



Name of Property: May 4, 1970, Kent State Shootings Site
City, State: Kent, Ohio
Period of Significance: May 1-4, 1970; 1977-78
NHL Criteria: 1, Exception 8
NHL Theme: IV. Shaping the Political Landscape
 1. parties, protests, and movements
 2. governmental institutions
 3. military institutions and activities
 4. political ideas, culture, and themes

Previous Recognition: 2010 National Register of Historic Places
National Historic Context: IX. Political and Military Affairs after 1945
 XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements
 E. Peace Movements
 N. General and Radical Reform

NHL Significance:

- On May 4, 1970, Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, was placed in an international spotlight when a student protest against the Vietnam War on campus ended in tragedy. The Ohio National Guard shot and killed four Kent State students and wounded nine during the protest.
- The historical and social significance of this event is best understood within the context of larger, national student protest movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. The Kent State shootings increased the size of the movement against the Vietnam War and affected



public opinion on the war.

- Trials held subsequent to the shootings resulted in a ruling by the Supreme Court that the executive branch of government does not enjoy absolute immunity for its actions, establishing a legal precedent. The shootings also engendered prompt changes in military policy for civil disturbances, especially for the National Guard.
- In 1977 and 1978, the proposed construction of a university gym annex on a portion of the site associated with the shootings once again triggered student protests against the university and the State of Ohio, protesting how the history of the site was being recognized and preserved by the university, and raising questions about how best to commemorate this and other events.
- The site of the Kent State Shootings has achieved symbolic status resulting from the use of unreasonable, deadly force against protesting citizens by the United States government.

Integrity:

- A large majority of the core area of the May 4, 1970, Kent State Shootings Site has changed little since the period of significance. Adverse impacts caused by post-1970 construction are not concentrated in any one part of the site.
- The construction of the gym annex in 1977 near the southern boundary altered and fragmented the site on a portion of the historic practice field. Still, the original grade and boundaries of the practice field are recognizable.
- When the university rebuilt the Stopher–Johnson dormitory complex in 2006, which is adjacent to the west side of the historic site, it initiated a consultation process and was careful to rebuild on the original footprint in an architectural style, using materials, and

retaining a roofline, similar to the original 1956 buildings.

- Kent State University has a history of recognizing the historical importance of the May 4 Site in its planning processes and is committed to maintaining the integrity and feel of the site.

Owner of Property: Kent State University

Acreage of Property: 17.24 acres

Origins of Nomination: After listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 2010, through the efforts of Kent State University, the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office requested that the NHL Program review the National Register documentation to determine the site's potential as an NHL. The authors of the National Register nomination subsequently wrote the NHL nomination.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- Recognizing this site will remind older generations of, and teach younger generations about, this seminal, nationally significant event from the second half of the twentieth century.
- Designation as an NHL will aid in the interpretation and commemoration of the events of May 4, 1970, and will allow the public to understand the effects of this event on American history.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None is known.

Landmarks Committee Comments: Dr. Leavitt asked the nomination authors to respond to the comment letters objecting to the NHL documentation. Dr. Allan also expressed that compelling evidence outlined in the comment letters should be included, specifically the new information on the forensic analysis revealing an order to fire. One of the nomination authors, Dr. Laura Davis, addressed these concerns by noting that the nomination is complete to the extent of available, documentable evidence. There is a discussion of the forensic evidence regarding the order to fire on page 45. The nomination also includes a lengthy discussion of artistic responses to the shootings, including the song "Ohio". Per Dr. Davis, the differences of opinion are more based on length of discussion rather than content as all of the information which several comment letters note is missing from the nomination is actually discussed.

Dr. Carson noted that the comment letters objecting to the NHL documentation present an alternate history of the events that does not appear in the nomination, making the nomination incomplete. Before he could vote for this nomination the authors would need to acknowledge the complexity of the controversy that surrounds the interpretations of the shootings. The nomination does not need to find common ground but the documentation should acknowledge that these events do engender strong and diverging points of view. Dr. Carson also stated that the shootings have an intellectual history in addition to a political history, which should be acknowledged in a brief discussion in the nomination.

