

# FOUR DEAD IN OHIO

The Global Legacy of Youth  
Activism and State Repression

**Edited by** Johanna A. Solomon

RESEARCH IN SOCIAL  
MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS  
AND CHANGE

**VOLUME 45**

# FOUR DEAD IN OHIO

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RESEARCH IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS  
AND CHANGE VOLUME 45

# **FOUR DEAD IN OHIO: THE GLOBAL LEGACY OF YOUTH ACTIVISM AND STATE REPRESSION**

EDITED BY

**JOHANNA A. SOLOMON**

*Kent State University, USA*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan  
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2021

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80071-808-1 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-80071-807-4 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-80071-809-8 (Epub)

ISSN: 0163-786X (Series)



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standard  
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985  
ISO 14001



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# FOREWORD

This volume comes out of an international conference held at Kent State University on the Semicentennial of the occupation and shooting of students by the Ohio National Guard during a demonstration against the US wars in Vietnam and Cambodia, “Commemorating Violent Conflicts and Building Sustainable Peace.” The National Guard shooting of four white students on May 4, 1970, captured the American imagination. These deaths of unarmed protesters came to symbolize the divisions in the United States – both generational and political. The incident was memorialized in more than a dozen songs and plays, focused on in at least seven documentaries, and fictionalized in numerous novels, poems, comics, films, and television series. Numerous historical, journalist, and social science texts cover the lead-up, investigate what happened, and examine the memory of these shootings.

The Kent State shooting was not the first nor the last of such killings of students by state officers during this tumultuous period of heightened activism in the United States. Government information suppression and racism led to the near erasure of government shooting of students at historically Black colleges, such as the Orangeburg, South Carolina massacre and the Jackson State College, Mississippi, killings. The role of race in collective memory processes here are similar to the way that the 1964 Freedom Summer deaths of white and Black Civil Rights activists attracted attention during a time where the slayings of Black activists by whites attracted little attention. Similarly, the Kent State shootings are more commonly discussed in social movement texts than the much bloodier Corpus Christi Massacre in 1971 and the state infiltration of student movements during Mexican Dirty War. Thus, the editor of this Volume, Johanna A. Solomon, rightfully surmised that we do not need another book that interrogates the actions at Kent State related to the May 4th killings. Rather, this volume illuminates numerous other incidents of state suppression and/or student activism around the globe.

Lisa Leitz, PhD.  
Series Editor

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# **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

With many thanks to the editorial assistance of Kate Croteau.



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# INTRODUCTION

Johanna A. Solomon

On May 4, 1970, four Kent State University students, Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller, Sandra Scheuer, and William Schroeder, were pronounced dead after being shot by National Guardsmen during a campus protest of United States involvement in the Vietnam War. While citizens and historians grapple with the complicated and sometimes contradictory details from accounts of that day, May 4 stands as a leading example of the undeniable truth that the global legacy of student activism is inexorably tied to state repression.

In 1971, the Center for Peaceful Change at Kent State was established as a “living memorial” to Allison, Jeff, Sandy, and Bill, with a mission to promote “peaceful mechanisms of social and political change” through its teaching, research, and public service. The descendant of the Center, the School of Peace and Conflict Studies, hosted a conference in October 2019 as part of Kent State University’s 50th anniversary commemoration of May 4, 1970. This conference, *Commemorating Violent Conflict and Building Sustainable Peace*, co-sponsored by the Peace History Society, The Peace Studies Section of the International Studies Association, and the School of Peace and Conflict Studies, sought to link together the many disciplines and practitioners who work to prevent violence and build peace through understanding, commemoration, and the creation of accountability in conflicts.<sup>1</sup> The conference included the presentation of papers focused on peace activism, state violence, peace building and transitional justice, and social violence and responsibility.

