

*Tuesday, May 5, 1970.*

*You shout an order and if one man refuses to obey, you shoot straight into the mob. Into the mob, I say!*

—Jean Anouilh, *Antigone*.

The Kent State shootings, also known as the May 4 massacre and the Kent State massacre, were the killings of four and wounding of nine other unarmed Kent State University students in Kent, Ohio, by the Ohio National Guard on May 4, 1970. The tragedy took place during a peace rally opposing the expanding involvement of the Vietnam War into neutral Cambodia by United States military forces as well as protesting the National Guard presence on campus. The incident marked the first time that a student had been killed in an anti-war gathering in United States history.

I was a sixteen-year-old junior in high school junior where my first period class was French, taught by Sylvain Boni. At the beginning of class Mr. Boni talked about the Kent State shootings. He was incensed. He was angry with the National Guard as well as political conservatives in the country who tried to justify the shootings. As I recall he saw an issue of envy: people who had not gone to college were envious of students, which lay at the bottom of their inability to identify with them and, instead, align with President Nixon's "silent majority," that is, Americans who did not join in the large demonstrations against the Vietnam War at the time, who did not join in the counterculture, and who did not participate in public discourse. Mr. Boni, who had exhibited

a healthful antipathy toward autocratic authority in previous class discussions, spoke for perhaps ten minutes.

Earlier in the school term we considered the moral conflicts of Jean Anouilh's tragedy, *Antigone*. The play is a compelling adaptation of Sophocles' classical drama that deals with themes of maintaining integrity in a world of moral compromise. In a fatal act of civil disobedience, Antigone defies a decree of the state. For her, the dictates of moral law supersede the force of civil law. The play explores individual free will against the unjust laws of a tyrannical king.