EPISODE 1: <u>"Why do students protest?" TRANSCRIPT w/ Citations</u>

KACIE LUCCHINI BUTCHER: Okay, setting the scene. The year is 1967. It's the afternoon of May 17th. And students at UW-Madison are takin' it to the streets with a protest march.

ALLIE MORRIS: Hell yeah civil disobedience.

[AMBI: PROTEST, MARCHING SOUND, HONKING]

KLB: It starts with a few hundred people marching up University Ave, which is the main drag through campus.

But they only make it a few blocks before the city police show up and try to clear everybody away. The protesters, though, aren't having it. They start sitting down in the street to block traffic, right in front of cars and buses.

AM: Hell yeah civil disobedience…

KLB: The cops, of course, are like "okay time to make some arrests!" And they start dragging students away. But all the commotion just gets more people's attention. Students see their classmates getting roughed up and tossed in police vans, so they start joining the protest. Pretty soon there's a crowd of like 5,000 people, either taking part or just gawking. It's chaos. The demonstration ends up going on for three hours and it totally blocks this major artery right through the center of town.[1]

AM: So, 1967. College campus. This has to be a protest about the Vietnam War and the draft, right?

KLB: That's a really good guess, but actually no.

AM: Oh, um okay. So then is it something to do with Civil Rights?

KLB: Also a good guess, but also no…. This particular protest was about *traffic safety*.

AM: Wait, what?

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[1] "Police Quell Bus Protests By Students," *Daily Cardinal*, May 18, 1967, https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/A5LZ4EZQCG3XZO8E/pages/A56GRFLQYEPSCZ8I

KLB: Yup. Thousands of students in the streets. Thirty-five people arrested. Students being, quote “carried by arms, legs, and *hair* to the paddy wagon,” according to the Daily Cardinal. … All of this over the location of a bus lane.[2]

AM: Wow. Okay, Boomers, really committing to the bit of UW being a “protest school” on this one. Opposing a war or fighting discrimination I get. But sometimes I wonder why we as historians focus so much on this era…

Stuart Levitan: Well … first of all, it had a great press agent. … You know, sex, drugs, rock and roll, and protest? I mean, come on. That's gonna sell some newspapers. That's gonna sell some records. That's gonna sell some books.

KLB: And don’t forget about selling podcasts. Gotta give the people what they want.

[MUSIC]

AM: 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 Allie Morris.

KLB: And I’m… Kacie Lucchini Butcher. This season we’re podcasting truth to power. Takin’ it to the stree..eaming services. Making content, not war. *This is what public history looks like*…

AM: Okay, okay that’s enough… for Season Three of Reorientation, we’re talking student protest. What does it mean for a university like UW to be known as a “protest school”? How did we get that reputation and how has it changed over the decades?

KLB: Who gets to decide when a protest is deemed appropriate? When it’s justified? Effective? Violent or nonviolent?

AM: And, bottom line, does student protest work? Is it just something that college students do because they're college students? Or can these movements really create meaningful change?

[MUSIC]

KLB: To start things off, we should take a minute to make sure we’re not being too glib about the bus lane protest that we mentioned. Because for one thing, the protesters

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[2] “Police Quell Bus Protests By Students," *Daily Cardinal*, May 18, 1967.

actually had some legit concerns. Very, very briefly: The whole thing started when city planners decided to take University Avenue – the main road through campus – and turn it into a death trap.

[SCARY AUDIO, SCREAM]

They took this busy street and made it one-way. Four full lanes of traffic all going *west*. Then they took the shoulder lane and said 'this is where the *east*-bound buses go.'

AM: I'm not a city planner, but…

KLB: Yeah no, not a great idea. And right away people on campus started complaining. They said, "Hey, this is sketchy. There aren't any traffic signals. I'm trying to look out for four lanes of cars coming one way, and then I almost get clipped by a bus coming the other way. Somebody is gonna get hit."

And they were right. Just a few months after the change, sophomore Donna Schueler collided with a bus and got dragged under the wheels. Her injury was so severe that she lost a leg.[3]

AM: Okay, forget what I said earlier. That sounds like a damn good reason to protest. Hell yeah civil disobedience!

KLB: Yeah, it's an example of students seeing a problem, getting organized and protesting to change it. Now, in this case it wasn't super successful. Even though the protest got all this attention, and even though the university leaders were also asking the city to move the bus lane. The city dug in its heels. That bus lane stayed there until 1985.

AM: Dang! That's like a full 10 years after we left Vietnam. Did those Boomers really have more luck ending a war than they did solving a traffic hazard?

KLB: I mean.. As you'll learn this season, the efficacy of protest movements is a complex question… but I'm gonna say yes? Anyway, the reason we started with this story is because it's like a little microcosm of student protest in this era: demanding change… raising awareness… civil disobedience… clashes with the cops… it's all there. And the reason we're starting with this *era* is because you just can't talk about the history of protest at UW-Madison without it.

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[3] "May, 1967 – The Bus Lane Protest," WORT News Department, May 29, 2019, WORT https://www.wortfm.org/may-1967-the-bus-lane-protest/

Stuart Levitan: Our identity as a protest campus is based on the years from, you know, 1967 to 1970.

AM: That's Stu Levitan.

SL: My name is Stu Levitan.

