EPISODE 5: "Protests Go Abroad" TRANSCRIPT [FINAL] w/ Citations

ALLIE MORRIS: Hey, it's Allie. If you haven't listened to Episode 1, go back and start there. This episode will make more sense.

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KACIE LUCCHINI BUTCHER: Wanna hear something that'll make you feel old?

AM: You mean more than I do all the time?

KLB: Yes**.** Did you know that the freshman starting college this year were born in 2008?

AM: That's terrifying. I can still remember '08 like it was yesterday. I had my gauchos and sparkly toms. I was jammin' to songs from Camp Rock on my iPod touch. It was a vibe!

KLB: These kids missed sooo much. Obama was their first president. They don't remember the financial crisis… They were born 7 years after 9/11. That's crazy.

AM: [SUSPICIOUSLY] Yeah… that is so crazy…

KLB: Wait. Were you born before 9/11?

AM: Yeah!

KLB: Okay good.

AM: I had just turned one and… **[KACIE INTERRRUPTS]**

KLB: You were one. You were still in diapers. Now THAT makes me feel old.

AM: Okay. Okay. But I *was* alive during other major world events. Like, I kinda remember Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring. That tsunami in Japan. Brexit... The BP oil spill… The disappearance of Malaysian Airlines Flight 370… Black Lives Matter… Me Too… Covid, obviously…

KLB: Wooof, when you put it like that, we really have been through a lot in the last 25 years…

AM: And don't forget the ongoing destruction of Gaza. Being here at UW when all those pro-Palestine encampments were happening at schools across the country really felt like one of those 'living through history' kind of moments.

KLB: For sure. It was almost like your generation's Vietnam War protests.

AM: I mean, you *could* make that comparison…. But a better analogy might be UW-Madison students protesting Apartheid in South Africa. Just like with Gaza, that movement centered on education and calls for university divestment.

Or you could compare it to how students protested the 1953 American-backed coup in Iran. Even back then UW students were organizing against the US government supporting a violent, repressive regime in the Middle East.

KLB: Okay, so what I'm hearing is that we have a long history of students organizing around global issues way beyond Wisconsin.

AM: Yeah! And I didn't even get to mention the international women's rights movements… Or when UW Madison students demonstrated against the military coup in Chile… **[FADES UNDER INTRODUCTION]** OR the time that students protested US intervention in Central America? Or against the U.S. invasion of Grenada? Or when students put up crosses in front of Bascom Hall to visualize the deaths during the US intervention in Panama?[1]

[THEME MUSIC]

KLB: [SIGH] From the Rebecca M. Blank Center for Campus History, this is *Reorientation*, a podcast exploring the history of UW-Madison you won't hear on your campus welcome tour.

AM: … And don't forget students protesting the War on Terror and the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. You know, right after 9/11… which you're old enough to remember very clearly.

KLB: Yes. I'm your ancient host Kacie Lucchini Butcher.

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[1] Tyler Kennedy and David Null, "Protests & Social Action at UW-Madison during the 20th Century," *UW–Madison Libraries, Archives and Records Management,* https://www.library.wisc.edu/archives/exhibits/campus-history-projects/protests-social-action-at-uw-madison-during-the-20th-century/

AM: And I'm your slightly less ancient host Allie Morris. This season we've been looking at the history of campus protests at UW-Madison. But for Episode 5 we're talking about the ways students protest things that happen way, way *off* campus.

KLB: What's the difference between fighting for a cause on Library Mall versus the other side of the globe? Do the tactics stay the same or do they have to change? And what does success even look like?

[MUSIC]

KLB: So not to state the obvious, but if you've learned anything so far this season, it's probably that UW students are into protesting. We've said it a bunch of times: UW-Madison has a history as a protest school.

That's not really unique, though. It's a stereotype, right? Protesting is what college kids do. They wanna change the world!

But there's another stereotype that goes along with that: the world they're trying to change isn't the quote: "*real world."* Students are out of touch. When they protest it's all about them and the stuff around them. They're organizing to change the food in the dining halls, or trying to remove some racist guy's name from a campus building.

