**EPISODE 7: "Yes, students still protest!" TRANSCRIPT [FINAL] w/ Citations**

**ALLIE MORRIS:** Hey, It's Allie. If you're just starting with this episode, go back and listen to episode 1… things will make more sense.

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**AM:** Can I just say how happy I am that this season of the podcast is over?

**KACIE LUCCHINI BUTCHER:** Okay… rude.

**AM:** No! It was great. We learned so much about protest history at UW–Madison. Housing! Vietnam! Apartheid! The Black Strike! It was informative *and* fun.

**KLB:** Well if you've liked what we've done so far, you're in luck. We've got one more episode.

**AM:** No, we don't.

**KLB:** Yes, we do. We're doing it right now.

**AM:** No, no. When I decide something is done for me, it's over.

**KLB:** Wait, what? What do you mean?

**AM:** If I don't want to know the ending, I just stop where *I* want things to end.

**KLB:** Okay? Like . . .?

**AM:** Like I was just reading Sally Rooney's *Normal People*. I stopped when Connell and Marianne were still together.

**KLB:** But Connell ends up leaving Ireland and going to—

**AM:** No! Nope! He doesn't. Him and Marianne are *happy* and *together*.

**KLB:** Okay. Suuuuure.

**AM:** And Ned Stark and his family are perfectly cozy at Winterfell with their cute little wolf pups. Leo is drawing French girls on a *totally* buoyant boat. And everyone is having a great vacation at the White Lotus.

**KLB:** Well I guess you're definitely not the first podcast host to live in their own delusional world, we… we can work with this.

**[THEME MUSIC]**

**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.

**AM:** And I'm Allie Morris.

This season, we've looked at the history of student protest at UW-Madison. We've covered everything from housing discrimination to Vietnam, and somehow we still haven't covered everything. So, it's a *Reorientation* first: We're adding a special seventh episode because somehow there is still more left.

**KLB:** For our last and final episode, we're bringing you up to speed with some of UW–Madison's most recent protests. How has UW organizing changed in fifty years? Or has it at all? What are students worried about today? And does it have anything to do with the generations of students who've come before them?

**AM:** And since we're here, we'll talk about why it all matters. What can we learn from decades of student activism?

**[THEME MUSIC]**

**[TYPE WRITER CLICKING]**

**NEWSY VOICE:** "UW begins investigation into racial harassment at fraternity party."[1]

[1] Kelly Kalien, "UW begins investigation into racial harassment at fraternity party," *Daily Cardinal*, March 22, 2012, https://www.dailycardinal.com/article/2012/03/uw-begins-investigation-into-racial-harassment-at-fraternity-party

"ASM unanimously approves contentious divestment proposal to mixed reactions from campus"[2]

“Protests over racial injustice lead to property damage in Downtown Madison.”[3]

**AM:** Wait wait wait… Haven’t we already covered this? I swear we talked about racist frats and divestment and protests on State street in our last episode.

**KLB:** Haven’t you heard? Trends are cyclical. Everything comes back around.

**AM:** Okay, I’m fine with chunky highlights and layered tank tops. But this? THIS?!

**KLB:** That’s why studying student protest at UW can be a little dizzying. When you get into the weeds, you realize that everything old eventually becomes new again. Even protests. Tactics, organizing, slogans, even the demands themselves can often mirror previous protests and not in the fun ‘we’ve learned a lot about organizing’ way but in a ‘we still have all the same problems' way.

**AM:** Well that’s kind of sad . . . If students organized fifty years ago, and students today still need to organize for the same things . . .

**KLB:** Didn’t you ever watch Matthew McConaughey in the season 1 of True Detective?

**MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY:** “Someone once told me that time is a flat circle. Everything we’ve ever done or will do, we’re gonna do over, and over, and over again… and again… and again… forever. ”[4]

**AM:** No, I couldn’t even start that show. No way to salvage a happy ending out of that one.

**KLB:** Oh yeah, it’s bleak as hell. But it’s not wrong. Not to get too philosophical, but the point is that humans seem to have a hard time escaping the darkest parts of our nature, whether its ritualistic murders in the Louisiana bayou, or things like war, or racism.

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[2] Peyton David, "ASM unanimously approves contentious divestment proposal to mixed reactions from campus” *Badger Herald*, April 27, 2017, https://badgerherald.com/news/2017/04/27/asm-unanimously-approves-contentious-divestment-proposal-to-mixed-reactions-from-campus/

[3] Jackson Mozena, “Protests over racial injustice lead to property damage in Downtown Madison,” *Daily Cardinal*, August 26, 2020, https://www.dailycardinal.com/article/2020/08/protests-over-racial-injustice-leads-to-property-damage-in-downtown-madison

[4] *True Detective*, season 1, created by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, aired January 12–March 9, 2014, on HBO.

