

#91 Arrested Development: How Police Ended Up in Schools

Jennifer Berkshire Welcome to Have You Heard, I'm Jennifer Berkshire.

Jack Schneider And I'm Jack Schneider.

Berkshire And Jack we've spent the past few episodes focusing on the pandemic and talking about how much of that story has turned out to be a story about education. And now we're in the throes of really pretty unprecedented social protests. And once again, the movement that we're seeing against police brutality and now extending to police in the schools is also turning into an education story.

Schneider Yeah, it's an education story, not just because there are police in the schools, uh, and that, that is worth paying attention to, but also because the larger conversations about racial inequality and systemic racism are absolutely questions that cause us to see school policies and school practices in different light.

Berkshire Well, I should give you a heads up Jack, that I may have gotten a little bit carried away with this episode.

Schneider What else is new? So I'm guessing that you have been virtually flying all over the country, interviewing people, and that I am going to be put on the spot to try to come up with some sort of pithy summary

Berkshire You're exactly right. I would suggest that you get ready to answer questions about potentially any city in the country.

Schneider Perfect. I will get my Atlas out and just start thinking

Berkshire Well, Jack, in the past, the success of protesters in cities like Minneapolis and now Seattle and a growing list of other places, their success at forcing the question about the role that police play in schools and, and demanding that that cops be removed from the schools, that's exactly the sort of story that I would have wanted to cover as a freelance journalist, right? That here's a group of people making a demand and winning. But I hate to tell you this, I really feel I'm starting to feel your influence over me. I

Schneider It's not a bad thing, Jennifer.

Berkshire That really my first question was, you know, gosh, I want to know how is it that we ended up with police in schools in the first place?

Schneider You know, Jennifer, if you ever wanted to get a second doctorate, that would be a great dissertation question.

Berkshire So Jack, I learned something about historians while I was working on this episode. And I would like to share with you an observation now.

Schneider Oh, joy, go ahead.

Berkshire So when I was preparing to interview historian Matt Kautz about what happened in Boston, I came across this just astonishing mention that in the two years after the desegregation order was handed down in Boston, the mayor of the city at that point deployed half of the police into the city schools. So I get Matt on the horn, the contemporary equivalent of the horn, and I announced, this is what I'm interested in. Please talk about this now.

Schneider I'm guessing he did not. He started with a long backstory. Here's all the context you need to know. And half an hour later, he said, remind me what the question was again?

Berkshire And that is pretty much exactly what happened. Matt Kautz, who is a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University, and a Spencer Dissertation Fellow told me, you know, to understand the huge police presence in the Boston schools in the 1970s, you can't just start there.

Matt Kautz In the early 1960s. There's this vibrant civil rights movement stirring in Boston. When you have Black Bostonians who are challenging segregation and inequality throughout the city and its disastrous consequences, civil rights organizations are leading protests and demonstrations against government sponsored housing segregation, the city's failure or unwillingness to pick up trash in Black neighborhoods and against the brutality of police officers in these neighborhoods.

Berkshire Everything comes to a head in 1963 when the NAACP education committee charges the Boston school committee with operating and maintaining segregated schools, which the school committee basically ignores igniting another wave of protests, students and civil rights leaders, organized school boycotts, and what they call stay out for freedom days. Now, if you're familiar with Boston's battles over school desegregation, you probably know the name Louise day Hicks. She was a Boston school committee member who would lead the opposition to court ordered busing and his student protests are heating up it's Hicks who essentially tries to brand them as riots.

Matt Kautz And so Louise Day Hicks and three of the other school committee members seek to criminalize these and other demonstrations as well as the protesters themselves. So Hicks unsuccessfully calls for boycotting students and the adults stay out organizers to be arrested. And in the lead up to each of these demonstrations, she warns of impending violence as a result of these protests, needless to say, all of these protests are peaceful, but what Hicks was doing was kind of wedding together, this rhetoric of law and order with segregated schools and racial inequality.

Berkshire So you have a growing protest movement, you have resistance to it and efforts to criminalize that resistance. This by the way is when the Boston police also start to get organized. In 1965 they form the Boston Police Patrolmen's Association or the BPPA - in part because they're getting so many complaints from the community about police brutality. And as the protestors demanded racial equality and justice the new police union pushed back.

