

On May 4, 1970, at Kent State University in Ohio, political fires that had been burning across America during the 1960s exploded. Antiwar protesters wearing bell-bottom jeans hurled taunts and rocks at another group of young Americans—National Guardsmen sporting gas masks and rifles. At half past noon, violence unfolded with chaotic speed, as guardsmen—many of whom had joined the Guard to escape the draft—opened fire on the students.

Kent State meticulously re-creates the divided cultural landscape of America during the Vietnam War and popular anxieties around the country. On college campuses, teach-ins, sit-down strikes, and demonstrations exposed the growing rift between the left and the right. Many students opposed the war as unjust and were uneasy over poor and working-class kids drafted and sent to Vietnam in their place. Some developed a hatred for the military, the police, and everything associated with authority, while others resolved to uphold law and order at any cost.

Focusing on the thirteen victims of the Kent State shooting and a painstaking reconstruction of the days surrounding it, historian Brian VanDeMark draws on crucial new research and interviews—including, for the first time, the perspective of guardsmen who were there. The result is a complete reckoning with the tragedy that marked the end of the sixties.

Brian VanDeMark teaches history at the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis. The author of several books on American history, he also coauthored Robert McNamara's bestselling Vietnam memoir, *In Retrospect*, which became the basis of the Academy Award-winning documentary *The Fog of War*. He lives in Maryland.

Read by Daniel Hennig



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AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

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