

EPISODE 3: “The Wild Wild Midwest” TRANSCRIPT [FINAL] w/ Citations

SIOBHAN RYAN: Hey, it's Siobhan! If you haven't listened to episode 1, go back and start there. This episode will make more sense.

KACIE LUCCHINI BUTCHER: The year is 1958. And E.A. Bulkley is furious. He's just received a citation from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Protection & Security Department. Filled with self-righteousness and rage he sits down at his typewriter to respond to his citation.

[old-timey voice with typewriter sounds]

“I return here with your citation No. 74487. I refuse to answer it. I recognize the authority of the police department of the city of Madison to summon and try me for traffic and other offenses. I recognize no such authority in you. I repeat I will not appear before your private “court”; nor will I pay any “fine” assessed by it.”¹

SR: The University is undeterred by Bulkley's stern letter. In fact, the President - yes! The President of the University – responds himself.

[old timey voice with typewriter sounds]

“We regret that you were inconvenienced and annoyed ... The State Statutes authorize the Regents of the University of Wisconsin to establish rules and regulation for the use of University property, and the regents accordingly have established certain regulations relating to traffic and parking.”²

SR: But E.A. Bulkley is not finished.

[old timey voice with typewriter sounds]

“If this insolent piece of paper is returned to me again I will put it in the waste basket. I will not pay you any “fines.” I will not appear in your private “courts.” I will not follow “instructions” from you under any conditions.

¹ Letter from E.A. Bulkley to University of Wisconsin–Madison re: parking ticket, September 25, 1958, VP of Business and Finance Records, General Correspondence Files, Ce-Coll, 1958–1959, Series 24/1/1, Box 418, “Department of Protection and Security 1958–1959” Folder, University of Wisconsin–Madison Archive, Madison, Wisconsin (henceforth referred to as UW Archives).

² Letter from President Elvehjem to E.A. Bulkley re: parking ticket, September 26, 1958, VP of Business and Finance Records, General Correspondence Files, Ce-Coll, 1958–1959, Series 24/1/1, Box 418, “Department of Protection and Security 1958–1959” Folder, UW Archives.

*The legality of your private police system is irrelevant. An abuse of police power does not become less dangerous because it is ignored, connived at, or permitted by local authorities.*³

GW: Nothing like parking tickets to like really bring out people's like, explicit ideas about, like, power and governance.

KLB: From the Rebecca M. Blank Center for Campus History, this is *Reorientation*, a podcast exploring the history of UW–Madison you won't get on your campus welcome tour. I'm Kacie Lucchini Butcher.

SR: And I'm Siobhan Ryan.

SR: In the third episode of our podcast, we're talking about rogue campus police in the 1940s and 1950s, what powers they had, what power they didn't, and how campus security transformed into campus police.

[Music]

KLB: So, that last voice you heard in the intro... that was Grace Watkins.

GW: I'm Grace Watkins. I'm a doctoral student in history at Oxford, and I'm also a law student at Yale Law School. I'm writing my dissertation about the legal history of how campus police transformed from night watchman into full service police departments.

KLB: Today the UWPD is a “real” police force, deputized and given powers not only by the University but by the State of Wisconsin. But as E.A. Bulkley's letter indicates, it wasn't always this way. In the early-to-mid 20th century, the Madison community was confused about what powers UWPD actually had... if any ... And so were we as researchers.

SR: When UWPD became a police department [...]

KLB: That's Siobhan, talking with Grace.

SR: [...] the first reference to them being like officers of the peace legally in the Wisconsin statute seems to be in 1973.⁴ But, clearly there are records, from well before

³ Letter from E.A. Bulkley to University of Wisconsin–Madison re: parking ticket, September 29, 1958, VP of Business and Finance Records, General Correspondence Files, Ce-Coll, 1958–1959, Series 24/1/1, Box 418, “Department of Protection and Security 1958–1959” Folder, UW Archives.

⁴ Wisconsin Statutes 1973, Chapter 36, Section 11, <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/1973/statutes/statutes/36.pdf>

that, like even in 1950s, the 1950s, where the university is, defining their role as like, preserving law and order and enforcing the law.

GW: Yeah. yeah, it's a mysterious process. And it follows a very different trajectory from what I understand is like what's happening in the municipal police world. What I expected to find was that they were operating as night watchmen and lobbying for, like, recognition by the state legislature or, you know, deputization agreements with local police. And then once they had that, they then moved forward as police and operated as police. But what seems to have been the case is kind of the opposite order is that they started acting as police before they had the official recognition of their powers. And if you're, you know, an everyday private citizen, you know, it's illegal to impersonate a police officer.

SR: At this point you might be just as confused as we were. Are the UWPD really police before 1973? And if they're not, are they just pretending to be? Isn't that illegal? What on earth is going on?!

GW: They might've had some kind of informal deputization agreement. I wouldn't be surprised if they did. That seemed like an early precursor to recognition by the state legislature. But no, yeah, like I think one of the main arguments of my chapter is that they, yeah, they just were acting as police and that was their pathway to becoming police.