Kautz And so the BPPA would in the coming years, continuously side with Hicks and provides financial support to city groups opposed to desegregation. And I think it's important to recognize this part of the history to contextualize the years leading up to police officers, being in Boston schools so that we can recognize the racialization of crime and disorders specifically in response to calls for equality and justice.

Berkshire Over the next few years the protest movement just keeps getting bigger - and the focus is increasingly Boston's segregated schools.

Kautz Young Black activists in Boston continue their demonstrations against segregation and equality throughout the 1960s and seventies and starting in 1968. There's a new wave of student led protest with demands for Black studies courses, more Black teachers and guidance counselors changes to the district's dress code revisions to school disciplinary practices, and then the right to form Black student organizations. And so often the response by schools was to deploy police into schools and police in these instances often responded with force.

Berkshire We're going to speed ahead just a bit here. Apologies to all the historians involved in the making of this show. We're going to go to Boston's battles over school busing. It's 1974 and Boston has been ordered to desegregate its schools. And remember back at the start of this episode, when I mentioned that Boston's mayor Kevin White had deployed half of the city's police officers into the schools? Well, this is when it happens.

Kautz There are instances of violence that erupted in schools, and really you even have Boston city officials admitting that in the first month, this is almost strictly, you know, white violence against Black students and against Black adults in the community. But what happens is the narrative of, 'Hey, these suspensions are disproportionate. Police are roughing up Black students and not doing anything about these white students and parents who are stoning buses,' is saying that well, that's not true. It's these Black students who are coming in are these Black students and the communities in which white children are being bused that are starting this violence, that becomes the political narrative, which further kind of legitimizes the use of police forced in discriminatory ways

Berkshire Between 1974 and 1976 it was the actual Boston Police Department that was being deployed to the schools. But when unrest continued the same judge that ordered Boston to desegregate its schools also ordered the schools to create a new safety and security department.

Kautz That actually creates the new security force, which is Boston Public Schools' kind of own police department to patrol hallways and classrooms. And it's actually that organization that still exists today, policing Boston schools. What's helpful from Boston story in thinking about this happening during desegregation, that also happens in some other cities throughout the country, is that you see the establishment of police in schools is directly connected to racist ideas of criminality and disorder, and is used in a way that remakes inequality from prior to desegregation in ways that is also connecting to the expansion of prisons, police, and American life. And that those are deeply connected in their expansion, in the lives of young people, especially in urban areas.

Berkshire Thank you, Matt, for that excellent overview. Now, as I've been learning about how police ended up in public schools in the first place, I also wanted to hear from some students who have thoughts about the issue right now. Fortunately, some Boston students were more than happy to assist and we're going to meet one of them now.

Ashley Herman Hi, my name is Ashley Herman. I am currently a senior at Boston Community Leadership Academy, and I believe that school police in general, shouldn't be in schools because they don't deescalate situations. They make situations worse. And I think that's because they aren't trusted within schools. If cops aren't trusted in the outside world, what makes people think that they're going to be trusted within a school? A school is supposed to be a safe place and with police running around, we're literally seen as a threat.

Berkshire So Jack one thing I thought was really interesting was that during that period, we just heard Matt Kautz talking about in Boston, is that Boston was really shrinking, right? You have white flight, but you also have this really sort of decades-long downturn in the sense that Boston's best days were, you know, pretty far in the past. And now when we skip across to the other coast, LA you have a situation that really couldn't be more different. You have a region of the country that's just exploding with population growth. And in some ways that ends up creating some of the same issues and challenges we just heard about with respect to Boston.

Schneider Absolutely. So as LA began expanding dramatically in terms of the size of its population and the enrollment in its schools, we began to see the exact same kinds of challenges and debates around integration around school funding around the very same issues that had proved so contentious on the East coast. And so when we're able to see these things arising in such different contexts, it really tells us something powerful about, you know, the politics, uh, that are governing public education at this time. And particularly the politics around race.

Berkshire We heard about the link between student protests and the movement of police into schools in Boston. Well, something similar is happening in LA and Jack. I first learned about the 1968 protests known as the East LA Blowouts on this show because you gave us a little history

lesson. Refresh my memory. What were these protests about and how do they connect to this movement of police into schools?