Even with some of the major protest movements we've talked about… the Black Student Strike wanted African American Studies *on campus*. A big part of the Vietnam War movement was about students getting drafted *on campus*.

But as self-obsessed as students might seem from time to time, the stereotype just isn't true. Like we mentioned in the intro, UW students have been concerned about international issues for decades.

AM: If you look through the UW Archives you can find all sorts of posters rallying support for causes.

[OLD TIMEY VOICE]

"Oppose U.S. and Japanese Imperialistic Act! Support the Chinese…"[2]

[2] Political and Social Action, Articles, Clippings, and Broadsides, 1968-1972 Series 20/3/2/2 Box 4.

“Economic and Social Struggles of Turkey: Causes of Underdevelopment and Revolutionary Struggle”[3]

“Namibia’s Independence And Beyond”[4]

“U.S. Imperialism Hands Off Chile”[5]

AM: Definitely no shortage of passion. But the world is a big, complicated place. When you’re trying to change U.S. policy abroad, or even influence other countries’ governments, your tactics, your goals and even your definition of success are gonna be different.

KLB: So where do we start?

AM: Well, if we wanna make use of a particularly grim bookend, we could start with Iran. Right now UW students are protesting the US’s ongoing bombing campaign and standing in solidarity with the Iranian people. But they’re certainly not the first ones to organize against American intervention there.[6]

KLB: I’m sensing this might be time for one of our signature *Reorientation* very brief history lessons.

AM: You’re sensing correctly…

So, it's 1951 and for decades the British have had a monopoly over Iran’s oil industry… because colonialism.

KLB: Wait, the British? Are you telling me that the U.S. isn’t the first one at the scene of an oil crime in the Middle East?

AM: Just wait… the U.S. is benefitting greatly from Britain’s oil monopoly. They’re geopolitical bros.

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[3] Political and Social Action, Articles, Clippings, and Broadsides, 1968-1972 Series 20/3/2/2 Box 4.
[4] Madison Anti-Apartheid Coalition, “Poster for Lecture by Immanuel Ngatjizeko,” November 11, 1991, *Digital Collections*, University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries, Madison, WI., https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/A5ABHHYGWZLRSL8G
[5] Geoff Simon, “Hands off Chile protest,” September 13, 1973, black-and-white photograph, *Digital Collections,* University of Wisconsin–Madison Archives, General Photo Collection, 23/21, Madison, WI., https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/A4YZHAHVNH76LZ8E
[6] Erin McGroarty, “UW–Madison student in Iran sees civilians bearing the brunt of war,” *The Cap Times* (April 16, 2026) https://captimes.com/news/government/uw-madison-student-in-iran-sees-civilians-bearing-brunt-of-war/article_fa2c5304-d5f4-49c3-b9e8-1765a701962c.html

KLB: No of course, sorry to assume

AM: Oh and it gets worse…

KLB: Of course it does.

AM: So… by 1951, Iran's old ruling dynasty had been replaced by a democratically elected prime minister, a guy named Mohammad Mosaddegh. And one of his ideas as prime minister is 'Hey, maybe the Iranian people should control Iran's oil. Let's nationalize the industry.' The Iranians love this idea. The Brits and their oil-hungry American friends not so much. Throw in some fear about Soviet communist influence on Iran's government and…

KLB: Let me guess… the U.S. intervened…

AM: [SARCASTICALLY] How'd you know? Yeah the U.S. intervened!

In 1953, the U.S. helped organize a military coup that overthrew Mosaddegh and reinstalled a member of the old ruling family as Shah… basically king. The Shah, Mohammed Reza, was not a good dude. His regime is repressive and corrupt. But he's cozy with Western governments and corporations. And wouldn't you know it, the U.S. is happy to fund the Shah's brutal secret police force, which helps him stay in power for another 25 years, until another revolution… but more on that in a minute.[7]

KLB: Back to UW-Madison for now. Part of the reason we're bringing up this particular geopolitical episode is because UW students were some of the first people in the United States to raise the alarm about it.

Founded in 1952, UW's Iranian Student Association was the first and largest Iranian student organization in the country. For decades the group had a huge impact organizing and educating fellow students about US actions in Iran.