KLB: Yeah, you heard that right. UWPD became police by acting as police, long before they had recognition by the state legislature, and long before they had proper protocols or even training. Unsurprisingly this "Wild West" lawless approach to policing began to cause problems on campus almost immediately.

[old timey voice]

"Brash, Outdated Police Practices Need Action, Now." Daily Cardinal, May 23, 1951.⁵

"U.W. Police Cleared, But New Rules Set," Wisconsin State Journal, May 9, 1953⁶

"Cabbies Insist on Suspension of Hammersley," Wisconsin State Journal, September 13, 1945.⁷

KLB: It all comes back to Hammersley.

⁵ Newspaper Clipping, "Brash, Outdated Police Practices Need Action, Now," *Daily Cardinal*, May 23, 1951, Dean of Men's Records – Kenneth Little, Series 19/2/3/4, Box 28 "Campus Police Problems" Folder, UW Archives.

⁶ "U.W. Police Cleared, But New Rules Set," *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 9, 1953, accessed at <https://newspaperarchive.com/madison-wisconsin-state-journal-may-09-1953-p-1/>

⁷ "Cabbies Insist on Suspension of Hammersley," *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 13, 1945.

GW: It literally all does. Everything comes back to Joseph Hammersley.

SR: Wait... who is Hammersley?

[scratch freeze frame sound, rewind sound]

KLB: Oh... oh! I'm so happy you asked. How do I begin to explain Officer Joseph Hammerlsey? He's... well, have you ever seen one of those crime shows? Like *True Detective*? Or *Mare of Easttown*?

SR: Sure...

KLB: I want to be clear: Hammersley is very, very real. He served as the de facto chief of police of UWPD for years and was on the force for nearly two decades. But he's always reminded me of these sort of tropey crime show detective characters. Hammersley is aggressive, belligerent, a man who has no leash and no line he won't cross.⁸

SR: Oh my god, it could be the tagline of Netflix's newest gritty crime drama...

KLB: Listen, they would have a ton of content... Hammersley is accused of ticketing without cause, provoking drivers with violence to solicit more serious criminal charges, using abusive language to "torment drivers," using anti-Semitic and racist slurs, throwing leaded billy clubs at students, disrupting class to arrest students, searching dormitories without warrants, threatening students with firearms, and improperly "handling and methods of approach to student sex activity and homosexuality. [dramatic deep breath]

SR: He sounds like the stereotype of a bad cop.

KLB: Yeah! Imagine if I wrote him for a show, the showrunner would say whoa "tone it down, that's way over the top." Because his story is just SO bad. That's not even all of it. He's often accused of being drunk on the job, drunk off the job. His two public, very messy divorces revealed that he was abusive and at one point he had threatened to kill his own children. He's... and this is my professional historian opinion – a really bad dude. And for 20 years, Officer Hammersley is the face of the UWPD.

SIMON BALTO: I think that someone like Hammersley is not atypical of what police were doing at, basically all across the country.

⁸ You can find more information about Joseph Hammersley's conduct, including full citations, on our website:

<https://campushistory.wisc.edu/the-hammersley-method-the-history-of-mistrust-between-the-uw-madison-community-and-the-uw-madison-police-department/>

SR: That's Simon Balto.

SB: Okay. I'm Simon Balto, I'm an associate professor of history here at UW-Madison.

KLB: And, can you tell us what history you do?

SB: I specialize in African American history with a particular emphasis on the criminal legal system and the way that it operates in the United States.

SR: We talked to Simon to get to the bottom of the type of pseudo-policing lawlessness that was happening in America during the early 20th century.

SB: In many places in the 1940s and the 1950s, police operated roughly as they wanted to operate. And it's not to say that there wasn't ever any discipline whatsoever, but it is to say that, like, you know, being violent, being aggressive, being intrusive, these were not things that were discouraged.

SB: And in many ways, they still aren't, right? I mean, when it comes to what police do, but it is to say that there is at least to some degree more oversight over police conduct in 2024 than there was in, say, 1944. But I think that Hammersley was not, yeah, I think that he was just a particularly bad apple, perhaps, But like, but again, we can't separate him from the cart, from the apple cart, right? Where, if we take the proverbial cart to be the entirety of the profession of policing, I think that he was, he was remarkable for what he was caught doing, and less so for what he was actually doing.

KLB: Grace Watkins agreed.

GW: Yeah, I think the UWPD is remarkably representative of what the early post war period of campus policing was like. You know, large public universities were the leaders in establishing campus policing because they were receiving the largest influx of students from the GI Bill and just like general boom in student enrollment in the postwar period. And so they were the first to sort of respond to that influx of students by expanding their campus security or campus police departments.

SR: So, surely this had to cause issues with the actual Madison police department right? UWPD was essentially acting as police, under a terrible leader, with no training. Wasn't the city furious?