Schneider For a few decades, students who in the 1960s began referring to themselves as Chicano, had been agitating for equal access to the public schools. So California is actually the place where we see the first school segregation court cases. This is before *Brown vs Board of Education*. But by the 1960s, it's clear to these students that they aren't really going to be integrated into the school system, that they will remain segregated in largely, Hispanic, Chicano, Latinx schools, depending on the time period, you would change your terminology there. And they began making demands for schooling that was more responsive to their culture, to their background, to their language, to their experiences.

This really comes to a head in 1968 when, the Brown Berets, as they called themselves, began organizing students and promising protection to students who were agitating for change and who began demonstrating and who eventually led a series of massive walkouts, tens of thousands of students walking out in East LA demanding, not only some of the things that indicated an unequal distribution of resources, right? So demanding smaller classes, demanding better facilities, but also making demands for bilingual education by cultural education, a more diverse teaching force, a more diverse administration where they're looking for people from similar backgrounds to them, uh, represented in the teaching staff and the school administration, more engagement with the community.

And what we can see here is students pushing back against a system that was really designed for white students and controlled by white adults. And instead of meeting those student demands, the white power structure brought in sheriff's deputies in riot gear, demanding that students return to class. And eventually 13 of the organizers were rounded up and faced up to a lifetime in prison. They ended up in most cases, not going to prison, but these were treated as criminal actions. And as a result, I think we can begin to see that this is a case, and there are lots of cases nationwide of this, of students making clear what it would take in order for them to feel like school is really an educational place for them and those demands not being met. And so what that sets up is a kind of student resistance that plays out in the sixties, seventies, eighties, all the way through today, that begins to be perceived as violence at its most extreme and noncompliance at its most mundane.

Berkshire Well, I want to bring in another one of our experts. Judith Kafka is an associate professor at the Marxe School of Public and International Affairs at Baruch College and the author of the *The History of "Zero Tolerance" in American Public Schooling*. It's a fascinating book, especially her focus on what's happening in and around the Los Angeles public schools in the 1960s, like the Watts riots or Watts Rebellion of 1965 in which 34 people died and more than a thousand buildings were destroyed, but not the schools.

Judith Kafka That's one of my favorite things I learned when I did the study. You know, the scale of destruction during the Watts uprising was immense and schools were literally left intact while buildings next to them were burning.

Berkshire That the schools were left untouched says something about the faith that the community had in education, but that was changing.

Kafka So there was a real faith in schools and in the potential for schools to bring about equal opportunity. And that faith was pretty widespread amongst the communities. And after Watts, there a real turning point in the language among African American Angelenos saying, 'look, we're tired of hearing that we're the problem, that our kids are the problem, that if only, you know, we spoke the right way, or if only we had been trained the right way, we wouldn't have these problems. We think that the problems might actually be you all and the schools. And that was a real shift.

Berkshire And one measure of that shift was the explosion in student protests. As Kafka describes in her book, after Watts, students started making more demands, large and small. And even as teachers supported some of those demands, white teachers in particular also saw themselves as targets of the students' rebellions.

Kafka Their demands were often belittled, right? There's a sense, you know, because sometimes one of the things they would demand was better food in the cafeteria and they'd be, Oh, these are just kids. And they're protesting because they want better food in the cafeteria, but they also wanted school leadership that reflected the student population of the school. They wanted curriculum that included Mexican history, Mexican American history, African American history. They wanted more voice in student grooming codes and dress codes. They had all kinds...and they wanted smaller classes, better teachers, equity and resources, often the same demands that teachers made, even though at this point in the sixties, not at all teachers, but a lot of teachers and teacher organizations were asking for police in the schools, were asking for police as a mode of security and also to maintain order in the schools.

Berkshire And it's during this period, when you first start to see a police presence in and around schools, something LA really hadn't seen before.

Kafka There were some security officers prior to kind of the mid sixties who were hired to prevent vandalism at night, but there was basically no police presence in school and no security guards of any kind. And they start coming into schools, largely in response to student and sometimes family protests. So families that are picketing a school, they bring in the police to address the families. So many of the student protests that turned violent, turned violent when the police showed up, police show up, and then soon you hear that violence erupted. And, you know, we don't have any really good accounts of exactly what happened, but it's so similar to today where these protests are largely peaceful, if disruptive, and then police officers show up and they become violent.