And not just on UW's campus. In 1978 alone, the ISA sponsored 700 demonstrations at college campuses across the country with a quarter of a million people participating.[8]

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[7] Ervand Abrahamian, *Oil Crisis in Iran: From Nationalism to Coup d'Etat* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[8] Andrea Nasrine Shahmohammadi, "Masked resistance: The Iranian student movement in the United States, 1977–1979l," *Master's thesis*, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, 2008, 32, 35, 36. https://media.proquest.com/media/hms/ORIG/2/k87IH?_s=xe1xwRx4cEWFPpEEjDDNY%2BK4TJc%3D; "Iranian Student Conference, UW—Madison," ca. September 2, 1955-ca. September 5, 1955, Still Image, *University of Wisconsin—Madison Archives*, S06942 The UW—Madison Collection, Madison, WI.

AM: Wait, did you say 1978? If the coup was back in the 50s, they were still protesting 25 years later?

KLB: Remember how we said international protest was complicated? Initially students were upset about the coup. But as the Shah continued to repress his own people with help from the U.S., organizing shifted. The new goal was to support a democratic government in Iran without western influence.

Then, in 1979, there was a turning point. And it was led by students… though not UW–Madison students. There was already a political revolution underway in Iran. The Shah had fled to the U.S. for cancer treatment. And Ayatollah Khomeini, the future supreme leader of Iran, had returned from exile. Then, in November 1979, student protestors from several Iranian universities escalated things. They stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took 66 Americans hostage.

The Iranian Hostage Crisis lasted more than a year, and while it was going on, many UW students protested in support of the Iranian students' demands—namely that the U.S. would no longer intervene politically or militarily in Iranian affairs. And they got what they wanted. The U.S. agreed to those terms when they negotiated the hostages' release.[9]

AM: So, what does all this tell us in terms of our topic: UW students protesting.

As far as the protesting itself—the tactics—organizing around this international issue looked a lot like organizing for all sorts of stuff: students held demonstrations. They made posters and organized lectures. They tried to raise awareness and educate people about what was going on in Iran.

But it's the goals and the outcomes where things get murkier. Clearly these students cared about changing the *real world.* They were spending their time between classes trying to stop their own government from supporting a dictator 6,000 miles away.

But remember what Madison historian Stu Levitan said back in Episode 3?

STUART LEVITAN: The 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. "Here's what, here's what we're upset about. Here's why we're upset. Here's how we're gonna make

[9] Kristin Butler, "How a Small Band of Students Set off the Iran Hostage Crisis," *American Experience*, PBS (July 27, 2022), https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/students-iran-hostage-crisis/

your life difficult until you fix it, and here's how you can fix it." If you have those four things, you can, you- a protest will be successful.

KLB: Not to put too fine a point on it, but the student protesters who really followed that advice were the ones *in Iran*… you know, the ones who kidnapped diplomats.

AM: That's not to say that the organizing by students in Madison wasn't meaningful. The UW Iranian Student Association sponsored — wait, what did we say – *700* campus demonstrations in one year? That is pretty impressive.

But when the cause is something as big as swaying world events, it's almost impossible to tell how much impact marches and teach-ins actually have.

KLB: And that brings us to another noteworthy international protest movement at UW… one that took a different approach—demanding change *locally* to make change globally. We're talking about Anti-Apartheid Movement.

[MUSIC]

KLB: So, one more time with a very brief history lesson, even briefer than the last one…

South Africa… the Dutch colonized the region in the 1600s. And like most European powers did, they displaced and enslaved the indigenous population.[10]

AM: Many such cases.

KLB: Yeah… By the early 1800s the British took South Africa from the Dutch. But for our purposes, you can just think of that as swapping one white colonial master for another.

