

## BHS Class of 1970 Memorial Scholarship

### ESSAY

*“This is a live broadcast from Channel 5 News: Two students, James Green and Phillip Gibbs, were killed two days ago at Jackson State University, adding to the deaths of four students from Kent State University. These tragedies seemed to start as student demonstrations, but transformed the institutions of higher learning into battlegrounds. More details on this story at 9:00 pm.”*

I turn off the television in awe and say to myself, “Is this what happens when you stand up for something you believe in?”

As an outspoken college-bound senior, I begin to doubt my anticipation for the freedom and responsibility of college life. During the early spring of this year, a group of protests and demonstrations characterized many college campuses around the country. I never thought the government would take it this far. Many of my classmates had problems with the war in Vietnam and the United States’ invasion of Cambodia, but no one I knew was ever shot for their beliefs. Not only were these students shot and killed for their opinions, they were shot and killed by the government for their opinions. In the “land of the free and the home of the brave,” innocent college students shouldn’t be subjected to this behavior. This information has had a great effect on my decisions relating to the college. These two “massacres” have triggered nationwide student strikes that are forcing hundreds of colleges and universities to close. Many people, including me are beginning to question the necessity and safety of higher education. We, as citizens of this country, should have freedom of speech and expression without being harmed. Obviously something has gone wrong in the system. The Kent State University shooting involved 28 Ohio National Guardsmen opening fire on unarmed demonstrators.

This news event has had the most significant effect on me as a rising college student because one of those students could've been me. I stand up for what I believe in, and knowing that I could be unfairly and illegally killed for it frightens me. My stable plans for college have been shaken. Right now, I'm not even sure if the colleges I am hoping to attend will remain open. I am even considering waiting until things get calm to attend college. Being aware of this information has undoubtedly changed my perspective of many things. Two shootings at different colleges in the span of one month is a lot to handle knowing that in the fall I will be a part of that environment. This incident affected not only seniors but also the President of the United States. Many criticisms were made about the government after these events. Even though the President tried to create ways to solve the violence on college campuses, he was unsure of what to do. When the President of your country seems confused and unsure, what are the citizens supposed to think? Many Americans, counting myself feel helpless. I feel like there is nothing I can do to assure my safety and it seems that President Nixon cannot either. His unsuccessful attempt to establish an emotional connection with several college demonstrators and protestors displays this. His slight failure is evident due to the fact that his effort was a little premature (before the Jackson State shootings).

Everything surrounding the shootings has me thinking about my future. After these fatal tragedies, I don't know how I will enjoy my college experience. Before I knew about these incidents, I was excited and curious about my "journey into adulthood." I have now seen a side to college I had never expected or wanted to see. The issues in politics have a great effect on everyone, even those who don't bother to pay attention to it. The result of the events involving the universities is the awareness of many people. I now realize that being aware is being educated. Many high school seniors are ignorant to what is going on in society, which gives them a disadvantage. Being aware of this information allows me to be cautious and also encourages me to get involved in activities that concern the government. My newfound awareness has

deterred, but at the same time encouraged me to make a difference. The lives of those slain students have given me a reason to do what I feel necessary. Even though the shootings had nothing to do with me, they have had the most significant effect because anybody planning to go to college should be aware that there is a whole new and unpredictable world outside the present environment.

Though discouraged, but at the same time inspired, I turn on the TV again.

*“It has been a tragic month of May, but there is word that President Nixon is planning a committee to investigate the violence on college campuses. To the friends and family of the victims: Our condolences. Now signing off for Channel 5 News. Good Night.”*