It’s unfortunate that those things persist, but you can also see it as kind of hopeful. That across 50 years, students haven’t stopped fighting to make things better.

**AM:** Well I guess, when you and Matthew McConaughey put it that way, we don’t have to end this story immediately… Proceed.

**KLB:** Let’s take this in two parts. Since we’ve got two very different protests to talk about. First up—racism.

**AM:** Okay, does this mean we’re going back up to Langdon? I’ll need to grab my frat shoes.

**KLB:** You’re . . . what? You know what? I don’t want to know.

This story doesn’t just take place on Langdon… but Greek Life is still involved. Remember how students in 1969 wanted a campus that was more welcoming to Black students? And then in the 1980s after a string of racist incidents, students asked for the exact same thing in the Holley Report? Well, starting in 2016, Black students at UW–Madison once again started asking for UW to take actionable steps to make campus a more welcoming place for marginalized students.

**AM:** it all started with The #RealUW campaign on Twitter.[5] You know, back when Twitter was still called Twitter, students took to social media to talk openly and honestly about their experiences on campus. And they weren't great.

**[PHONE TYPING CLICKING]**

ANONYMOUS VOICES: “The real UW is when a car full of white UW male students try to run you over on your way from the library, and yelling [BLEEP] at you.”[6]

“Being questioned by campus police while white students were told to get out of there ‘before it got ugly.’”[7]

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[5] Pat Schenider, “#TheRealUW: A social media movement is forcing UW-Madison to confront its race problems,” *Capitol Times*, April 20, 2016, https://captimes.com/news/local/education/university/therealuw-a-social-media-movement-is-forcing-uw-madison-to-confront-its-race-problems/article_4d5a2909-68fc-5900-ab4c-69c386375589.html

[6] https://x.com/OrganicKemistry/status/709808378990632960?a=8N1J0kERRpMbg4cjIj4&s=20

[7] https://x.com/Elmosnttickled/status/709572819470983168?a=8ExOl6dw2jwsbzp0SU4&s=20

“I feel safer in the south, in Atlanta, than I do with this town and university that claims to be progressive.”[8]

“Was asked how I and other Native Americans can have critical thinking skills because of our religion. I have 2 masters degrees.”[9]

**KLB:** Many students commented on how unsafe they felt on Langdon street at night. Students reported being called slurs, having garbage thrown at them, and worse. But it was bigger than one street—it was the whole campus. Students of color in 2016 started pointing to the same troubling pattern than students noticed in the late 1980s. UW has a culture problem.

**AM:** The #RealUW was only the beginning. While students called attention to their experiences, there wasn’t a lot of action from the university. There was a lot of *concern* expressed. There was a lot of listening and learning. But not much else. Unsurprisingly, the culture kept coming.

**KLB:** In fall of 2016, a Badger football fan showed up to a game dressed as Barack Obama with a noose around his neck. Initially, the university decided not to reprimand the fans citing free speech. But after outrage, from students, faculty, and importantly college athletes—Chancellor Rebecca Blank changed course.[10] She apologized for her initial response, and banned the fans from Camp Randall.

**AM:** Some praised her for her apology, but many pointed out an unfortunate pattern. In moments of turmoil for the university, the institution aims to protect itself, instead of protecting students who were being harmed.

**KLB:** It didn’t stop there. That same fall, someone vandalized a sacred indigenous fire circle with the words "Columbus Rules 1492”[11]. In 2017, a chemistry TA was fired after it came out that he had a pattern of antisemitic behavior and had committed a hate crime at a prior university. In the spring of 2019, stickers were found in the dorms that said

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[8] https://x.com/blueflamearies/status/709409509211418625?a=FuZ2LZgHRbVM4v3Z6ms&s=20
[9] https://x.com/SiouxperNova/status/709876331127906305?a=kpiRYKoVxZ9651-hP6Y&s=20
[10] Teymour Tomsyck, “Blank apologizes for handling of Camp Randall noose incident,” *Badger Herald*, November 18, 2016, https://badgerherald.com/news/2016/11/08/onlinechancellor-rebecca-blank-apologizes-for-handling-of-randall-noose-incident/
[11] Site staff, “Students feel unwelcome after vandal writes ‘Columbus Rules 1492’ on sacred fire circle,” *Channel 3000*, October 11 2017, https://www.channel3000.com/students-feel-unwelcome-after-vandal-writes-columbus-rules-1492-on-sacred-fire-circle/

“Make America White Again.”[12] Later that year, Black students were asked to participate in a video celebrating Homecoming. But when the video was released, only white students were included.[13]

**AM:** Wait, 2019? We’re not even to 2020 . . .

**KLB** Way to rush me… but yes, 2020 was a turning point, not only for student organizers who cared about racial justice on campus, but for activists everywhere.

