EPISODE 6: "Protests Come Home" 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 more sense.

***

KLB: It was a dark and stormy night…

AM: Ooh, are we doing a scary story?

KLB: Obviously. Just listen to the music.

[OMINOUS MUSIC]

AM: Okay, carry on.

KLB: Thank you. It was a dark and stormy night. You're home alone… making some popcorn… about to settle in and watch a movie…

[POPCORN POPPING]

AM: And then the phone rings!!

[PHONE RINGING]

KLB: Hey, who's telling the story here?!

AM: Sorry, I'm just excited!

KLB: Well keep it to yourself. We only have like 20 minutes. But yes, the phone rings…

[PHONE RINGING]

KLB: Hello?

CREEPY VOICE: Hello. What are you doing?

KLB: Who is this?

CREEPY VOICE: Tell me your name and I'll tell you mine.

KLB: I don't talk to strangers…

[POPCORN]

CREEPY VOICE: What's that noise?

KLB: I'm making popcorn.

CREEPY VOICE: You know industrial-scale monocrops contribute to climate change, right?

KLB: Yeah, but I like to have a little snack when I'm watching a movie.

CREEPY VOICE: Is it a scary movie?

KLB: Mmm… It's a documentary about racism in higher education.

CREEPY VOICE: Oh, well you know it's systemic, don't you? It's never just been about individual instances of racism. Universities have historically tolerated a culture of discrimination. And even though administrators tout all sorts of diversity initiatives, many say those plans fail to meaningfully address the concerns of minority students.

KLB: What? No way! You're scaring me! I'm hanging up now!

[CLICK]

AM: Oh snap!! This is getting good. I bet he calls right back!

[PHONE RINGING]

KLB: Hello?

CREEPY VOICE: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you… But did you know it wasn't just *racial* discrimination? In the 80s and 90s, some universities had rules *on paper* against discrimination based on sexual orientation. But in practice they still allowed the ROTC on campuses and kept taking military funding even though the armed forces banned LGBT people from serving.

KLB: No! No! No! I'm calling the police. Leave me alone!

[CLICK]

AM: So then the police tell her to stay calm and lock the doors and they'll trace the line if the creepy guy calls back?

KLB: How'd you know? Have you heard this story before?

AM: Lucky guess!

[PHONE RINGING]

KLB: Umm, hello?

CREEPY VOICE: Oftentimes well meaning attempts at change get bogged down by competing institutional interests and underlying issues continue to go largely unaddressed.

KLB: What do you want from me?!!

CREEPY VOICE: I wanna teach you about history.

KLB: Never!!!!

[CLICK]

AM: Man, this girl needs to look at her caller ID. I never pick up on numbers I don't know.

[PHONE RINGING]

KLB: I said leave me alone!!!!

POLICE: This is the police. The call is coming from inside the house! You need to leave now!

KLB: But it's too late. Right behind you are student activists organizing to make meaningful change within their own institution. They're protesting from inside the house!

AM: Wait, I'm confused. So was this teenage girl like the chancellor in this scenario? Or like the human embodiment of the university itself?

KLB: Look, it doesn't have to make sense. It's a scary movie… or, I guess an educational podcast pretending to be a scary movie. Whatever. We just needed a silly analogy to introduce this concept of students protesting to hold their own university accountable, okay?

AM: Well, in that case, I'd say you *killed it.*

[THEME 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 looking at the history of student protest at UW-Madison. So far we've talked about early organizing on campus… about some of the major movements like Vietnam and Black Power that gave UW its reputation as a protest school … and about students fighting to make change abroad.

AM: But today, we're sticking a little closer to home. What does it look like when the thing students are protesting for … is for their own university to *do better*?

[MUSIC]

KLB: Just because a protest is inside the campus bubble doesn't mean it's small or trivial. Sure, not every college protest is earthshattering. But there are plenty of examples at UW where students tried to hold the university accountable on major issues like racism, homophobia, disability rights, or police violence.

AM: We've seen some of that in earlier episodes this season. Students in the 40s and 50s wanted the university to do more to stop housing discrimination… part of the anti-war movement in the 60s and 70s was about getting the university to stop playing ball with the military and weapons companies. The 1969 Black Student strike took the ideas of the Black Power Movement and applied them to academia.

KLB: Once we get to the 80s and early 90s, students had inherited this protest playbook from previous decades. But they were also working out new strategies that fit the causes they were fighting for.

One of those was getting the university to address a pervasive culture of racism.