AM: You also heard his voice in the intro. He's an author and historian and our resident expert on Madison in the 60s.

SL: There were a number of big, boldface events in those years that at least two or three of them were nationally historic. The Dow protest was the first time tear gas was used on an American campus to quell an anti-war demonstration. It had never been done anywhere before it happened on this campus. The Black Studies Strike was a historic event. The Mifflin Street Block Party riot was the first great lifestyle riot of the '60s. It happened before Stonewall. So you see historic things happening in that period that kept the ball rolling.

AM: Not to talk ourselves up too much, but like Stu was just saying, a lot of the activism going on here in the 60s was groundbreaking. Nowadays you kinda think of protesting as just something college kids do. But at the time, UW was one of a handful of schools — along with Michigan, Berkley, Columbia — that were redefining what protest on college campuses looked like.

KLB: These protest movements on Vietnam and Civil Rights were bigger than anything that had happened on campuses before — we're talking thousands of people showing up at demonstrations. They were organized, with a focus on educating people about the issues. And they weren't afraid to be disruptive — students had sit-ins, they got arrested, they destroyed property, and sometimes they got violent.

AM: When people say UW-Madison has a reputation as a protest school, this is probably what they're thinking about. And it's a part of the story the university tells about itself. There have been *plenty* of alumni magazine articles and interactive websites marking anniversaries of the Dow Chemical Protest or the 1969 Black Student Strike. And they're remembered positively, as students fighting for what was right … even if reactions at the time were more … mixed…

KLB: All this is part of the reason we picked student protest as the topic for this season. Yes, these big protests are important and interesting. And yes, we have full episodes

coming up about Vietnam and the Black Student Strike. But there are also *decades* of protest before and after that are just as important in really understanding why UW is a "protest school".

AM: As much as students from the 60s might like to think they invented protest from scratch…

SL: Boomers take a fair amount of… we, we have never b—we have never lacked for pride in our generation.

AM: Even Stu would admit that they were building on the collective protest knowledge of student organizers that came before them.

KLB: Yeah, I mean students in the early 1900s were publicly pressuring the university to uphold academic freedom. College kids organized for women's suffrage. They held anti-war walkouts in the 1930s. And in the 40s and 50s they tried a bunch of tactics to fight racial housing discrimination.

AM: And it should go without saying that protest at UW didn't stop after the 60s either. Organizing against US imperialism in the Middle East? Check. Pushing the university and the city of Madison to divest from Apartheid South Africa? Yup. Spending the 80s and 90s holding university leaders accountable over a culture of racism AND systemic homophobia in ROTC programs? Check and double check. And that's not even mentioning recent protests for racial justice and the encampment for Palestine.

KLB: Clearly student protest can look like a lot of different things, with different tactics and different goals. We're gonna dive way deeper into those examples we just mentioned and more in upcoming episodes this season.

And we're also going to try to answer a few bigger, squishier questions, like why do college students protest so much? It'll take us more than one episode to answer that one, but two of our experts, Stu and author David Maraniss did have surprisingly similar takes:

[INTERCUT BITES]

DAVID MARANISS: You know, it's a point where you're free from parental control for the first time.

SL: "Oh my gosh, I'm, I'm, I'm away from home. I'm an independent actor. I have agency.

DM: You're finding yourself, you're at probably the most idealistic moment of your lives.

SL: They're, they're in a, they're in a milieu of wanting to question authority.

DM: Before you've been beaten down by jobs and, and the realities of the world,

SL: Students are the ones who have the time, the intellectual ferment.

DM: The intellectual ferment.

SL: I have teachers who are filling my head with great ideas about freedom and revolution and democracy.

DM: And you're looking for, something ideal.

SL: And I'm gonna go out and, and exercise, and exercise all, all those rights that they've told me about.

DM: That's what, in so many ways, a college experience is.

AM: And there's the even squishier question: does student protest work?

MOU BANERJEE: They do work. Now the question of course immediately is how do they work?

DM: I think that there's nothing more American than dissent and protest.

MB: Or what do they work for? Or what is the outcome of all this working?

SL: Rule number one of a successful protest is you can only target the people who have the power to make the decision to do what you want.

DM: It's what sort of makes this country at its best,

SL: You have to give them a way to solve the problem.

Martha Biondi: But I think we also have to take the long view and know that even if protest works in the short term or middle term, nothing is sacred and gains can be reversed.

SL: If, if it's just, "I'm so pissed off that I'm gonna heckle, I'm gonna sit in, I'm gonna firebomb, I'm gonna blow [BLEEP] up," it's not gonna be successful.

MB: Any time there is a protest, it is worth doing solely for the fact that the government knows that there is social disaffection.

DM: I don't think working is the right question because I think it's the struggle that matters.

[EXPERT BITES SUPERCUT]

AM: Okay, maybe forget I asked. Or stick with us as we start untangling *all of that* on the next episode of Reorientation.

[MUSIC]

LM: You can find a full teaching guide for this episode on our website at campushistory.wisc.edu. That includes more info on that bus lane protest that we talked about.

Reorientation is written by Kacie Lucchini Butcher, Allie Morris, Lauren Munda, and John K. Wilson. He also produced and edited this episode. Additional help from Taylor Bailey and Dan Berman.

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