**[NEWS CLIPS]**

**NEWSCASTERS:** “Tension building tonight in Minneapolis after an unarmed Black man died after being arrested.”

“46-year old George Floyd, a Black man, who died in police custody.”

“George Floyd repeatedly told officers that he could not breathe, after an officer knelt on his neck.”

**[PROTESTERS CHANTING]**

**KLB:** When the Minneapolis Police killed George Floyd, his death became a flash point, a symbol, a movement.[14]

**[PROTESTERS CHANTING]**
**AM:** Just like cities across the country, Madison erupted in protests.

**[PROTEST AMBI]**
Madison Police used tear gas on State Street. They shot rubber bullets at protestors.[15] S*ome* of those protestors were students. But George Floyd was killed in May. School

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[12] Jenna Walters and Defang Zhang, “Racist sticker exposes campus presence of national extremist group,” *Daily Cardina*l, April 16, 2019, https://www.dailycardinal.com/article/2019/04/racist-sticker-exposes-campus-presence-of-national-extremist-group

[13] Julie Bosman, “In a Homecoming Video Meant to Unite Campus, Almost Everyone was White,” *The New York Times*, January 1 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/01/us/university-of-wisconsin-race-video.html

[14] Kristina Roth & Alli McCracken Jarrar, “Justice for George Floyd: A Year of Global Activism for Black Lives and Against Police Violence,” Amnesty International, 24 May 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2021/05/justice-for-george-floyd-a-year-of-global-activism-for-black-lives-and-against-police-violence/

[15] Quattrone Center, Madison Police Department  Sentinel Event Review (SER) of the Department’s Responses to 2020 Protests of Police, November 16, 2021, https://www.law.upenn.edu/live/files/11942-madison-sentinel-report

was out and a lot of students were gone for the summer. It wasn't really a *campus* protest. But just weeks later, the cops shot another Black man, this time even closer to home.

**[NEWS CLIPS]**

**NEWSCASTERS:** "We are going to begin with what is happening in Kenosha, Wisconsin."

"Protests broke out over a video of police shooting a Black man, Jacob Blake, in the back multiple times."

"Blake was shot at least seven times on Sunday, and is paralyzed."

**AM:** In late August 2020, Kenosha Police shot Jacob Blake seven times in the back and side, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down.[16] This time the students were back. And they organized.[17]

**KLB:** Students wanted to push the university to recognize its own complicity in systems of oppression, especially police violence. They focused their attention on UW–Madison's Police Department, and the fact that campus police supported city Police during the Floyd protests.[18] They also highlighted the long history of mistrust between campus police and students of color.

**AM:** *clears throat* If you want to know allllllll about UWPD's history, you can listen to season one of *Reorientation*.

**KLB:** Smooth… real smooth.

But anyways, to summarize way too quickly: Black and BIPOC student groups released a list of 10 demands.[19] Those included removing the statue of Abraham Lincoln on

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[16] EBSCO, "RESEARCH STARTER: Shooting of Jacob Blake," https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/law/shooting-jacob-blake/

[17] Azul Kuthari, "TAA , BIPOC Coalition march for racial justice and dismantling of UWPD," *Badger Herald*, October 11 2020, https://badgerherald.com/news/2020/10/11/taa-bipoc-coalition-march-for-racial-justice-and-dismantling-of-uwpd/

[18] Mary Magnuson, "Records reveal UWPD spent over $6,000 on pepper spray, smoke grenades during George Floyd BLM protests," *Badger Herald*, October 16 2020, https://badgerherald.com/news/campus/2020/10/16/records-reveal-uwpd-spent-over-6000-on-pepper-spray-smoke-grenades-during-george-floyd-blm-protests/

[19] BIPOC Demands for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Created August 31, 2020, https://www.change.org/p/university-of-wisconsin-madison-bipoc-demands-for-the-university-of-wisconsin-

Bascom Hill and improving support systems for marginalized students on campus. Maybe of most interest to this podcast, they demanded that the university revisit the 1969 Black Student Strike demands, most of which were still unmet.