AM: In spring 1986, UW's Kappa Sigma fraternity hosted a party at their Langdon Street house with a "Harlem Room." It was decorated with trash on the floor, graffiti and a basketball hoop. White students wore blackface and afro wigs, and served fried chicken and watermelon punch.[1]

KLB: Oh my god, what do you even say to that?

AM: Yeah, and it wasn't a one-off. Quick warning for a racial slur here…
The next year, the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity held a "Martin Luther Coon Day" party.[2]

And a month later the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity threw their annual Fiji Island party with a cutout on the lawn of a "native" man with a bone through his nose. Again, partygoers showed up in blackface.[3]

KLB: We should say that this stuff wasn't exclusive to Greek life. But these parties were some of the most visible examples of a campus culture that tolerated—or even celebrated—racism.

And because the parties *were* so visible, and so egregious, student activists were able to use them to pressure the university to do something.

AM: To their credit, university leaders did do something.

In the summer of '87, they created the Steering Committee on Minority Affairs. It was made up of students, faculty and staff, and the idea was for them to come up with a list of recommendations… basically concrete steps the university could take to make things

---

[1] Susan Lampert Smith, "UW fraternities get a break," *Wisconsin State Journal*, October 23, 1987, accessed at https://newspaperarchive.com/madison-wisconsin-state-journal-oct-23-1987-p-1/
[2] Jeff Mayers, "University officials pledge to fight racism," *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 6, 1987, accessed at https://newspaperarchive.com/madison-wisconsin-state-journal-may-06-1987-p-41/
[3] Gardner Selby, "Frat's caricature triggers blacks' call for UW reform," *Madison Capital Times*, May 4, 1987, accessed at https://newspaperarchive.com/madison-capital-times-may-04-1987-p-1/

well… less racist. And, crucially, some of the same student activists who had been pressuring the university got a seat at the table.[4]

KLB: Now, if you've made it this far in the season, you might be asking, 'wait, when did this ever work for protesters to go through the "proper channels?"' That's a fair question.

Geneva Brown was one of the student activists at the time, and the co-president of the Black Student Union. In an oral history, she recalled that they made a conscious decision to try to affect university policy, not just express outrage.

Geneva Brown: There was a lot of hard work done by regular folks sitting around a table that summer… And it was a revolutionary idea at that point. We just didn't want to march up and down Langley…

KLB: We're pretty sure she means Langdon there. It's been a few decades.

GB: We just didn't want to march up and down Langley or have demonstrations in front of Bascom Hall. We really wanted to make concrete changes, and that's what we did.

AM: It kinda makes sense, right? When you're trying to hold your own university responsible… when you're protesting from inside the house, you wouldn't go out to the yard and shout 'this house is ugly!' No, you'd want a say in how to redo the pipes or where the kitchen island goes… sorry this is going from a horror movie to a home renovation show… But anyway, back to the story of this steering committee.

Geneva Brown's co-president at the Black Student Union was an undergrad named Charles Holley. And he became the chair of this committee. So when they released their final report, it was named after him.

KLB: The Holley Report made a bunch of recommendations, including hiring a vice chancellor of minority affairs, adding a six-credit ethnic studies requirement, and creating a multicultural student center.[5]

But around the same time, the university hired a new chancellor named Donna Shalala. And even though she had only been on campus a couple of months, Shalala decided the Holley Report was overkill. It was too "separatist." So she sidestepped the

---

[4] T.J. Braxton, "A Closer Look At UW-Madison's Campus-Wide Diversity Initiatives," May 5, 2021, http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/81854

[5] The Final Report of the Steering Committee on Minority Affairs, also known as "The Holley Report," November 1987, https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/3W4OWHJXU3L5W8C

committee, plucked a few items from the report and released her own initiative, called the Madison Plan.[6]

AM: Wow, creative name!

KLB: Well, I don't know if anybody brought that up, but student activists were definitely less than impressed with the plan itself. They saw it as a pale imitation of everything they'd been working on.

Here's how Charles Holley recalled it in an oral history recording:

Charles Holley: They watered it down. They had some achievable goal, I think, to make things look successful. But the Madison Plan was, you know, a diminishment from what we were arguing for. And they have, you know, stepped back from that. So you know our position back in '88 was, "Okay either you accept these recommendations in whole to get you on the road to doing the right thing or you know sooner or later you'll come back and realize that you know you're going to regret what's going to come next because the next group of students, they're going to be a lot more forceful once you've had notice. And you start to see that mid-90s and you're definitely starting to see that now.