KLB: Oh, Absolutely. The city and the University had many meetings in the 1930s and 1940s about how they planned to work in unison – or in some cases wholly separately – to handle issues on campus. But in February of 1952, Richard Bardwell the Dane County District Attorney sent a scathing letter to the University and the UWPD.

[old timey voice]

“The manner in which these cases were handled hardly measures up to what might even be remotely considered efficient police practice... If the university intends to operate its own police force on anything approaching a reasonably efficient basis, decisions on criminal matters should not be left to people devoid of legal or police experience as background.

In other words, if the University is desirous of maintaining its own police force, it should be operated as a police force.

It is my urgent suggestion that somebody be placed in charge of the University police that has some idea of what law enforcement is all about. The ineptness of the present system is apparent from the manner in which the foregoing cases were handled.”⁹

SR: whoa! That is brutal.

KLB: Here I am talking with Grace about it.

KLB: You don't have records. Your police reports are shoddy. Like he has a list of complaints about how they've screwed up. And he basically says you're acting like police with no police training or power. Like, what are you doing? I couldn't believe that letter wasn't more of like a wake up call or like an impetus. And it was only a wake up call in the sense that they were like, oh, I guess we should probably get more police and maybe get some training, like some rough training. But it didn't stop them.

GW: Yeah. No, it kind of cemented their powers, like they kind of got their foot in the door through doing that. And at other institutions, like, there are pretty stark examples of, like, students pointing out, they're like, wait, like, checking state law and being like you're not actually police. And then them overnight having to change their sirens from red sirens to amber sirens or crossing off the word police that they had on all their squad cars and uniforms until they could, you know, then, you know, scrambling to get it officially codified.

KLB: And UWPD does eventually get codified. In the early 1970s. But from 1938 until then they are acting without any codified state powers as police and mucking it up quite often.

SR: So what happens to Hammerlsey? UW must take action against him, right? Do they fire him?

⁹ Letter from Richard Bardwell to Frederick B. Wilcox, February 6, 1952, Dean of Men's Records – Kenneth Little, Series 19/2/3/4, Box 28 “Campus Police Problems” Folder, UW Archives.

KLB: No. He dies in September of 1959 as an active officer on the force.

SR: What?!

KLB: Yeah! Hammersley's 20-year record of complaints and legal violations is well documented. In fact, it was Hammersley's behavior, and the behavior of the officers he was tasked with leading, that clearly began the student outcry about police on campus. Yet, he was *never* punished, reprimanded, or fired. I was never able to even find any letters that indicate that university administrators or Regents even considered seriously reprimanding him, let alone dismissing him.

SB: Really the most important part of that story is that UW administration had clear evidence of what he was doing and the ways that it was impacting people and the real concerns that students, that faculty, that community members had about what he was doing.

SB: Right. And they still thought that what he was doing was fine. Right. And it's because what the administration wants is largely detached from what students and faculty and community members want.

KLB: And you'd think once he dies that it would solve some of the problems, right? That this "bad apple" is gone so UWPD's practices would change. But if the reports, letters, and newspaper articles about UWPD after Hammersley's death do not focus on him, they point to officers close with Hammersley, and those trained by him.

GW: I mean, I'm just reflecting on what you're saying about Hammersley and, like, whether he's kind of exceptional or not in his badness. Like, I've always thought of him as sort of a composite character of behavior that I see across the board in the post war period. But that there's just like a kind of remarkable amount of documentation of what he was up to. You know, I don't think he was that different from any of the other officers on the force. And I think what's also interesting about him is that he was never chief. You know, that he, like, I think his case really demonstrates the significance and the importance of the day-to-day actions of rank and file officers on patrol and the way that they wield the discretion, their own discretion in deciding what to do with the people they encountered.

KLB: If Hammersley's actions did any small tiny slightly positive thing, it spurred students to more vocally protest UWPD and to demand better. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Hammersley is largely a caricature with students. They mock him in campus newspapers, yearbooks, and joke publications. But over time, the joke didn't seem to be funny anymore. Newspaper headlines shifted, the tenor of conversation on campus changed. And by the early 1950s, UWPD began to seriously professionalize sometimes in what appeared to be in nearly direct response to Hammersley's actions. New uniforms, more conspicuous police vehicles, a

police station on campus, and a real chief of police with - and I know this is shocking - actual police training.

SR: So... What does UWPD do on its newly found path to professionalization? We'll talk about one of UWPD's first real policing initiatives – a 15 year shadow operation to purge the university of a perceived moral blight. **That's on the next episode of *Reorientation*.**

KLB: You can find a full teaching guide for this episode on our website at [campushistory dot wisc dot E-D-U](http://campushistorydotwiscdotE-D-U). That includes a link to an in-depth research article from the Center about Hammersley, in case you want to read even more.

SR: *Reorientation* is written by me, Siobhan Ryan, Kacie Lucchini Butcher and John K. Wilson. He also produced and edited this episode.

SR: Additional help from Amaya Boman, Taylor Bailey and Dan Berman.

SR: You can subscribe for more episodes wherever you get your podcasts.