**AM:** The sad truth is that what Black students were experiencing in the 2010s, and what they were asking the university to do about it, eerily mirrors the 1960s. Students during the Black Strike wanted the university to fund a Black Cultural Center. Students in 2020 wanted the university to "Recognize the educational value of marginalized, identity-based student affinity groups." And to create a funding structure supporting those groups.

Black students in 1969 wanted to have a bigger role in shaping university structures that supported them. Students in 2020 wanted "meetings between leaders and the general body of the Wisconsin Black Student Union regarding their experiences and recommendations in making this a truly diverse and inclusive campus."[20]

**KLB:** Now you might be thinking… what the hell? You've been telling me this whole season that protest works. Now you're telling me students fifty years apart are fighting the university for the same paltry advancements.

**AM:** And we haven't even gotten past 2020, to more racist incidents in the dorms… to 2023 when a white student went viral in a video saying she wanted to "re-enslave" Black students.[21] Maybe sad Matthew McConaughey was right.

**MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY:** "Why should I live in history, huh? I don't want to know anything anymore. This is a world where nothing is solved." [22]

**KLB:** Quit playing those clips. You're not giving people hope.

**AM:** Is there any?

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madison?utm_content=cl_sharecopy_24434419_en-US%3A6&recruiter=1100704257&recruited_by_id=42f3f500-a38a-11ea-8bcc-4560d49a8d7d&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=copylink&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_initial&utm_term=share_petition

[20] BIPOC Demands for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Created August 31, 2020.

[21] Scott Jaschik, "Controversy at Madison Over Racist Video," *Inside Higher Ed*, May 4, 2023, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2023/05/04/madison-students-want-fellow-student-expelled-racist-video

[22] *True Detective*, season 1, created by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, aired January 12–March 9, 2014, on HBO.

**KLB:** Yes, there's always hope. But like we've said, it's complicated. We heard from Professor Martha Biondi earlier this season. She studies this exact stuff: the history of Black social movements. And she puts it like this:

**MARTHA BIONDI:** 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. And so we've seen that.

**KLB:** If you look only at history as a string of unfolding tidbits, like we often do in this podcast, you miss some of the complexity. Yes, students today are asking for similar things to students in the past. But advances have been made, protest has changed this institution. The 1969 Black Student Strike created the African American Studies Department which continues to educate students on Black history and culture.[23] The Holley Report created the Multicultural Student Center which continues to be one of the most vital spaces on campus for students of color.[24]

**AM:** And yes, there are a lot of things that haven't changed. But that's not the students' fault.

**KLB:** While students have a lot of power — the power to educate their fellow students, the power to make their voices heard, the power to disrupt — they don't have the power to make decisions for the university, or to change policy. Only university leaders and the Board of Regents have that power.

**AM:** Similarly, civilians don't have the power to change foreign policy, or dictate decisions made in war. BUT in the ecosystem of change, protest and dissent are important. Frederick Douglass once said, "Power concedes nothing without a demand."[25] And while it may sound like pretty words, it's a powerful truth. Things don't change unless people demand they change.

**KLB:** That is a heck of a quote. I bet you were thinking we could use that to wrap everything up nicely, right?

**AM:** I mean…

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[23] For more on the history of the creation of the African American Studies Department, see https://africanamericanstudies.wisc.edu/history/

[24] For more on the history of the Multicultural Student Center, see https://msc.wisc.edu/about/

[25] Frederick Douglass, excerpt from a speech on "West India Emancipation," August 4, 1857, https://www.gilderlehrman.org/ap-african-american-studies/unit-2/organizing-for-freedom/west-india-emancipation-1857

**KLB:** Well, we're almost there. But we can't talk about the state of student protest today without mentioning the most recent major protest movement on campus: the encampment for Palestine.

**AM:** If you were on campus at the time, in spring 2024, you know this protest felt like a big deal. Hundreds of students occupying the center of campus to protest Israel's genocide in Gaza… big marches… teach-ins … and eventually police violence.[26]

But this podcast wouldn't be this podcast if we didn't stop here and say: 'This actually goes back decades.' Remember…

**MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY:** "Time is a flat circle."[27]

**KLB:** The 2024 protest didn't come out of nowhere. Students at UW and in the United States have been concerned about violence and injustice in Palestine for a long time.

There's no way we can adequately explain the history of the conflict in podcast form, but for our story today, here's what you need to know: After World War Two, the British and other Western powers got on board with a plan to carve out a chunk of Palestine for a Jewish state. Following a war between Jewish settlers and neighboring Arab countries, Israel was officially established in 1948.

