

#### **EPISODE 4: “Morality Police” TRANSCRIPT [FINAL] w/ Citations**

**KACIE LUCCHINI BUTCHER:** Hey, it's Kacie! If you haven't listened to the rest of the season, go back and start with episode 1. Things will make a lot more sense.

\*\*\*

**KLB:** Alright Siobhan. Today we're talking about slang words – have you heard of them?

**SR:** Seriously? I'm Australian. About 90% of my vocab is slang.

**KLB:** Oh yeah... Crikey mate, chuck a shrimp on the barbie will ya, and crack open a Fosters.

**SR:** Okay, Wisconsinite. Ope, where's the bubbler? Oof-Da. I've got plenty of Wisconsin slang for yah. Not to mention all the UW slang I've had to learn since coming here – the Rat. Sconnies. Coasties. The KK.

**KLB:** The Purge.

**SR:** Uh, “the purge?” As in the hit dystopian movie franchise “The Purge”?

**KLB:** No, as in... the “Gay Purge.”

**SR:** What is that?

**KLB:** The gay purges... from 1948 to 1962. You haven't heard of the gay purges?

**SR:** I mean I knew that happened at UW but I didn't know it was called the “purges”... I thought this was a setup to get us into talking about slang words for cops. Po-po, 5-0, the fuzz, pi –

**KLB:** We get it. There's plenty of slang words for the police.

**SR:** This really wasn't a set up to talk slang words for cops? 'Cause I've got more... The heat. Boys in Blue. Bobby. Flatfoots. Twelve. Johnny Law. Thin Blue Line. Jacks. Narcs. Mounties. Paw Patrol. Six-up. Smokey.

**[fade Siobhan out but still listing...]**

**KLB:** While Siobhan entertains herself... 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.

**KLB:** In the fourth episode of our podcast, we're talking about campus police as the “morality police” and their outsized role in the “gay purges” at UW-Madison. We’re going to unpack the 15 year shadow operation to purge gay men from the university, its effects on the victims, and how it contributed to the further professionalization of the police on campus.<sup>1</sup>

### [INTRO MUSIC]

**SR:** The Gay Purges have no relation to the popular Purge movie franchise. Though I guess they were a little lawless. More on that later.... So if it's not a national alarm that gives you license for 24 hours to commit any atrocious crime you want, what were the “gay purges”?

**SCOTT SEYFORTH:** Well, the purges, in the 62-63 academic year was part of a policy and procedure of trying to identify gay men on campus and kick them out that went back 15 years. So it wasn't just one academic year. It was part of a long standing effort to not allow gay men to graduate from this university.

**KLB:** That's Scott Seyforth.

**SS:** Hi, Scott Seyforth. I'm one of the co-founders of the Madison LGBTQ+ Archives.

**KLB:** Scott is an expert on queer history in Madison and we brought him in to discuss how the university, the UWPD, and medical professionals worked together to execute a decade-long terror campaign against gay men in Madison.

### [MUSIC]

**KLB:** Not to be the annoying history person but there is an important context to the purges. So, cast your mind back to the Midcentury. The United States has just come out of *another* massive World War. Globalization is having growing pains – to put it lightly. The United States appears to have enemies everywhere. The world is feeling a little unstable. Sound familiar?

**SR:** And in the midst of that fear? Well, opportunists like then little known Wisconsin senator Joseph R. McCarthy saw an opportunity for political stardom. In February 1950 McCarthy claimed to possess a list of 205 card-carrying Communists employed in the U.S. Department of State which spurred what we call the “Red Scare” – a wave of fear and inquisitions into communists working against US interests from the inside.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> There has been copious research on the “gay purges” at UW-Madison. For this podcast, we pulled extensively from the scholarship of Scott Seyforth, Ezra Gerard, and Richard Wagner. Additionally, we used KJ LeFave, “The Gay Purges – A Brief History of Exclusion and Resilience,” June 30, 2023, The Nonviolence Project, <https://thenonviolenceproject.wisc.edu/2023/06/30/the-gay-purges/>; “The Gay Purge,” for Wisconsin Pride on PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/video/purge-62fryd/>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the “Red Scare,” visit the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library collections, available online. <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/mccarthyism-red-scare>