Fast forward to the 20th century, and South Africa had gained independence from the British empire. This was happening in European colonies all over Africa at this point. And many of these newly independent countries were finally being governed by indigenous people. But not South Africa. The "independent" country was still being tightly controlled by the white Dutch and English minority population.[11]

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[10] *Apartheid Learners Book*, "The Origins of Apartheid," Chapter 1, The Apartheid Museum, https://www.apartheidmuseum.org/uploads/files/Resources/learners-Book/Learners-book-Chapter1.pdf
[11] *Apartheid Learners Book*, "The Origins of Apartheid," Chapter 1

And they held onto that control by baking white supremacy into every facet of South African society: a system called Apartheid.

AM: Apartheid means “separate” or “apart” in Afrikaans, the Dutch language in South Africa. And it was literally that: separating Black people and white people in every single area of life: jobs, schools, churches, buses, neighborhoods.[12]

KLB: This is sounding a heck of a lot like Jim Crow and segregation in the United States.

AM: Right. Exactly. Historians have found that Apartheid took inspiration from the U.S. system of racial segregation. And the two overlapped in the 40s, 50s and 60s. So it’s really not surprising that Apartheid became an issue for student activists here.[13]

And we should give another shoutout to UW-Madison students, because just like with Iran, they were some of the first people in the entire United States to recognize South African Apartheid as a problem that deserved global attention.

The American Anti-Apartheid movement didn’t really gain big, national momentum until the 1980s, but UW students were already on it by the late 60s.[14]

KLB: Have we mentioned UW’s history as a protest school?

AM: Maybe once or twice, but we earn it… I mean, take 1968, right in the middle of all the Vietnam War and Black student organizing. That same year, hundreds of UW–Madison students held a campus sit-in for seven hours protesting the university’s investment in Chase Manhattan Bank, which had financial ties with the Apartheid regime.

KLB: Wait… Are you saying they wanted the university to un-invest in the bank? Or in other words, *divest*?

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[12] “Apartheid: A Short History,” Anti-Apartheid Legacy, https://antiapartheidlegacy.org.uk/heritage-arts-culture/history/apartheid-a-short-history/

[13] Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Taylor & Francis, 2013).

[14] Cindy Barbosa, “Students of Madison Lead the American Anti-Apartheid Movement: Madison Area Committee on Southern Africa,” The Nonviolence Project, University of Wisconsin–Madison (December 3, 2024), https://thenonviolenceproject.wisc.edu/2024/12/03/students-of-madison-lead-the-american-anti-apartheid-movement-madison-area-committee-on-southern-africa/; Wisconsin Public Radio, “UW-Madison’s anti-apartheid and divestment history,” *Wisconsin Today* (May 22, 2024), https://www.wpr.org/shows/wisconsin-today-2/financial-aid-for-college-history-of-divestment-protests-country-music-by-black-artists.

AM: Yes, thank you for so subtly setting that up. This was an early example of organizers calling for *divestment*, which would be one of the major strategies in the US anti-Apartheid movement. The idea was basically protesters trying to turn the screws on *local* institutions—city governments, companies, universities—to stop financially supporting the white South African government.

KLB: So, they were doing what Stu was talking about earlier.

SL: You have to localize the protest so that the decision-makers are affected.

AM: Basically, yeah! I mean, calling for divestment wasn't all they were doing. They did a lot of the other classic protester stuff too.

At UW, the main anti-Apartheid group was the Madison Area Committee on South Africa, founded in 1969. A lot of their early efforts were educational, trying to raise awareness about the grim realities of Apartheid and the university's tacit involvement.

They hosted frequent teach-ins and trainings. And they published their own newsletter that went to more than 400 households, with headlines like:

[OLD TIMEY VOICES]

"Is Southern Africa Wisconsin's Business?"

"Wisconsin Corporate Involvement in Southern Africa"

"Do You Plead Guilty or Ignorant to the situation in Southern Africa?"[15]

KLB: So, organizers were plugging along with demonstrations, and teach-ins, and newsletters, until things came to a turning point… with violence. In June 1976, news and photographs started to spread of the Soweto Youth Uprising in South Africa. Some 10,000 South African student protestors were attacked by police, leading to extreme violence. While numbers are still contested, it's estimated that 575 people died and almost 4,000 were wounded.[16]

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[15] Barbosa, "Students of Madison Lead the American Anti-Apartheid Movement, 2024. https://thenonviolenceproject.wisc.edu/2024/12/03/students-of-madison-lead-the-american-anti-apartheid-movement-madison-area-committee-on-southern-africa/

[16] "16 June 1976 - Soweto Uprising," South African History Online, published May 21, 2013, https://sahistory.org.za/article/june-16-soweto-youth-uprising

AM: Attention to the Anti-Apartheid movement exploded not only in Madison, but across the country. Student activists at UW, as well as Harvard, University of Michigan, and Johns Hopkins, built makeshift encampments, called “shanty towns,” to replicate the living conditions of Black South Africans.