**AM:** But this new country wasn't made out of empty land. Palestinians were already living there, and had been for a long time. Many were forced from their homes and forbidden from returning.

In the 80 years since Israel was established, they have continued to capture more land through military force, occupation and settlement. There have been ongoing and escalating conflicts between Palestinians being violently pushed out of their homeland and Israelis who claim the land as part of their country. Palestinians living under Israeli occupation have faced decades of unequal rights, segregation and limited resources.[28]

**KLB:** None of this was lost on UW students. You often hear the idea that this conflict is just too complicated to understand. And that can be an excuse not to engage with it. But

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[26] For a play-by-play of every day of the encampment, see the reporting from the Daily Cardinal, https://www.dailycardinal.com/article/2024/04/live-updates-campus-leaders-call-on-protesters-to-remove-tents-before-discussing-their-demands

[27] *True Detective*, season 1, created by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, aired January 12–March 9, 2014, on HBO.

[28] Ilan, Pappe. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oneworld Publications Limited, 2006. Avi Shlaim, "The debate about 1948." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 3 (1995): 287-304. Benny Morris, *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem revisited*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

over the decades, UW students have engaged with it, repeatedly. And much like the issue of campus racism, new generations of students have continued to find ways to face the issue.

Do you remember what we talked about back in Episode 5 with the movement against Apartheid in South Africa?

**AM:** Of course. Do you mean how students in the 80s pushed the university to divest money from institutions that did business with the Apartheid government?

**KLB:** Yes. What we didn't get to in that episode, though, is that around the same time, student organizers also tried to push the university to divest from Israel. But while South African divestment was largely successful, calls for Israeli divestment went unanswered. At the risk of oversimplifying, the geopolitical relationships just aren't the same. The US has everything to gain from supporting Israel's dominance over the region.[29]

**AM:** But that hasn't stopped students from continuing to organize. In the early 90s, a protest turned violent when a prominent rightwing Zionist activist tried to speak on campus. In the 2000s, activists revived the campaign for divestment after Israeli military crackdowns.[30]

And then came October 7th, 2023.

**[MUSIC]**

**KLB:** Hamas militants carried out a terror attack in Israel. They killed at least 1200 people and took over 200 people hostage. In response, Israel immediately declared war on Hamas and began a massive bombing campaign and ground invasions in Gaza. This led to the large-scale destruction of Gaza and the death of at least 50,000 people, including at least 21,000 children.[31]

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[29] "Case Study: Divestment from Israel." Divestment for Humanity: The Anti-Apartheid Movement at the University of Michigan. Harold Kohen, "…and apartheid." *The Daily Cardinal*, November 25th, 1987.
[30] Jonathan Pollack, *Wisconsin, the New Home of the Jew 150 Years of Jewish Life at the University of Wisconsin–Madison*. Pgs. 126-131: Online Link to Book.
[31] Statista Research Department, "Monthly cumulative Palestinian recorded fatalities and injuries in the Gaza War as of June 2026." June 15th, 2026. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1616501/monthly-gaza-fatalities-injuries/?srsltid=AYCX9vJm8sQN31XFAMpUewyV9WPt7kJkFKq1LR2m27a2e8wtUpr8hxFj

Gozlan A, Abuhasira R, Dreiher J, Peleg S, Sebbag G, Schwarzfuchs D, Slutsky T, Dolfin D, Frenkel A, Codish S. "October 7th 2023 mass casualty incident in southern Israel: lessons for emergency preparedness and management." *Isr J Health Policy Res*. 2024 Nov 11;13(1):67. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11556145/

**AM:** Protests in the US and around the world grew over the next several months as the civilian death toll in Gaza kept climbing. And by spring 2024, American college campuses had become a hotbed for pro-Palestine organizing.

In April, students at Columbia University in New York established an encampment with about 50 tents on campus. They demanded the university—you guessed it—divest from Israel. After a few days Columbia's president authorized the NYPD to break up the demonstration, and conduct mass arrests. But the students just arrived again the next day and re-established the tents.[32] Negotiations followed—and fell apart—but something else had already begun.

**KLB:** Inspired by Columbia students, encampments spread to campuses across the country. On April 29, 2024, UW-Madison student groups set up their own encampment on Library Mall. They called for the university's "financial and social" divestment from Israel.[33]

**AM:** These UW students drew on a long history of protest. They set up tents, much like the shanty town protests against Apartheid in the 80s. They held teach-ins with lectures from professors on the history of Palestine, just like students did during the 1969 Black Student Strike. They spoke about their demands with fellow students passing through the Mall, just like students did during the fight to end housing discrimination.