Uniquely, the October conference also included events engaging participants, community members, and students with the historical and current contexts of state violence and youth movements. These included a live performance of *May Forth Voices: Kent State, 1970: A Play* by David Hassler (2013), director of KSU’s Wick Poetry Center, and a public ‘fishbowl’ discussion, entitled *When Government Kills: State Violence and Youth Movements*, facilitated by me, an Assistant Professor at the School of Peace and Conflict Studies at Kent State, and featuring Dr. Thomas Grace, one of nine surviving casualties of the Ohio National Guard gunfire and historian of May 4th, Dr. Tony Gaskew, a Professor

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Four Dead in Ohio

Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change, Volume 45, 1–8

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ISSN: 0163-786X/doi:10.1108/S0163-786X20210000045020

of Criminal Justice and 20-year veteran police officer, and Sibley Hawkins, who worked with the International Center for Transitional Justice on issues of gender in Côte d'Ivoire, Nepal, Syria, Tunisia, and elsewhere.

This volume stems from that conference, where one resounding theme was the central role of youth activism in community change, as well as the societal and state level push back against the children and young adults seeking that change. Across disciplines, modern youth are often regarded as less involved and active in politics than prior generations (Putnam, 2000). Or, at minimum, they are seen as not yet being properly socialized into the kinds of political and social engagement older citizens deem “correct” (Gordon, 2007). However, many authors have argued that the engagement of youths and students in activism today simply differs (Dalton, 2009). For example, youth may engage in participatory politics online (Cohen, Kahne, Bowyer, Middaugh, & Rogowski, 2012) or may protest through what they choose to purchase or not to purchase rather than organizing in more traditional ways (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010). Campus activism has also been studied for decades, and authors continue to witness the benefits of college life for political organizing, especially at elite institutions (Enriquez, 2014; Rojas, 2007). Moreover, student and youth activism have also been shown to translate to mainstream political engagement (Snellinger, 2018).

The volume is inspired by those students and youth who have given their energy and sometimes their lives to create a better and more just world. We also recognize that while our narrative often centers those majority white, US-based young activists like those at Kent State, students and youth around the world who have fought for change must be acknowledged, commemorated, and recognized. The intersectional nature of the position, pushback against, and often disappearance from the narrative both in the moment and in history books for youth who face additional structural injustices – racism, sexism, poverty, authoritarianism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and more – must also be acknowledged (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Gordon, 2009; Keller, 2012). Two years before the Kent State shootings, in 1968, Black students faced down the national guard in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Police eventually shot and killed three student civil rights activists at a sit-in and injured 28 at a bowling alley during the massacre (Biossoneault, 2018). Riots by others that damaged property were cited as justification for these unjustifiable killings. The anti-protest narrative equating property damage and human life was not unique to these events. It was heard at Kent State, Orangeburg, and Jackson State College, and it continues to reverberate through history to protests by Black Lives Matter activists today.

This volume centers the narrative of those youths and students who fight for structural change; in it we seek to understand why youth are so often repressed or ignored, to highlight ways their contributions are commemorated, and to look at how youth lead and join movements around the world. Chapters not only span the globe but also multiple methodologies and academic disciplines. The term “youth” can be hard to pin down across so many theaters. “Youth” is a term that can and has included everyone from children (17 and younger) to those aged 35. Youth, inherently, are not a static group; youth grow to become adults, and new youth replace them. In this volume, the brackets around youth

were not pre-set; each author may have focused on a different age or social group, all contextually understood to be students and/or youths.

The value of using the terms student and youth in this work is in constructing a coherent body of work, wherein youth is viewed as a matter of perception and social standing, not as belonging to a specific age group. Youth here is seen as a social maturation process rather than a physical one, whereby young people come to engage with their identity in the context of larger society. Youth in many cases may also refer to those viewed as generally too young to be centralized in the standard political discourse in their society, and/or those without normative forms of power, such as money or a vote due to their age. Students are often viewed as youth regardless of specific age, and in this work generally students are referred to as those studying in secondary schools, colleges, and universities (Wyn & White, 1996). In this volume, we use both terms due to their highly interconnected nature in many social movements.

This volume of *Research in Social Movements, Conflict, and Change* is presented in three sections: Student and Youth Movements; Responses to Repression; and Memory and Commemoration. The first section focuses on youth activism and how society views and responds to such activism. The second section highlights how violent repression of student and youth activism occurs, and the third section examines how it is contested and commemorated.

## STUDENT AND YOUTH MOVEMENTS

Youth are part of the political world. They are not only impacted by policy and power; they impact these dynamics. Student and youth movements, peace builders, and change makers are often seen through the lens of the status quo. As they ask for change, youth can be viewed as uplifting society with hope or as the cause of disorder and destruction. This section examines both, sometimes simultaneous, possibilities.

