any social issue or against any issue, such as the war in Indochina, even though I abhor that war. I want my students to wander a free campus, and I only want those who are 'academically inclined' to contemplate with humility and with intricacy. I am frightened of the mob—the mob in me.

Kent professor of English

The statement issued [by the faculty] from an Akron church Tuesday correctly expresses the angry mood of the majority of the faculty, but it is not enough. If academic democracy is to work, it must be self-enforcing. We must demonstrate clearly that we understand and are able to assume the responsibility for conduct of our university.

It is imperative that we defend academic freedom, which includes the right to dissent, as we have undertaken to do, but we must insure that the freedom we defend is clearly differentiated from license to destroy by violence. Our campus must remain open to those who would express unpopular ideas, but it must not be a sanctuary for those who commit felonious acts, no matter what purpose they avow.

I am not making just another appeal to 'law and order.' My position is that unless we insist upon the maintenance of orderly processes, the tragic circumstances of last Monday are the eventual and inevitable result.

All who have contributed to the blurring of the connection between the rights and responsibilities of free people must share in the guilt for the deaths of our students: those who have engaged in civil disobedience and have refused to accept the consequences, those who

have cried for amnesty for those who have criminally violated the rights of others in pursuit of a worthy cause, those who have failed to understand that destroying a building is not a legitimate exercise of freedom of expression, and those who have stood silently by while this tide of passion has engulfed us in its tragic whorl.

Kent professor of journalism

The most deplorable aspect of these letters was not the explosive outpouring of hatred (which could be forgiven as an autonomic response to phenomena not understood) nor the obvious obsession with property values as opposed to human life (which is often observed in American life) but rather the willingness to condemn all students, perceiving them as a mass to be castigated. Nothing can excuse this error. We must constantly remember that only a small percentage of the Kent student body was involved. The following table has been revised continuously from the day this study started; it was refined whenever new police reports were made available or new photographs came to light. As it now stands, it incorporates the best guesses of many experts but reflects the personal conclusions of none. It is a composite.

*Percentage of Student Body of 21,186 Participating in Disturbances*

<i>Incident</i>	<i>Total Persons Involved</i>	<i>Non-university Persons</i>	<i>University Persons</i>	<i>%age of Total Student Body Participating</i>
Friday night downtown	1,000	600	400	01.9
Saturday night ROTC fire				
Passive spectators	1,500	250	1,250	05.9
Active participants	500	250	250	01.2
Sunday night sitdown	700	150	550	02.6
Monday noon rally				
Distant spectators	2,500	400	2,100	09.9
Passive on Blanket Hill	650	150	500	02.3
Active on Blanket Hill	450	50	400	01.9

from *Kent State: What Happened and Why*, 1971

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