And much like prior protests, university leaders responded as generations of leaders before them had—they cited university codes that students were violating.

**[PROTESTERS CHANTING]**

**KLB:** On the morning of May 1st, Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin ordered the UW Police Department to break up the encampment. Madison Police and other agencies were

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Elisabeth Mahase, "Israel accepts Gaza death toll of 70 000, but experts say true number is much higher." *BMJ* 392; 239: (2026). https://www.bmj.com/content/392/bmj.s239

Michael, Spagat, et al. "Violent and non-violent death tolls for the Gaza conflict: new primary evidence from a population-representative field survey." *The Lancet. Global health* vol. 14,4 (2026): https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/41722607/

[32] Isha Banerjee, "Timeline: The 'Gaza Solidarity Encampment'," The Columbia Spectator, May 2, 2024, https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2024/05/02/timeline-the-gaza-solidarity-encampment/

[33] For coverage on Day 1 of the UW-Madison encampment, see  For a play-by-play of every day of the encampment, see the reporting from the Daily Cardinal, https://www.dailycardinal.com/article/2024/04/live-updates-campus-leaders-call-on-protesters-to-remove-tents-before-discussing-their-demands

there too. When protesters refused to leave, police officers pushed through the crowd with shields and batons. **[CHAOS IGNITING]** Many students were left bruised and bloodied. Dozens were arrested, and tents were pulled down. But after the police cleared out, students simply set up new ones and re-established the encampment.[34]

**[PROTESTERS CHANTING]**

Mnookin released a statement the same day defending her decision to send in campus police. She praised the UWPD and reiterated that all protestors had a chance to disperse and chose not to.

**[TYPING]**

**[VOICEOVER]:** Civil disobedience has been a time-honored tradition in our nation, including here. Yet it is a long-standing element of the civil disobedience tradition to respect the laws we share and to accept that there are consequences for violating them. It is this that distinguishes civil disobedience from mere lawlessness.[35]

**AM:** Now, we as historians can't help but point out an issue here. Civil disobedience is defined as a non-violent refusal to obey laws in an effort to promote or force societal change. When black and white students during Civil Rights sat together at segregated lunch counters, they were intentionally breaking the law. When students protesting Vietnam ignored orders from the National Guard to leave Commerce Hall, they knew they were breaking the law. And so did students organizing the encampment in 2024.

Students weren't asking to violate the law without consequence. They were breaking the law and participating in a [chancellor voice] time-honored tradition of civil disobedience.

**KLB:** But we digress; let's get back to the story… university leaders eventually agreed to negotiate with the student protestors. But despite multiple meetings, the university wouldn't budge on the central demand: divesting from Israel.[36] They cited complexity. It would simply be too hard to divest. Donor privacy is protected. So is where university

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[34] "Pro-Palestine protest day three: Protesters rebuild encampment after police remove tents." Daily Cardinal, May 1, 2024, https://www.dailycardinal.com/article/2024/05/live-updates-police-remove-pro-palestine-encampment-on-library-mall

[35] Chancellor Mnookin update on Library Mall tent encampment, UW News, May 1, 2024, https://news.wisc.edu/chancellor-mnookin-update-on-library-mall-tent-encampment/

[36] "No police action until pro-Palestine protesters meet with Mnookin again," *Daily Cardinal,* May 2 2024, https://www.dailycardinal.com/article/2024/05/live-updates-no-police-action-until-pro-palestine-protesters-meet-with-mnookin-again

dollars are invested… and the university's Foundation manages those university investments… investments that leaders claimed they have no say over.[37]

Plus, Wisconsin state law actually protects investment in Israel specifically. It forbids state agencies and local governments from engaging in or adopting policies that boycott, divest from, or sanction Israel.[38]

**AM:** If the divestment campaign highlighted one thing very clearly, it's that university investments aren't as simple as your average high-yield savings account; university investments are complicated, and largely obscured from the public. But that's not an excuse to not investigate or demand divestment. If anything, it's a call for more transparency.

