Kent State in Context:
The National Guard in Campus Disorders
1965 - 1970

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Overview

- Purpose
- Methods, background of the paper
- Types of protest and appropriate control strategies
- About the U. S. National Guard
- Importance of location (lack of local police)
- History of NG involvement on college campuses, 1965-1970
  - 44 incidents, 3 stages
- Escalation, state political factors
- Analyzing NG success and misapplication of force
  - As related to type of protest, enforcement code
- Discussion and conclusions . . .
  - About the National Guard
  - About Kent State
Teenager Mary Ann Vecchio screams as she kneels over the body of Kent State University student Jeffrey Miller, May 4, 1970. Photo by John Filo.
On May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guard troops shot their rifles at a crowd of protesting students, killing four and wounding seven. A pivotal moment in the movement against the Vietnam War.

The Scranton Commission (1970) called the shootings “unnecessary, unwarranted, and inexcusable.” But the event was not inexplicable.

Analysis: every incident of campus unrest where NG was actively involved, 1965 - 70.

Purpose: Identify factors that contributed to:
- NG effectiveness in restoring/maintaining order
- Violence/misapplication force by NG

Analysis not meant to exonerate those who acted badly at Kent State
Background and methods

• Author enlisted in DC National Guard in late 1969, under threat of draft
  – Applied to U. of Chicago Sociology PhD program while on active duty.
• Arrived in Chicago just after May 4, freshly trained in riot control
  – Called for investigation of Ohio National Guard at public “student strike” meeting
  – Invited by the late Morris Janowitz to study NG that summer
• Summer 1970: Travelled to DC to do research at National Guard Association
  – Annual state NG reports, After Action reports list every NG activation, with operational
details
• Gathered accounts of each incident from New York Times microfilm, other
newspapers and sources in U of C library
• December 1970: Completed 90-page white paper summarizing results
• 2019-20: With Kent State 50th anniversary approaching, updated analysis
  based on recent literature about protest policing.
N6’s on Campus - Voorhees College 1970

N6’s on Campus - Ohio State Univ.

which are still boarded up.  It took on April 29, six weeks ago, was
for 12 black demands, 7 white, to win student power group demands,
Women’s Liberation Front.  New commencement comes away campus
security demands are still being negotiated.  New black demands cancelled
after issues unsettled, student unrest about campus security.  N6’s
were occupied all week.  4000 in area on May 25.  For 3
preceding days, pedestrians 2 blocks from university had been asked
for identification.  N6’s, with bayonets, blacked rifle, jungle setting on
helmets.  Last week the N6’s were discreetly replaced with unarmed
picketers.  3,316 acre campus.  Since last Monday, 34 students
arrested for disrupting a meeting (classes) and interrupting on 2 domiciled areas
campus.  Barricades.  Columbus Mayor, Maynard K.  Demenskramer, said
police lives more important than disruptions. Much less force used now since
April 29, 1980.
### Types of protest and control strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spontaneous</th>
<th>Organized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peaceful</strong></td>
<td>Casual Crowd</td>
<td>Peaceful Demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disruptive</strong></td>
<td>Unruly crowd</td>
<td>Disruptive Demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violent</strong></td>
<td>Emergent Crowd Violence</td>
<td>Planned Violent Demonstration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Organized protest differs from spontaneous protest in degree of social organization
- If spontaneous violence occurs in a crowd, dispersal of crowd is effective
- Organized groups need a policing approach through leadership
  - Make use of existing social controls on participants
Two enforcement codes in tension

“Escalated force”
- well-armed and trained police and soldiers
- equipped with full anti-riot equipment
- clearly defined plan
- completely clear the area of disturbance
- use only force necessary to accomplish the objective

(NCCPV 1968)

“Negotiated management”
- Restraint and professionalism
- Not goaded by actions of the few; retain crowd’s good will
- Control troublemakers without antagonizing the crowd
- Officials must deal in good faith with dissenting groups
- Grant full expression to freedom of speech, assembly.