AM: And you know, he wasn't wrong. Racist incidents continued. And so did the protesting. In 1988, the Zeta Beta Tau fraternity became the center of controversy for hosting a "slave auction" party. Some attendees dressed in blackface and afro wigs and impersonated famous Black people, like Oprah Winfrey.[7]

KLB: That same year, members from the University of Illinois's Acacia frat were invited by the UW-Madison chapter. During their visit, they disrupted five classes, including two African studies courses. They lit off stink bombs, shouted, and provoked fights with UW students.[8]

AM: In response, students kept organizing. In November 1988, they staged Day of Outrage Against Racism, with demonstrations on campus. And they publicly released a ten-point plan pressuring Shalala to adopt more pieces of the Holley Report.[9]

---

[6] T.J. Braxton, "A Closer Look At UW-Madison's Campus-Wide Diversity Initiatives," May 5, 2021, http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/81854
[7] Robert Gebelhoff, "ZBT accused," *Daily Cardinal*, October 24, 1988.
[8] Roger Gribble, "Report shows UW minorities made inroads," *Wisconsin State Journal*, April 26, 1988, accessed at https://newspaperarchive.com/madison-wisconsin-state-journal-apr-19-1988-p-71/
[9] "Protests & Social Action at UW-Madison during the 20th Century," University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries,

KLB: So… did they get what they wanted?

AM: Well, some of it. The university came up with a speech code that let them punish racist and discriminatory behavior. (Though a court later overturned it). And a more enduring outcome was the creation of the Multicultural Student Center, which is still going strong today.[10]

KLB: So long story short, student organizing didn't completely fix a culture of racism on campus. But students succeeded in getting the university to acknowledge the problem. They had some concrete wins like the Multicultural Student Center and they continued to beef up that protest playbook that students would keep using in the decades to come.

[MUSIC]

AM: So, remember what that very creepy history enthusiast said in the intro?

KLB: The thing about the popcorn?

AM: No, don't ever let anybody shame you for enjoying a snack. I meant what he said about racism not being the only type of discrimination students were fighting against. Around the same time as the Holley Report and all these parties, UW leaders were also facing pressure over their relationship with the US military and how it treated LGBTQ students. At the center was the ROTC.

KLB: If you're not familiar, ROTC stands for Reserve Officers' Training Corps. It's basically a collection of programs that different branches of the military run on college campuses across the country. You know when people join the military as a way to go to college? Well the ROTC is where they do part of their training while they're in school.

And since the ROTC is a clear symbol of the military's presence on campus, UW students have been protesting it for decades. Anti-war students were calling out the ROTC as far back as the 1930s. And not surprisingly, it was a big target in the Vietnam War era.

AM: But by the 80s, students had started focusing on the way the military— and by extension the ROTC—was treating gay and lesbian people.

1980-1989,https://www.library.wisc.edu/archives/exhibits/campus-history-projects/protests-social-action-at-uw-madison-during-the-20th-century/

[10] T.J. Braxton, "A Closer Look At UW-Madison's Campus-Wide Diversity Initiatives," May 5, 2021.

At the time it was illegal for LGBTQ people to openly serve in the armed forces. But that was at odds with the state law and university policy. Wisconsin added sexual orientation to its nondiscrimination law in 1982, actually becoming the first state to legally protect gay people. UW-Madison followed with its own policy in 1987.[11]

So students and faculty began pointing out this pretty glaring contradiction: If the university says it doesn't discriminate based on sexual orientation, why is it hosting a military program that does?

KLB: It was an issue that got both students and faculty to start organizing. In 1989, nearly 300 faculty members signed a petition calling for an all-faculty meeting to address the ROTC's presence on campus.[12]

Professor Joe Elder was one of the leading organizers against ROTC. Here he is making his case during that all-faculty meeting:

Faculty Senate Joe Elder: The minority group against which that discrimination is targeted are those undergraduates on our campus who identify themselves as homosexuals. The ROTC programs automatically define such undergraduates as less worthy and less fit than their fellow undergraduates. By attaching the stigma of unworthiness to gay and lesbian undergraduates on the Madison campus, the ROTC policy injures all gay and lesbian graduate students, faculty, and academic staff on our campus. Publicly defining them too by extension as less fit and less worthy than their fellow citizens and perpetuating ungrounded myths and stereotypes about homosexuals, that should long ago have been relegated to the dustbins of history.[13]

KLB: A big majority of faculty agreed with Elder and voted in favor of a referendum calling for the ROTC to be phased out from campus unless gay and lesbian students were allowed to participate.