**KLB:** But why stop at a “Red Scare?” Why not add to the rainbow? Pun very much intended.

**SR:** On the heels of the “Red Scare,” came the “Lavender Scare” – the fear that gay men and women in the United States government had a horrible secret, one that could be easily exploited by foreign governments. The Lavender Scare became a witch hunt to find and dismiss anyone from government service who was even suspected of being gay.<sup>3</sup>

**KLB:** In comparison to the Red Scare, the Lavender Scare was wildly effective.<sup>4</sup> In March of 1950, hundreds of government employees willingly stepped down from their roles rather than be publicly outed in the Congressional record. Thousands more were targeted in the years that followed.<sup>5</sup>

**SS:** One of the difficult things for queers at the time is that, you know, you had the law against you and you had, you know, religion against you and you had medicine against you. You know, for the law you were illegal. And for the church, you were an abomination. And for medicine, you know, you were sick. And it was very hard to fight that, you know? And that was the culture that these administrators grew up in, and they believed in that, the modern medical sickness model predominated.<sup>6</sup>

**SR:** This type of fear – of communism, of spies, of gay men, of changing attitudes around sex and sexuality – it spread to every corner of the United States. Including our campus.

**SS:** If you read all the disciplinary cases from 1926 to 1968, anyone who's caught actually having sex on campus is kicked out. Straight, gay, whatever. Anyone caught having sex is kicked out. But what was different is that in the gay purges, they intentionally went looking. And they spent an enormous amount of time all throughout the year, every year, for 15 years. And they probably purged at least 900 people.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Judith Adkins, “These People Are Frightened to Death”: Congressional Investigations and the Lavender Scare, *Prologue Magazine*, Summer 2016, Vol. 48, No. 2.

<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2016/summer/lavender.html>

<sup>4</sup>The Lavender Scare, The National Archives Foundation,

<https://archivesfoundation.org/newsletter/the-lavender-scare/#:~:text=McCarthy%20theorized%20that%20both%20Communists.known%20as%20the%20Lavender%20s%20Care.>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the medical sickness model that aimed to treat and “cure” homosexuality in the midcentury, we recommend: Kunzel, Regina G., *In the Shadow of Diagnosis: Psychiatric Power and Queer Life*, Chicago, IL :The University of Chicago Press, 2024.; Drescher, Jack. “Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality.” *Behavioral Sciences* (Basel, Switzerland) vol. 5,4 565-75. 4 Dec. 2015, doi:10.3390/bs5040565; Vernon Rosario, “Rise and Fall of the Medical Model,” *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, Nov-Dec. 2022 issue, <https://glreview.org/article/rise-and-fall-of-the-medical-model-2/>.

<sup>7</sup> The figure provided is a rough estimation based on disciplinary records, police reports, investigative documents, newspaper articles, internal communications between administrators and medical professionals, and more. If the university purged exactly 900 people over 15 years, it would amount to 60 people per year. However, some investigative records show up to 20 people being targeted per week in bathroom sting operations. If anything, the estimated figure of 900 people purged may be undercounted

**KLB:** That's right. 900 students, faculty, or staff in a 15 year period were intentionally purged from the university community.

**SS:** Like you and I have seen the documents. Like some of the lists. Like, there, you know, there's letters from Hammersley saying, well I was hanging out at this [...]