(NCCPV 1969)
About the National Guard

• Dual mission: Federal and state
  – In 1960s, Guard used almost exclusively for domestic (state) duties

• Governor of the state can activate the Guard

• Training and equipment aimed at the Federal mission (combat)

• A military force, not a police force
  – In this period, Guard lacked non-lethal weapons, protective equipment, cross-agency radio equipment, coordinated intelligence sources

• Riot training based on methods for controlling urban disorders
  – Not suited to control of large, organized demonstrations
  – Not suited to geography and social structure of a college campus
Importance of geography

• When disorder occurs, local police have primary responsibility for control
  – National Guard is usually used to back up or supplement police
  – For example: traffic control, establish a perimeter, guard arrestees

• Small college towns have small police forces
  – Campus cops usually lack power of arrest
  – In large cities, local police have sufficient staff for control

• When disorder occurs in a small college town, local law enforcement is easily overwhelmed
  – Guard is more likely to be called out
  – Guard is more likely to have direct contact with protesters
44 incidents, 3 periods

- **1965-68: Black student unrest**
  - 9 incidents, all at HBCU’s

- **Spring 1969: Broadening white student protest**
  - 7 incidents, including 4 HBCU’s
  - Major Guard involvement at U. Wisconsin, Berkeley

- **Spring 1970: Violent white student protest**
  - 28 incidents, peaking in May after Nixon announces Cambodia invasion
Escalation and spread of campus unrest

- Focus of protest shifted from black student demands to protest over the war, the draft, role of the military on campus
- Protest tactics of white students became more disruptive, violent
- White student protest moved from cities to small town campuses
- Incidents of campus unrest involving NG became more frequent
  - Average number of National Guard troops called up increased
- Certain state governors took a “law & order” stand, more frequently called out the Guard
  - Ohio Gov. Rhodes, California Gov. Reagan, others
  - Actions of these authorities increased polarization, protest
NG violence and violence by police: by type of incident

33 incidents with active involvement of National Guard troops in control of campus unrest
Classification of 33 incidents

• Type of protest:
  – Was protest activity mostly spontaneous, organized, or mixed?

• Enforcement code:
  – Was the campus promptly closed?
    • 9 schools closed immediately, 6 closed later
    • All closings were at HBCU’s, or at other schools after Kent State
  – What was the effective policy on peaceful demonstrations?
    • Permitted?
    • Banned or suppressed?
    • Not allowed after curfew?

(Not included: 11 incidents where NG troops were only on stand-by)
### Organized, non-violent incidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NG posture</th>
<th>College/University of incident</th>
<th>HBCU?</th>
<th>Campus closure</th>
<th>NG violence</th>
<th>Other agency violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active control</td>
<td>Tuskegee</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delaware State</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voorhees 1969</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voorhees 1970</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U. New Mexico</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>10 bayonet wounds</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U. Denver</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordon</td>
<td>Grambling</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Dog bites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miami of Ohio</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Dog bites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oregon 4/15/70</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organized, non-violent incidents

• Surest way to end disorder: promptly close the campus!
• NG was effective when used for organized, disruptive protest
  – Because campus was closed in most of these incidents
  – NG used as overwhelming force to clear campus, maintain cordon
• Only one incident involved NG violence (bayonet wounds)
## Spontaneous, violent incidents

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>College/University of incident</th>
<th>HBCU?</th>
<th>Campus closure</th>
<th>NG violence</th>
<th>Other agency violence</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackson State 1967</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 killed by police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.C.A.&amp;T. 1968</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida A.&amp;M.</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern—Baton Rouge</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Police shotgun fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.C.A.&amp;T. 1969</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson State 1970</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Open 1 day</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 killed, 12 wounded by police</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** NG returned sniper fire, no casualties
Spontaneous, violent incidents

- Spontaneous violence incidents were all at HBCUs
  - Police violence prominent in these incidents
    - Tragic deaths in two incidents at Jackson State
  - NG performed effectively, without serious misapplication of force
  - These incidents most closely resemble urban disorders of 1960s
Mixed incidents, demonstrations permitted

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>College/University of incident</th>
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<th>NG violence</th>
<th>Other agency violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central State U.</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Open 1 day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina State</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>Open 2 days</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>Highway patrol kills 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. Wisconsin 1969</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Illinois 2/70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>U. Kansas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>U. Maryland</td>
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<tr>
<td>U. of Illinois 5/70</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>U. Wisconsin 1970</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio U.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td></td>
<td>++ NG troops charged crowd with troopers from Highway Patrol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mixed incidents, demonstrations permitted

- Official approach resembled “negotiated management” (McPhail et al. 1998, Gillham 2011)
  - But without advance negotiation or close coordination with demonstration leaders
- Police violence at SCSC (Orangeburg massacre)
- Incidents lasted several days
  - Turmoil and disruption similar to campuses where protest prohibited
- No NG misapplication of force
## Mixed incidents, demonstrations prevented

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>NG posture</th>
<th>College/University of incident</th>
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<th>Campus closure</th>
<th>NG violence</th>
<th>Other agency violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations Banned</td>
<td>Alcorn A &amp; M</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Troopers club protesters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sheriff’s deputies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ohio State U. April 1970</td>
<td></td>
<td>Open 10 days</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sheriff’s deputies’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kent State</td>
<td></td>
<td>Open 3 days</td>
<td>4 killed, 9 wounded; 2-3 bayonet wounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curfews</td>
<td>Ohio State U. May 1970</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U. of Illinois 3/70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southern Illinois 3/70</td>
<td></td>
<td>Open 4 days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U. South Carolina</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Mixed incidents, demonstrations prevented

• Guard expected to maintain “law and order”
  – No mass protests allowed, even if peaceful
• Incidents lasted several days
  – Campuses kept open or only closed after several days of chaos
• Serious violence by law enforcement occurred in all four incidents where peaceful protest was prohibited on open campus
  – NG violence at Kent State
  – Violence at Alcorn, Berkeley, Ohio State by state police or sheriff deputies
Analysis by incident type and enforcement code suggests . . .

- **Surest way to end disorder: promptly close the campus**
  - Campuses often closed in the early HBCU phase
  - Then again after Kent State tragedy
- **NG was most effective in spontaneous violence incidents**
  - These situations are most similar to urban riots of the 1960s
  - NG was equipped and trained for this type of unrest
  - “Escalated force,” crowd dispersal can be effective in these incidents
- **NG usually effective in clearing disruptive, organized protest**
  - Because HBCUs closed when such protests occurred
  - But: NG wounded 10 with bayonets while clearing occupation of building at closed U. New Mexico
More from the analysis . . .

• Across all types of incidents, violence from police occurred more often than violence from the National Guard
• Violence was associated with official policies that kept campus open, expected NG to maintain order in a mixed situation
  – No Guard violence in incidents where peaceful assembly was allowed, some disruption tolerated
  – Law enforcement violence most common where peaceful protest was prevented
• Misapplication of force most likely where official enforcement policy (‘escalated force’) is not suited to type and locale of protest
• NG is a military force, not a police force, and should be used accordingly
Kent State in context

• Tragic sequence of events at Kent State has been well documented
  – Current analysis adds no new facts to the record
  – Recognizing larger circumstances does not exonerate those responsible
• Kent, Ohio is a small town, NG had to be summoned
• Authorities chose to keep KSU open, prohibit protest
  – NG training, equipment, and tactics badly mismatched to that mission
  – Ironically, enforcement code emerged informally, with no clear top direction
• Kent State was *typical* in the difficulty NG experienced in controlling protest, maintaining order in mixed, complex campus unrest
• Kent State was *exceptional* in the extreme misapplication of force by the National Guard
Let us remember . . .

Black student lives lost to police violence:
- Jackson State 1967
- South Carolina State 1967
- Jackson State 1970
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