Chapter 1 of section one, “To Thread the Conscience: Michigan State University and the Anti-Apartheid Movement,” analyzes the student protests of the 1960s’ at Michigan State University of the Apartheid system in South Africa. In this work, Eric Morgan discusses the history and legacy of these students’ work, as well as that of the Southern Africa Liberation Committee (SALC), beginning as students gathered to protest at Chase Manhattan Bank in NYC in support of divestment for the start of a multi-organization coordinated *Action Against Apartheid Week* (Jones, 1965). Morgan demonstrates that the lasting impact of the students’ efforts was a moral awakening in the American public about Apartheid, helping build a movement, especially amongst colleges and universities, that helped to eventually end the policy.

Chapter 2 in this volume tackles why student and youth movements are often portrayed as violent, harmful, threatening, or negative. “In Fear and Loathing: The Rise of Ephebiphobia and its Implications for Youth Activism,” author Elizabeth W. Corrie explores the historical context for how the American teenager is portrayed across past and present social movements including Climate

Strikers, Black Lives Matter, March for Our Lives, and Standing Rock. She demonstrates that a narrative of youth as working outside their roles, being incompletely developed, or needing to be kept securely away from the public sector often dominates (Ellis, 2015; Morris, 2018; Rios, 2011) and argues this *ephebiphobia*, the fear and loathing of young people, shapes their activist work and responses to that work. Furthermore, Corrie points out that a different lens, one that acknowledges the history of criminalization, disempowerment, and dismissal of young people in the public sphere is necessary to fully support youth activism today.

Authors Thomas Elliott and Jennifer Earl in “Talking with or Talking at Young Activists? Mediated Youth Engagement in Web-Accessible Spaces” address an interconnected problem in youth political activism – a youth-deficit model of engagement (Earl, Maher, & Elliott, 2017; Giugni & Grasso, 2019). Despite active involvement and leadership from, by, and for youth over time, the social perspective on youth activism has changed from the 1970s when youth were seen as political actors to today when youth are treated as only followers. This change, they argue, is in part due to this deficit model that centered the ideas, actions, and leadership of adults. The authors examine online or web-accessible spaces, which are more promising for engagement that is youth led and centered, highlighting organizations such as Zero Hour, the Sunrise Movement, and Black Youth Project 100. This chapter seeks to understand if these spaces can overcome this youth-deficit mindset.

The final chapter in this section, “Peace Fellows: Building and Institutionalizing a Visible Peace Community on Campus” by Andrea S. Libresco, Margaret Melkonian, and Susan Cushman, highlights the creation of a space for youth peace builders on the NYU campus. This short spotlight demonstrates one model for how students can be welcomed to engage in peace building and social justice initiatives that impact their lives. The authors highlight innovative ways to build opportunities that can combat the negative social forces discussed in prior chapters, including a stipend for peace fellows to do the work of building peace and the building of a collaborative community across student cohorts.

## RESPONSES TO REPRESSION

How social movements are viewed by a society helps shape what actions can be taken to support or stymie them. As movements contend with the social and political forces discussed in section one, they face a dialectic that often changes both the social movement and the society in which the movement has mobilized. Section two expands on the interplay between society, youth, social movements, and state repression. It examines three case studies from Chile, Iraq, and the Ukraine, demonstrating how student and youth movements change in response to violence, repression, and public opinion.

This first chapter of section two contends with how social support for, or animus against, student movements is shaped by the interaction between activist, authorities, and media. In 2011 Chilean students frustrated with class based

educational separation, sometimes referred to as educational apartheid, led a landmark, and often contentious, movement for educational equality (Getz, 2011; González, Cornejo, & Sanchez, 2006). Gabriela Gonzalez Vaillant and Fernanda Page Poma illustrate a ‘dialectic of repression’ which occurred during this movement in their chapter, “The Morphology of Repression: Dialectics Between Chilean Students and State Force Actions.” Between 2000 and 2012, the authors find that repression and negative media often followed activist strategies that disrupted the status quo, leading to public accusations of youth as a threat to order—a familiar refrain across chapters in this volume, and one which continues to be levied against movements for structural change today.