AM: It was a historic vote. It made national news and inspired faculty at other schools to take up the issue. But it was also nonbinding. And a couple months later, the Board of Regents resolved to keep ROTC on campus. University leaders said they opposed the

---

[11] Ezra Gerard, ""In the Dairy State You Cannot Discriminate:" Protesting Military Homophobia at UW–Madison," UW–Madison Center for Campus History, June 6, 2022, https://campushistory.wisc.edu/in-the-dairy-state-you-cannot-discriminate-protesting-military-homophobia-at-uw-madison/

[12] Ezra Gerard, ""In the Dairy State You Cannot Discriminate:" Protesting Military Homophobia at UW–Madison."

[13] *Faculty senate meeting*, 4 December 1989, audio recording. UW-Madison Faculty Senate Meetings tapes, Series 5/2/16/2, Box 2. UW Archives.

military's discriminatory policies, but they argued it would be better to keep up good relations with them and lobby for change at the federal level.[14]

KLB: I guess you could say administrators were trying their own 'inside the house' strategy there. But students saw something else. They saw the university choosing federal funding, ROTC scholarships, and institutional caution over a clear stand on discrimination.

AM: With the Regents refusing to budge, students tried other tactics. Organizers pushed the university to add a disclaimer to ROTC promotional materials mentioning the discriminatory policy, and pointing out that it went against university rules. If the ROTC *had* to be on campus, every brochure and poster should at least acknowledge the contradiction in plain language.[15]

KLB: But the Chancellor, Donna Shalala, said nope.

AM: Wait, is this the same chancellor as earlier who watered down the racism initiative?

KLB: Yeah, mhmm yup, same one. "Let's not rock the boat" seemed to be her whole approach when it came to conflict. She said she didn't "see the usefulness" of a disclaimer.[16] So, like we've seen over and over, students escalated things outside of the "proper channels."

In April 1990, about 60 students started a sit-in outside Shalala's office. Some even brought sleeping bags and camped out in Bascom Hall. After five days, they moved to the Board of Regents office in Van Hise Hall, to make sure their involvement was highlighted too.[17]

AM: And that's when the university called in the cops. After a ten-hour sit-in, university police began arresting students who refused to leave. Forty students were arrested and many were dragged from the building.

Outside, a crowd of nearly 300 chanted, "In the Dairy State you cannot discriminate."[18]

---

[14] Ezra Gerard, ""In the Dairy State You Cannot Discriminate:" Protesting Military Homophobia at UW–Madison."
[15] Ezra Gerard, ""In the Dairy State You Cannot Discriminate:" Protesting Military Homophobia at UW–Madison."
[16] "Wisconsin Students Stage Sit in to Protest ROTC Ban on Gays." *Associated Press*, April 19, 1990.
[17] "Wisconsin Students Stage Sit in to Protest ROTC Ban on Gays." *Associated Press*, April 19, 1990.
[18] Christensen, Jean. "Police Use Force to End ROTC Sit-in." *Daily Cardinal* (Madison, WI), April 24, 1990, UW–Madison Archives, UW–Madison Libraries.

KLB: Students later reported excessive force and homophobic behavior by the police, like blowing kisses and making a show of wearing rubber gloves to avoid HIV. Protester Jordan Marsh told the Daily Cardinal, “we made the assumption that [UW Police] were professionals… and they beat the crap out of us.” But university officials insisted the police action was appropriate.[19]

AM: Okay, so here’s where we step back again and ask ‘what was the outcome? Did this work’?

KLB: And then we hedge and we say, “well, protest is complicated??”

AM: Exactly! In this case, neither that faculty vote nor the student sit-in got the university to kick ROTC off campus. In fact, it’s still there today. And the ban on LGBT service members was eventually phased out, but all that happened over decades *on the federal level*.

Still, the outcomes of specific protests only tell part of the story. We said this episode was about students trying to hold their own university accountable, and that’s exactly what both the ROTC and anti-racism protests show.

KLB: They demonstrate how students were testing the university’s language against its behavior. They were asking whether nondiscrimination was a real policy or just an idealistic statement. And when the university leaned toward the latter, students made that contradiction public.

AM: And you know what’s great about all this complexity and inconclusiveness? It means we still have more to talk about! Lord knows there are plenty of issues in the present day that need attention. And UW-Madison wouldn’t be UW-Madison if students weren’t protesting around those too. 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 links to the full Holley Report and the Madison Plan.

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

---

[19] Christensen, Jean. “Police Use Force to End ROTC Sit-in.” *Daily Cardinal,* April 24, 1990.

Additional help from Taylor Bailey and Dan Berman.

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