Dr. Chen asked to what extent were those involved in the shootings consulted (Dr. Stevens noted that this was not the question before the committee but rather whether the property meets the criteria for national significance). From the comments received he feels that there are important issues and perspectives that are missing in the nomination. He asked for a more thoughtful response from the authors to those concerns. Dr. Davis outlined the history of the consultation process for the National Register nomination which began in 2007, in addition to two other concurrent projects. These projects all involved extensive consultation that lasted five to six years, including additional consultation for the National Register and National Historic Landmark nominations with diverse audiences. The preparers believe that they have done due diligence with the consultation process.

Dr. Leavitt responded that she would like to see some discussion in the nomination of the different viewpoints in the historiography. Dr. Stevens suggested that the nomination could be approved with the provision that a paragraph or an extensive footnote acknowledge the historiography/diversity of opinions on the shootings.

Dr. Young asked the nomination authors to further discuss the justification for the second period of significance. Dr. Stevens asked for an explanation of why the second period of significance is nationally significant. Dr. Davis noted that there were protests which continued over a two-year period in 1977-78 against the construction of a gym annex over part of the site where people walked during the 1970 protest, in particular the route that the National Guard took down to the practice field. It demonstrates a continuation of the national student protest movement and its lasting impact.

Staff historian Patty Henry asked that the committee note their position on the integrity of the site in response to a comment letter that suggests the site lacks integrity because of the presence of trees. Mr. Hoyos does not believe that the site has been substantially altered to where it cannot be interpreted.

The committee recommended the nomination with the stipulation that a summary of the consultation process and a discussion of the varying points of view in the historiography be added to the nomination and that a response that addresses the factual issues raised in the comment letters be drafted as a separate document.

Landmarks Committee Recommendation: Designation. Dr. Mills moved and Dr. Leavitt seconded; unanimous approval.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of 10/25/16):

Lawrence Pollock, Chair, Board of Trustees, Kent State University, Ohio (owner)

Richard T. Serpe, PhD, Professor and Chair, Sociology, Kent State University

Sandra Perlman Halem, Founder, May 4th Oral History Project, Kent, Ohio

Cara Gilgenbach, MLS, Head, Special Collections and Archives; Associate Professor, Kent State University Libraries

Claire A. Culleton, Professor of English, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio



Amanda Terrell, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Ohio History Connection, Columbus, Ohio

John Fitzgerald O'Hara, PhD, Associate Professor, American Studies Program, Stockton University, Galloway, New Jersey

Cybelle Jones, Principal, Executive Director, Gallagher & Associates, Silver Spring, Maryland

Karen Curry, Executive Director, Rudman Institute for Entertainment Industry Studies, Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts and Design, Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Brian Katona, Aurora, Ohio

Ashton Potter, Brooklyn, New York

Daniel L. Miller, PhD, Director, "Fire in the Heartland," Fire River Pictures, LLC, and Kent State Alumnus; Professor, School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon

Suzanne Clark, PhD, Producer, "Fire in the Heartland," Fire River Pictures, LLC; Professor Emerita, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon

Brian D. DiPaolo, Kent State Student

David Middleton, Professor, The School of Visual Communication Design, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio

Howard Emmer

Mahauganee D. Shaw, PhD, College of Education, Health, and Society, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

Andrew Jones, US History/Humanities Teacher, Hawken School, Ohio

Laurene M. Heybach, Chicago, Illinois

Allen F. Richardson, Old Greenwich, Connecticut

Robin Burkhardt, Ravenna, Ohio

Linda Seeley, Los Osos, California

Sherrod Brown, United States Senator, Washington, DC

Tim Ryan, 13th Ohio District, United States House of Representatives, Washington, DC

John Eklund, 18th District, State Senator, Columbus, Ohio

Kathleen Clyde, 75th House District, State Representative, Ohio

Public Comments (received as of 10/17/16):

Maria Gilardin, TUC Radio

Public Comments Objecting to Documentation (received as of 10/17/16):

Mary Ann Vecchio, Fort White, Florida

Laurel Krause, Kent State Truth Tribunal

Lesley Wischmann, Holly Ridge, North Carolina

Joseph J. Lewis

Cyril H. Wecht, MD, JD

Advisory Board Recommendation: