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From Another Era: Living in the Moment

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From Another Era: Living in the Moment

Abstract

I'm the child of Baby Boomers, born and bred in Ohio. Although I've since moved away, Ohio is and always will be home. The one thing that I always remember about springtime and Ohio is May 4th. All throughout high school and college, it seemed like every spring, as the days inched closer and closer to May 4th, talk among teachers and parents would invariably drift towards Kent State and the memories of the terrible shootings that happened there. Growing up in Ohio, it's just a fact of life that everyone learns about Kent State. It is ingrained into state memory. There are Kent State alums all across the state, and it always seemed like there was one willing to share his/her experiences, even if it was several years before or after the shootings. [excerpt]

Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation

Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Public History | Social History | United States History

Comments

Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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From Another Era: Living in the Moment

TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 2012

I'm the child of Baby Boomers, born and bred in Ohio. Although I've since moved away, Ohio is and always will be home. The one thing that I always remember about springtime and Ohio is May 4th. All throughout high school and college, it seemed like every spring, as the days inched closer and closer to May 4th, talk among teachers and parents would invariably drift towards Kent State and the memories of the terrible shootings that happened there. Growing up in Ohio, it's just a fact of life that everyone learns about Kent State. It is ingrained into state memory. There are Kent State alums all across the state, and it always seemed like there was one willing to share his/her experiences, even if it was several years before or after the shootings.

So, I always knew of Kent State. But I never understood it. The seriousness, the tension, the fear, all the different emotions that Kent State produced - the vivid memories of that moment in time, just never resonated with me, for we all know the ending. Knowing what we know now, it was just a bad situation all over. There were scared kids on both sides. Shots were fired somewhere, and basic survival instincts kicked in – the guardsmen fired on the crowd. It wasn't until my senior year in college, while working on my senior thesis, that I finally understood the meaning of Kent State.

I was interviewing emeritus professor of history, Dan Calhoun, about the College of Wooster during the 1960s. We were talking about a wide range of subjects, from the anti-war movement and the Civil Rights Movement, to religion and liberal arts education. And like most conversations about protest in Ohio, we drifted towards talking about Kent State. Professor Calhoun remembered the day, recalling that many students and faculty had skipped classes that day at Wooster, instead opting for a teach-in – a sort of free form discussion that students and faculty often held in the student union, discussing the pressing issues of the day. Calhoun related that he was actually speaking when news broke of the tragedy at Kent State.

“They are killing students at Kent State.” That was the first thing they heard.

That was it. They, the government, was shooting its own. They were shooting their own students for protesting the war. When Professor Calhoun told me that line, I immediately understood. A wave of emotion swept over me. For the first time, I sensed the fears, the tension, and the terror that Kent State created. A million questions must have popped into the student and faculty's heads, when they heard the news. Kent State became alive to me that day. It held meaning for the first time.

Thinking back to Kent State, I know there have been many other moments like it in history. Moments when terrible

**Four Students Killed In Kent State Riots
As Violent Campus Demonstrations Spread**

news breaks, something bad has just happened, and no one knows what is going on. I have lived through one myself – the September 11 terrorist attacks. It leads me to think back to what those moments might have been during the Civil War.

Firing on Fort Sumter – What did that mean to the folks in the moment? Civil war has come. American blood has been spilled by Americans. What is going to happen to the United States?

Lincoln's been shot – What will happen to this newly settled peace?

Similarly, there are much smaller personal moments too, that can be interpreted at every battlefield. My best friend has been shot. I just saw my commander blown to pieces. I just killed another man. Moments of tragedy and triumph like the above mentioned are really what our sites are all about.