**[dramatic freeze frame sound]**

**SR:** Wait... Hammersley? Again?!

**KLB:** Oh... you thought we were done with Hammersley? *Everything* comes back to Joseph Hammersley.

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

**KLB:** That was Grace Watkins again. You might recognize her from episode three. If you haven't listened to episode three, here is a brief recap. Joseph Hammersley was the de facto chief of police at UWPD for nearly 2 decades and in my professional historian opinion – he sucked. No seriously. He was a terrible man who acted horribly and terrorized UW-Madison without punishment for decades. If you're thinking "wow, I need to know more" go check out episode three.<sup>8</sup>

**SR:** Back to what Scott was saying...

**SS:** Like some of the lists. Like, there, you know, there's letters from Hammersley saying, Well, I was hanging out at this bathroom this week and here's the 20 people I caught. And that was just that one week in January. And you know, he wasn't, he wasn't doing that just one week every year. Because there are lists, like some of the, they would create lists of all the queers on campus that Hammersley had caught.<sup>9</sup>

**KLB:** And Hammerlsey was *looking* alright. He had taken up the purges as his personal pet project.

**KLB:** It always gets pitched as like, it just kind of happened, but he pursued it quite actively.

---

as records are dispersed haphazardly throughout various archival collections and many disciplinary records are unaccounted for or inaccessible to researchers.

<sup>8</sup> 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/>

<sup>9</sup> Many of the collections related to the Gay Purges at UW-Madison are restricted to protect the victims. If you would like more information on sourcing, please contact the Center directly.

**SS: Absolutely, he was looking for boys necking in cars. Yes, that's exactly it. He loved doing that.**

**SR:** The newspaper articles from the time describe it as a sort of happy accident. In 1948, Hammersley *happened* to stumble upon two men in an intimate position in a car on campus while he was on a routine patrol.<sup>10</sup> Thus began the first real investigation on campus into what police described at the time as a “homosexual ring” that included not only UW-Madison students but Madison community members.<sup>11</sup> But as Scott said, that misses a HUGE part of the story. While Hammersley may have truly stumbled upon these two men in a car in 1948, what he did afterwards was anything but accidental.

**KLB:** In 1948, Hammersley involved the Madison Police Department and the Dane County District Attorney was forced to press charges against the accused men for breaking the state's sodomy laws – which made sex between men illegal.<sup>12</sup> This ongoing legal case meant that the 1948 purges were a sensationalized local news story. The men accused were named in the papers, their addresses were listed, alongside all the accusations against them. The details of their court cases littered the covers of newspapers across the state for weeks.<sup>13</sup>

**SR:** UW leaders hated it. The university looked as though it had been *harboring* gay men, creating a campus culture where they were safe, even accepted. (god forbid!) Parents wondered how that would affect their children who attended. Could gayness be spread like the flu? State legislators critiqued what was being taught. Are there how to be gay courses in the course catalog? All jokes aside, it was a PR nightmare that left lingering questions about the university and its student body.

**KLB:** The university learned one crucial lesson that year: the idiom “there is no such thing as bad press” doesn't always ring true.

**SR:** So after 1948... *everything* changes.

**SS:-They university never wanted to make this public, they never wanted the purge process to become public. Because they were actually ashamed of it, and it probably wasn't legal. So for instance, like, you know, even though they're like, going to the bathrooms and trapping people, you know, meeting with 20, 40, 60 people at a time, faculty, staff, and students. Umm, kicking students out, you know, firing faculty and staff. if you said, I'm going to bring a lawyer in, then they would drop it. Because what they**

---

<sup>10</sup> Wagner, R. Richard. *We've Been Here All Along: Wisconsin's Early Gay History*. [Madison, Wisconsin]: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> For more on Wisconsin's Sodomy Law and the fight to repeal it, see Nate Imig, “How Wisconsin became the 1st state to outlaw discrimination against LGBTQ people,” June 3, 2022, On Milwaukee, <https://onmilwaukee.com/articles/88nine-wisconsin-lgbtq-history>

<sup>13</sup> Newspaper coverage appeared primarily in the *Wisconsin State Journal* and the *Cap Times* in June of 1948.

**didn't want is it to become discoverable. They didn't want it to become public. There is not a newspaper report about these after, after they create the policy and procedure in '48, there's not a newspaper report about any of this.**

**KLB:** Quick interlude: let's talk about the *process* of the purges. After 1948, gay men were no longer being stumbled upon in cars. The UWPD began actively pursuing investigations across campus, including setting up sting operations in university bathrooms to catch gay men "cruising" for sex.<sup>14</sup> The most important adjustment to their process - UWPD no longer contacted the Madison Police Department. Instead, those who are caught were referred to an internal disciplinary process – and a completely separate disciplinary process for what they called the "homosexual problem" – in the hopes of keeping their actions quiet.

