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William A. Gordon. *Four Dead in Ohio: Was there a Conspiracy at Kent State?* Laguna Hills, Calif.: North Ridge Books, 1995. 301 pp. $13.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-937813-05-8.

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Freelance journalist William Gordon has re-issued his 1990 *The Fourth of May: Killings and Coverups at Kent State* (Prometheus Books). Although there are some changes, *Four Dead in Ohio* is basically the same book. Taking on the controversy surrounding the killing of four students and the wounding of nine others by the Ohio National Guard on May 4, 1970, Gordon states that he feels that he has a "fairly good idea of what happened" (p. 16). What he certainly proves is that many questions remain about the actions taken by the Guard while on the Kent State University campus in early May. The main question that he tries to answer is whether or not there was a National Guard conspiracy to kill the students. Unfortunately, he is unable to provide proof of that conspiracy. Gordon states that it is his view that an order to fire was issued by officers, but admits that the evidence is circumstantial and only four or five guardsmen, who have kept silent on the issue, know the truth (pp. 207-208).

No definitive history, using all the documents available on the events that May, has been published. Such a book would need to place the shootings in the context of changes in American universities in the 1960s, the Vietnam War, the political upheavals of the decade, and particularly the invasion of Cambodia which prompted the incident at Kent State. Nevertheless, much has been written on the events at the university, including James Michener's *Kent State*, Peter Davies' *The Truth About Kent State*, and Scott Bills' edited collection of experiences *Kent State/May 4: Echoes through the Decade*. Each has its value, but the first two (and many others) were written in the heat of the killings and published prior to the trials that followed later in the decade. Bills' book is a collection of essays and interviews that provides some unique and personal perspectives to the events, but is not an effort to be a complete history of those events.

While Gordon's book attempts to be comprehensive in terms of the story at Kent State, it too does not attempt to place those events in the historical perspective of the tumultuous 1960s. He begins with the events sparked by the invasion of Cambodia and the protests that followed the next day on the campus. He discusses the harsh rhetoric of Ohio Governor James Rhodes in Kent the day before the shootings and then follows the events that led to the killings and the contradictions in statements made by the Guard and others in the aftermath. He also provides evidence that the Nixon White House attempted to coverup and suppress any Justice Department investigation. Finally, Gordon discusses the criminal and civil trials that ultimately resulted in an out-of-court settlement in 1979 that awarded the victims $675,000 and included a "statement of regret" to the victims and their families from Rhodes and the Guardsmen.

The most significant changes in the new version comes in the acknowledgements, the preface and the bibliography. In the latter, Gordon expands his commentary on the books and created a new category which he calls "Scholarly Studies (Or At Least What Passes For Scholarship)" (p. 273)! Although his is an interesting and valuable book, Gordon seems to resent much of the academic work done on the Kent State killings. This new version does much to distance itself from the academic writing style. For example, while the 1990 book had numbered endnotes, the 1995 paperback has extensive discussions in the note section followed by page-by-page source notes referenced by key phrases in the text. It is in the note section that one finds the biggest problem with the book. The reader is forced to read two sections of the book at once: the chapter itself and the discussions that go along with each chapter which are placed in the back of the book with the notes. The author would have done better to integrate those discussions into the chapter text.

Gordon combines a personal pursuit of justice with a critical eye toward contradictions in participants' statements. He writes based on his personal experiences,

interviews with the participants, and investigative research, though at times he relies too much on his personal observations. Using the evidence available, Gordon raises significant questions about what went on from the burning of the Kent State Reserve Officer Training Corps building to the shootings and subsequent investigations and trials. *Four Dead in Ohio* is certainly worth reading. In the end, however, it fails to answer many of the questions that still remain about what happened on the Fourth of May.

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