

1970 Essay Event

In 1970 there were many national news events that effected people all around the globe. Events such as ten thousand women celebrating the 50th anniversary of the passing of the ninth amendment, or the separation of the Beatles. One significant event that would have affected me the most as a college bound senior would have been the fact that the U.S. States Government was still operating under the draft and the fact that President Nixon in 1970 ordered more American troops into yet another foreign country, Cambodia. Although, these events as two separate events, I see them as one of the same and the Cambodia incident being the straw that broke the camels back. This incident sparked uprising all over American colleges, some of these protest ended in riots and universities shutting and in tragedy as with Kent State University.

President Nixon had thought that his political support would come from his fellow Republicans and the South Vietnamese. He also felt that the gradual withdrawal of American troops, would keep America's opinion of him high and that he would not be criticized by his decision to invade Cambodia. He was very wrong in fact, he was scrutinized following his 30 April 1970 announcement to order more troops into Cambodia. American campuses went into revolt with protest. The reason that the colleges were so upset was because American soldiers were dying in Vietnam already. They didn't want more American troops, which were their peers and family members to be sent to yet another foreign country to die. There were over four hundred universities and colleges shut down as a result of the protest; a lot of schools canceled their graduation ceremonies. The media, as well as many movie stars and high profile individuals were very critical of President Nixon's decision as well and capitalized on the protests at the universities. Even the media that was usually supportive of the President such as the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that the Cambodian invasion would lead to "deeper entrapment" in Indochina. Congress was upset as well as a lot of his administration; four members of Henry Kissinger's staff resigned and two hundred State Department employees signed a petition against the invasion. Congress immediately passed legislation requiring the United States to withdraw from Cambodia.

Out of those four hundred campuses that shut down, the one that stands out in everyone's mind was Kent State University. The most tragic protests were held at Kent State University in Ohio and Jackson State University in Mississippi. These two uprisings led to violent confrontations between the students and police. Two women were killed at Jackson State and the National Guard at Kent State killed four students. However, of these two, the most publicized was the tragedy that occurred on May 4, 1970 at Kent State, where over two thousand people had gathered to protest. They knew that the rally had been banned but they went along with it anyway. There were chants, curses, and rock throwing when the National Guard tried to disperse the crowd. Shortly after noon, tear gas canisters were fired. The gas, blowing in the wind, had little effect on the protesters. The guards moved forward forcing the protestors to retreat to the practice field. Once they moved them to the practice field, the guard realized that the crowd did not disperse so they unloaded a burst of rifle fire at the crowd; the National Guard at Kent State killed four students. After this incident, the campus was closed. Professors took

students into their homes; they housed them, fed them, and taught them. The university went on literally underground; the university was in fact never closed... the faculty was the survival of Kent State University. On June 13, 1970, 40 days after the University closed its classrooms, 1,250 seniors and graduate students returned to the Kent Campus to receive degrees.

Now, if I was a college bound senior in 1970, this national news event would have the most significant effect on me because it dealt with my next step in life and that would have been the fact that I wanted to attend college. During this time most high school seniors were automatically drafted to fight in Vietnam. The truth is, of those that went to college, they were mostly wealthy young men and women. So, as a young black man I probably wouldn't have gone to college. I would have been drafted. Another simple truth is that as a healthy, young college bound student in 1970, my choices in life would have been very limited. My three choices would have been to accept the draft, dodge the draft by leaving home and going to live in Canada or another country or to attend college if my family could afford to send me. If I would have been lucky enough to go to college, my plans would have been hindered due to the over four hundred campuses that were shut down.

The shooting at Kent State University would have really made me have second thoughts about going there but better there with a numbered amount of National Guardsmen than in Vietnam with an endless supply of Vietnamese. As a young black man during that time in American history, I wouldn't have been safe on the streets in Mississippi, at a university in Ohio or in Vietnam. It seems that my life would have been very bleak and hopeless. I realize that I live in a different world today and a much better America. I am not saying that all is perfect in America because there are many things that we can improve on and some of the civil rights we were fighting for in 1970 we are still fighting for. However, when all is said and done, I feel very blessed to be a college bound student in the year 2002.