**SS: All of the records that they kept for all of these, they did not file in the regular student conduct process. It was not overseen by this regular student conduct committee. And the numbers were not reported to the faculty and staff with the rest of the conduct numbers which they, that was what they had to do. They kept the files separate. When they donated all the student conduct files to University Archives in 1968, they did not donate any of the 15 years of the purge files. It was a shadow discipline process.**

**SR:** Gay men – or men the university believed to be gay – could be identified using anything from being caught in a compromising position with another man to simply being accused by a classmate. So, once a student was identified as "being gay" - and I say this with huge air quotes - They were firstly dealt with by UWPD. Usually it was Officer Hammersley as this was his pet cause, but after his death in 1959, it would be Officer Peter Rordam, Hammerlsey's trainee. Whether the student admitted to guilt or denied the accusation, they were sent to the Dean of Men.

**KLB:** In collaboration with the Dean of Men, the newly formed Department of Neuropsychiatry created a policy of forced mental health treatment.<sup>15</sup> We want to be clear about the word *treatment* here. Nothing about this process was healing, therapeutic, or quite frankly, helpful. Students were forced, under the threat of expulsion, to attend meetings with mental health professionals who decided whether they were "true homosexuals" or whether they were simply "pseudo-homosexuals" who were confused. Pseudo-homosexuals could possibly be rehabilitated and re-admitted to the university while gay men who were unashamed were seen as a threat to the university.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> There are numerous letters detailing the sting operations led by Officer Joseph Hammersley. The most accessible online example is featured in *Sifting & Reckoning* and is available at this link, <https://reckoning.wisc.edu/student-activism/#the-gay-purges>

<sup>15</sup> For more on the medical process at UW-Madison, see Ezra Gerard, "Gay Purge: The Persecution of Homosexual Students at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1962–1963," Public History Project blog, March 22, 2021, <https://campushistory.wisc.edu/gay-purge-persecution/>

<sup>16</sup> For more on this delineation between "true" and "pseudo" homosexuals, see Ezra Gerard, "Gay Purge: The Persecution of Homosexual Students at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1962–1963."

**SS: A lot of those people coming back, they were older students, they were not 18 year olds away from home for the first time, they were 26 year olds who had seen the world. They had survived war, and they knew who they were. And so when they came back, the university was presented with a kind of student body it had never seen before.**

**SR:** In other words, many gay men were not repentant enough for the university's standards. To be sure, many of the men accused were not gay. Many were. In most cases, it didn't really matter to UWPD or to university officials. Once an accusation was leveled, there was rarely a chance for a student to come back to the university and complete their degree. They were formally expelled with little recourse.

**KLB:** While the university seemingly streamlined processes around finding and punishing gay men, they never solved their \*quote\* "homosexual problem." Because gay men exist, have always existed, and continued to exist on campus in spite of the UWPD and the university's purge campaign. And the university didn't seem set on stopping this shadow process. Until maybe, most importantly, medical opinions begin to shift.

**SS: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, so the purges in '63 end because like the Department of Psychiatry and the head of the Department of Psychiatry at the time have finally seen so much damage being done to students at the university that they go to the dean of men and say, we will not participate in this any longer.<sup>17</sup>**

**SR:** It's hard to overstate just how important this small action was. The university's purge campaign relied on doctors and their professional medical expertise that categorized homosexuality as a disease. This was the justification for why the purges were necessary.