**KLB:** So what did the university agree to in those negotiations? Basically more meetings. They promised to facilitate access for student protesters with decision-makers at the UW Foundation so they could "present concerns and requests." They also agreed to establish visiting scholar positions and scholarships to support scholars and students impacted by war, occupation and displacement in places like Gaza and Ukraine.[39]

**AM:** So at this point, you know what I have to ask…

**KLB:** We've asked it a lot this season. Don't you think it's getting . . . played out?

**AM:** I still have to ask. Did the protest work? Does any protest work?

**KLB:** As we approach the end of the season, we can confidently answer this question, yes. Protest works. Do protests achieve what they set out to do? Sometimes. Do students get their demands met? Sometimes. Every protest is different. The outcomes are affected by political moments, university leadership, organizing tactics, and all sorts of other stuff. But things change because people demand they change.

**AM:** It's easy to look at the spring 2024 encampments and see the big, flashy demand that wasn't met. UW did not divest from Israel. But what's harder to quantify sometimes has greater impact. How many more students knew about the conflict in Gaza than

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[37] Ty Javier and Noe Goldhaber, "Pro-Palestine protesters have called for disclosure of UW Foundation assets. Why are these records not public?," *Daily Cardinal,* May 9, 2024, https://www.dailycardinal.com/article/2024/05/pro-palestine-protesters-have-called-for-disclosure-of-uw-foundation-assets-why-are-these-records-not-public

[38] Wisconsin Legislation, Palestinian Legal Action, https://legislation.palestinelegal.org/location/wisconsin/

[39] Agreement reached to resolve Library Mall tent encampment, UW News, May 10, 2024, https://news.wisc.edu/agreement-reached-to-resolve-library-mall-tent-encampment/

before the protest? How many more alumni and donors became aware of the way their investments were being handled by the university? How many more Wisconsin voters realized that the lawmakers they elect affect whether divestment is even possible? Those impacts matter too.

**KLB:** At this point we've walked you through a hundred-plus years of protest history at UW. All the way to the present day. And as much as, in some ways, time is a flat circle **[FLAT CIRCLE CLIP]**[40] … we've also seen how protest has evolved. Generations of students building off the activism of those before them.

But it's not just tactics or goals that have changed; it's the world. And we can't ride off into the sunset of this season without talking about one very big change that will affect protest in the decades to come: surveillance.

**[MUSIC]**

**AM:** Student protestors have always been surveilled. It's happened at the local campus level, the state level, and even the federal level. Many of the student organizations that we've mentioned this season have a long history of being surveilled: undercover cops literally tried to infiltrate anti-war and Black power groups on campus.

But the mechanisms of surveillance have changed in the 21st century.

**KLB:** Surveillance in the United States has spread far past the hokey vision of police detectives in unmarked vans eating fast food; we live in a far-reaching mass surveillance system. From CCTVs in every business, to local police departments establishing surveillance grids, Americans are more surveilled than ever. Flock cameras and predictive AI are only the most recent advancements in an already advanced system meant to watch, record, and monitor people's every move. You only need to look at the legal cases and political ICE arrests during the Gaza encampments to see how these technologies have been used against student protestors.[41]

**AM:** Students have always faced consequences for protesting. Students in the 1969 Black Student Strike had their names and addresses published in local newspapers. Students have lost scholarships or been expelled. But today consequences can go far

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[40] *True Detective*, season 1, created by Nic Pizzolatto, directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, aired January 12–March 9, 2014, on HBO.

[41] The most high-profile case was the arrest of Mahmoud Khalil. For more, see Devin Dwyer, "Pro-Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil appeals to Supreme Court to sue Trump admin over free speech," ABC News, October 19, 2026, https://abcnews.com/Politics/pro-palestinian-activist-mahmoud-khalil-appeals-supreme-court/story?id=137388888

past that. Students who protest can risk deportation. They risk being physically harmed by police who have more access to weapons and chemical agents. It's not just the local newspapers anymore; it's having their personal information blasted to every corner of the internet.

If you were a student thinking about protesting 50 years ago, the stakes were just different.

**STU LEVITAN:** They wanted to participate. They accepted the risk, because the risk was, "Okay, I'm, I'm white, I'm middle class. I get arrested, eh, I'll survive.

**AM:** If you've made it all the way to Episode 7, you'll recognize the voice of Madison historian Stu Levitan.

**SL:** You know, today it's, it's way more serious than that, and, and it's, it's really understandable why someone who... You look at the... You do a, a risk-reward analysis. What's my reward for this protest? Is it gonna... I- is it really gonna ch- is it gonna change anything? Are we gonna get what we are after? Probably not. Is it gonna expose me to great risk? Yup.