As the US Anti-Apartheid movement kept growing over the next several years, so did demands for divestment from South Africa.

And this is an area where the UW-Madison Anti-Apartheid group was remarkably successful. In the 70s and 80s, they were able to push the Madison Common Council, Dane County Board of Supervisors, and the UW Board of Regents to take steps towards divestment.[17]

KLB: Zooming out to the big picture again, what can this movement tell us about student protest, international or otherwise?

In this case, the education worked. Awareness about Apartheid seeped into the American consciousness. It became one of the major humanitarian causes in the later 20th century.

And the focus on divestment was also a success. Convincing officials in your community to tighten their purse strings works better than demanding it from national corporations or governments. And it eventually adds up.

But the U.S. Anti-Apartheid movement didn’t end Apartheid in South Africa. It certainly helped push things in the right direction, but change came from millions of South Africans fighting for it over decades.

AM: So what can you say to college students (or anyone, really) who sees a problem somewhere in the world and wants to help solve it? Is it worth it? Do protests work?

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

AM: You might recognize the voice of Mou Banerjee from back in Episode 3. She teaches South Asian history here at UW-Madison, and she also directs the university’s Nonviolence Project.

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[17] Barbosa, “Students of Madison Lead the American Anti-Apartheid Movement, 2024. https://thenonviolenceproject.wisc.edu/2024/12/03/students-of-madison-lead-the-american-anti-apartheid-movement-madison-area-committee-on-southern-africa/

Not to get too philosophical here, but Banerjee says protests can be a means to an end *and* an end in themselves.

KLB: Like we said, it's complicated.

MB: The question of course immediately is how do they work? Or what do they work for? Or what is the outcome of all this working? And those are far more nebulous areas. Does it temporarily draw attention to a particular kind of issue that actually needs highlighting, that needs sustained interest from all over the world, that needs to be made more public? Is this a kind of injustice that has been happening which, you know, someone needs to shine a torch on? Yes, it works for that particular purpose.

Is it something that will bring about long-term meaningful change? I do not know. That all depends on how sustained the work is that is going on behind it, correct?

How does it work? Well, a government does not have conscience. It cannot have a conscience. But society, people around us, they do have a conscience. People who make up the government, the pillars of government, so to speak, may also start questioning themselves. A journalist might think that it is worth highlighting this particular issue and drawing national or international attention to it. Someone who works in the police, for example, might think twice before breaking up a protest, right? Someone who's watching from the sidelines who has been very, very neutral about this entire issue might find that their sympathies are moved for the people who are protesting for a good cause, and they might take it up.

So again, how does it work? Does it work? Yes, it does work. But the way in which it might work is very, very different. Again, long-term successes cannot really be predicted, but any time there is a protest, it is worth doing solely for the fact that the government knows that there is social disaffection. That all its decisions are not being accepted by a very docile population. For that very simple fact, protests work.

KLB: So look, you know how we just spent the last 20 minutes talking about how students care deeply about the outside world? And we gave you a bunch of examples of how they protested big issues way beyond campus? Well, all that's true. But it turns out they can also take that same passion and those same organizing tactics, and turn them around to hold a different power structure accountable… their own university.

That's on the next episode of *Reorientation.*

[MUSIC]

Lauren Munda: You can find a full teaching guide for this episode on our website at campushistory.wisc.edu. That includes primary sources from the South African divestment movement at UW.

Reorientation is written by Kacie Lucchini Butcher, Allie Morris, Lauren Munda, and John K. Wilson. He also produced and edited this episode.

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