In “Universities in Post-2003 Iraq: Coalition and Iraqi responses to violence and insecurity,” Sansom Milton examines post-war violence and responses experienced by academics and universities. This chapter demonstrates the vulnerabilities of higher education in post-war situations without clear governmental authorities and protections. The chapter points out that security for universities generally falls to the state government (GCPEA, 2014), and it asks questions about how to create security for students when the state itself is a risk to student welfare. This chapter also examines responses to this violence faced by such institutions in Iraq, including a 2019 protest movement against corruption and failed state services.

The final chapter of this section critically examines the interaction between the state and society in the context of Ukraine. In it, Sophia Wilson looks at how the violent repression of social movements can change a movement, in this case from an initially peaceful one to a movement that uses violence as a tactic. Examining the 2014 Maidan Revolution, “The Ukrainian Revolution: Repression, Interpretation and Dissent” demonstrates the tipping point where revolutionaries shifted their stance on violence. Wilson identifies state-level repressive tactics, such as the use of excessive force by police, torture, and shootings of demonstrators, as key factors in this change. She notes that while repression by the state is often studied as a way to stop activism (Gupta, Harinder, & Sprague, 1993; Moore, 1998), the social interpretation of state repression in this case, especially the beatings of students and youth, led instead to the escalation of the use of political violence by protesters.

## MEMORY AND COMMEMORATION

As the two prior sections of this volume demonstrate, activism and protest by students and youth often face harsh social and state responses. In addition to physical violence and repression, movements can face consequential negative state and social narratives. Moreover, these are not a new phenomenon; the oral and written histories of past events shape future opportunities for student political engagement around the world. The third section of this volume therefore explores the processes of memory and commemoration of two events that changed the narratives of history: the Democracy Uprising in Gwangju, South Korea, and the May 4th, 1970 shootings at Kent State.

South Korean collective memory work is the subject of the next chapter, which focuses on the violently repressed Gwangju Uprising led by students protesting for democracy. In this piece, “Remembering Gwangju: Memory Work in the South Korean Democracy Movement, 1980–1987,” Soon Seok Park discusses the divergence of state-sponsored and popular memories of this event (Lev-Aladgem, 2006). The tensions created in this divergence are important in controlling the narrative and possibilities for state level violent and non-violent responses to activism. In this case study, the interconnection between social perception, activism, and the state helps us understand a successful state-level transition to democracy and how this transition was remembered.

The volume’s concluding chapter brings the volume full circle-back to Kent State University-as it examines the physical work of remembering and commemorating campus activism and violence. E. Timothy Smith in “Tent City 1977 and the Kent State Gym Annex” traces the physical memorialization of May 4, 1970. The chapter focuses on the Kent State University administration’s policies that first stymied and later supported such commemoration (O’Hara, 2006). The work specifically discusses the controversy and conflict surrounding the decision to build the Kent State Gym Annex on the grounds of the 1970 shootings and the impact that had on the campus’s memory of May 4 (Grace, 2016; Grim, 1977).

Taken together, this volume presents a global collection of work from scholars examining how youth and student activists impact broader society and how they are impacted by it. The chapters individually and collectively help us understand how student and youth activism, state repression, and memorialization interact to co-create the outcomes and meanings of movements striving for justice and equity. While this volume represents only a small collection of works on the unique issues confronting students and youth engaging with state violence and social repression, it clearly demonstrates the global legacy of youth activism. I am humbled by the scholars’ strong contributions, and I sincerely hope that this volume of RSMCC does justice to the student activists who inspired it.

## NOTES

1. Without the conference committee’s work, this volume would not have been possible. Thank you to Erika Kuhlman from the Peace History Society and Department of History, Idaho State University; Gratzia Villarroel of the Peace Studies Section of ISA and Department of Political Science, St. Norbert College; Elaine Frantz from the Department of History, Kent State University; David Hassler from the Wick Poetry Center, Kent State University; and special thank you to Landon Hancock from the School of Peace and Conflict Studies, Kent State University and Patrick Coy, Professor Emeritus from the School of Peace and Conflict Studies, Kent State University who co-chaired the committee and provided invaluable support for this volume.

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