**KLB:** To make matters worse, the university itself has been tightening the screws on protest in recent years. Following Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, and Gaza encampment in 2024, UW–Madison has expanded rules around campus protest.[42] These policies include limits about where you can protest, whether you can have amplified sound, the types of graffiti allowed, and more. And they have already been used to punish students.[43]

**AM:** All of this — surveillance, punishment, policies on campus and laws off campus—have made it harder for students to protest. But students are still protesting.

**KLB:** Which brings me to one of my most important soap boxes. **[MIC TAP]** We want students to protest.

**AM:** What?

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[42] Noe Goldhaber, "Free speech expert, ACLU of Wisconsin question constitutionality of new UW-Madison protest policy," *Daily Cardinal,* August 30, 2024, https://www.dailycardinal.com/article/2024/08/free-speech-expert-aclu-of-wisconsin-question-constitutionality-of-new-uw-madison-protest-policy

[43] Anya van Wagtendonk , "Months after pro-Palestinian encampment protests, UW-Madison students face discipline," WPR, September 30, 2024, https://www.wpr.org/news/madison-palestinian-encampments-protests-uw-wisconsin-discipline

**KLB: *clears throat*** We want students to protest.

**AM:** Okay, I'll bite. Why do we want students to protest?

**KLB:** It may seem idyllic to imagine a campus where no one protests. There would be no picketers marching down Bascom Hill. No protestors interrupting sporting events. No organizers shouting into bullhorns. No lists of demands. No violent police arrests. But a campus like that… is an apathetic campus.

**[MUSIC]**

Students who care—who love their university—protest. Because protest is about making something better. If students didn't care about UW, if they didn't care about the world, they wouldn't protest. They'd go to class, hang with their friends, graduate, and move on. Students who protest are students who care.

**AM:** In fact it's in the university mission statement: "The primary purpose of the University of Wisconsin–Madison is to provide a learning environment in which faculty, staff and students can discover, examine critically, preserve and transmit the knowledge, wisdom and values that will help ensure the survival of this and future generations and improve the quality of life for all."[44]

**KLB:** It continues: "To fulfill its mission, the university must: Embody, through its policies and programs, respect for, and commitment to, the ideals of a pluralistic, multiracial, open and democratic society."[45] And protest? Protest is a part of a healthy democracy.

**[MUSIC]**

**DAVID MARANISS:** You know, that gets to the whole question of what is the role of dissent in American life, right? What's, what is patriotism and what is dissent?

**KLB:** You'll also recognize the voice of author and journalist David Maraniss.

**DM:** I think that there's nothing more American than dissent and protest. It's what, it's what sort of makes this country, at its best, what shapes and forms the country to improve and get better. but... I think it's an important part of American history and

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[44] The University of Wisconsin–Madison Mission Statement, Revised statement, adopted June 10, 1988, UW System Board of Regents, https://www.wisc.edu/about/mission/

[45] The University of Wisconsin–Madison Mission Statement, https://www.wisc.edu/about/mission/

democracy that, that colleges be a place where protests can not only be tolerated, but part of the fabric of what goes on there.

**AM:** If you think about what he's saying, it makes sense. What is a better environment than a college campus for students to begin participating in democratic processes? UW–Madison students already vote in record numbers. Why shouldn't they also be encouraged to protest?

**KLB:** Obviously it's not all roses and clever picket signs. Protest is hard.

**SL:** There's a vicious circle, a vicious cycle of protest, repression, more protest, more repression, more protest, more repression, because the empire always strikes back.

**AM:** But if you can't dissent, on a college campus, or elsewhere, then what?

**SL:** It's, it's hard to say that we're still a functioning democracy.

**[MUSIC]**

**KLB:** Protest is a sign of an engaged campus population, and more importantly, of a functioning democracy. Change happens when people demand it does. So maybe instead of asking—does protest work?—we need to start asking: How can we all better support protests? How can we listen to organizers' demands with an open mind? How can we work together to build a better campus—a better world?

**AM:** Protests on campus will continue. And they should continue. We want students who are engaged. We want students who care. We want students who are willing to fight to make campus a better place for generations who come after them. The question for future historians is: How will leaders—on campus or elsewhere—respond? Will they continue to ignore demands, skirt responsibility, and repress repress repress… or can our cultural views and playbook responses to protest change?

**KLB:** So don't throw out those picket signs just yet. Whether its bus lanes or housing discrimination, anti-war or Black power, campus—our world—needs you. University leaders won't thank you, but future students might. And hey, you might just be featured fifty years later on a small educational podcast.

**[MUSIC]**

**Lauren Munda:** You can find a full teaching guide for this episode on our website at campushistory.wisc.edu. That includes more info on the history of divestment activism 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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