**KLB:** The Dean of Men at the time, Ted Zillman, was furious.

**SS: And the story I heard is, you know, they go to the Dean Zillman and say, we're not going to participate in this anymore. And Dean Zillman says, well, you can't do that. I'm going to go to the Chancellor. We're going to force you to do it. And, they say, well, then we're going to go to the Faculty Senate and tell them what you've been doing. And that's when Zillman decides to back down. Because, again, they don't want people to know this whole huge shadow disciplinary process that they've been running and how many people have been influenced. And they haven't been reporting all the terrible outcomes to anybody outside of the circle.**

**KLB:** The outcomes of the purge may be the most difficult part of this story – to talk about and to hear about. These records are some of the most heartbreaking documents I've ever handled

---

<sup>17</sup> A few medical professionals at UW spoke out against the practice, you can see highlighted statements here, see Ezra Gerard, "Gay Purge: The Persecution of Homosexual Students at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1962–1963."

in my career. Students were expelled within days of their graduation – undergraduate students all the way up to PhDs. They weren't allowed to walk with their classmates, and most importantly, they were never granted their rightful degrees. There are letters where students relay that they have met all credit requirements, where they literally beg for their earned degrees, to be told swiftly and uncompromisingly no.

**SR:** There was no opportunity to transfer to another school because UW ensured that the purges haunted these men at every institution. The registrar's office was directed to lock transcripts, making it impossible to transfer credits. Deans often wrote letters, warning other schools about individuals and their "history" at UW. This effectively barred them from graduating from college, forever.

**KLB:** The letters relay the consequences of not having a college degree. Careers lost. Opportunity squandered. Disastrous financial and personal consequences that haunt the men for decades. Faculty and staff are targeted as well, many losing their jobs and their careers, as word of their dismissal followed them.

**SR:** In some cases, men took their own lives.<sup>18</sup>

**KLB:** And so it was not like a small, thing at all. And the consequences it has always felt too vindictive, but also, compounding, right? You're not only in trouble with the university and losing your degree, you're also in trouble with the law and you're facing those consequences. You're facing social consequences if this gets out, you know, you have to explain to your parents, your family, your future wife why you don't have your degree, right? Or live with this lie. It just has always felt the weight of it is very, very heavy and it falls on the victims to carry that and not the university to take responsibility.

**SR:** Though many have called for a public apology or at least some recognition of UW's commitment to the purges, the university has yet to do that. At least not in a way that many LGBTQ+ people in Madison find satisfactory given the gravity of the harm.

**KLB:** If the purges are UWPD's first real chance to see what professionalization looks like and specifically at what modeling UWPD after "real" police departments feels like in the mid century, the university considered it a success. Hundreds of students, faculty, and staff are coerced, entrapped, and threatened under a highly organized, highly detailed, highly professional campus-wide operation to rid the university of gay men. In the eyes of the university, if the purge was a test, UWPD passed. The Dean of Students even said so himself in 1962.

---

<sup>18</sup> The files documenting the "gay purges" contain sensitive information about the victims. For this reason, they contain access restrictions and restrictions on what can be cited publicly. The Center is committed to protecting the victims of the purges and we have chosen not to publicly name the individuals targeted. If you are interested in learning more about these collections, please contact the Center and we can connect you with the UW Archives.

**[old timey voice]**

*“It was necessary for us to manage with utmost discretion, some vexing difficulties that had to do with a group of deviants. Any mistakes, major or minor, could have resulted in highly unfavorable publicity for the University. It was largely due to the skill and judgment of Mr. Al Hamman and Mr. Pete Rordam that some exacting duties were carried out in a commendable fashion without any unfortunate public incidents.*

*The conduct of the entire matter deserves a commendation and I wish this to be considered one.”<sup>19</sup>*

**SR:** So... What happens next on UWPD’s path to further professionalization? What do they do with the newfound approval of university leadership? And how do they handle the turbulent late 60s? Hint: They get more cop-y. **That’s on the next episode of *Reorientation*.**

\*\*\*

**SR:** You can find a full teaching guide for this episode on our website at [campus history dot wisc dot E-D-U](http://campushistory.wisc.edu). That includes a link to the Madison LGBTQ Archive, and a longer article from the Center on the purges.

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

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

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

---

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Luberg to Al Hamman re: gay purges and press, May 16, 1962, Dean of Men's records, Lewis Drake. Mim - Public Relations Series 19/2/3-6 Box 8, “Protection & Security Reports - Protection & Security Misc.” Folder, University of Wisconsin–Madison Archive.