Berkshire The central question of this episode is how did police end up in public schools in the first place? Well, when I put that question to Louis Mercer about Chicago, where he's a PhD candidate in history at UIC, he told me that I need to start in the progressive era. That's when Chicago rolled out the first juvenile court in the country. By the turn of the 19th century, Chicago even had a female police officer whose job it was to enforce child labor laws and compulsory education laws. In other words, policing and schooling were already intertwined in Chicago going way back. But it's in the mid 20th century that police start to become a presence in schools.

Louis Mercer What happens then is in the 1950s, of course, the fear of the Blackboard Jungle, lots of talk about juvenile delinquency starts to emerge. And of course, especially in cities, particularly the, the white power structures began to talk about what do we do with these kids who they often framed it as being culturally deprived children. What do we do about the presence of culturally deprived children in schools? And one of the answers was, of course we need to police them and what they meant, of course this was colorblind language in the 1950s, but what they meant was Black and Brown children.

Berkshire And if the role of teachers in, say, Los Angeles was complicated with regard to the police, in Chicago it's much clearer. The Chicago Teachers Union made more police in schools one of its central demands.

Mercer They were pushing hard to be the sole bargaining unit. And what they did was they used many issues, obviously teacher pay, working conditions, but they also used teacher safety as an issue to try and organize. And whenever there was a case where a student attacked a teacher, they would use that. I found this from looking at the newsletters from the Chicago Teachers Union. John Fuchs, who was the, who was the president of the Chicago Teachers Union at the time, talked about these instances all the time of violence against teachers to say that we need more security in schools and specifically he said, we need police in schools.

Berkshire Then in 1961, a white teacher in a school in Englewood on the city's South side, a neighborhood that had quickly flipped from white to Black was murdered.

Mercer What happened was a day later, the police arrest a Black student who was 14 years old. And they start to question him without lawyers present. And they used good cop, bad cop techniques. They used evidence ploys, and eventually they forced a confession out of him without any lawyers present. And he was convicted by a jury. They, the lawyers tried to have the evidence thrown out, or the confession thrown out because of the forced confession, but they were unsuccessful. On appeal in 1968, the Illinois Supreme Court upheld the conviction. It went all the way to the Supreme Court in 1974. And they refused to hear the case. So the conviction held and just last year, actually this boy who was convicted of this murder was exonerated.

Berkshire The case set off a media frenzy and was seized on by advocates of more police in schools, including the teacher's union.

Mercer In 1961, the Chicago Teachers Union uses this as evidence prime example A of why we need police in schools to protect teachers from students, and in particular to protect white teachers from Black kids.

Berkshire And in his research into the history of police in Chicago schools, Lewis says that that pattern shows up again and again.

Mercer These stories keep popping up over and over of white teachers, white administrators talking about their experiences or using examples to try and say, we need to be protected, right? So this is eventually what happens is the police do come into schools. 1966 is the first year that there's a formal contract with the Chicago Police Department to hire off duty police officers, to guard the schools. And principals started asking the off duty police officers to wear their uniforms and their badges and their guns. And so that was the formal creation essentially of the police force in schools,

Berkshire Fast forward to the present and the Chicago Teachers Union is now demanding that police be removed from the schools. I asked Lewis how the shift looks to him having spent so much time chronicling the union's role in bringing police into schools in the first place.

Mercer I think in part, my initial response is because I have this long historical knowledge of it. Good! You're on the right side of history. But my other response to that is, as you said, hopefulness, because if the teachers seem to be against this, the presence of police in schools, then I assume parents will be as well because they understand what it means and how it doesn't necessarily protect all students. And in fact, it threatens some students within schools and things like that.

Berkshire A big thank you to Matt Kautz, Judith Kafka and Louis Mercer, and to Boston student Ashley Herman. Next up Jack has been busy reflecting on everything we've learned in this episode. When we come back, we'll hear what he's come up with. But first here's Boston student, Calvin Chan, to tell us what she thinks about police in schools.

Calvin Chan Hello, my name is Calvin Chan. I'm a student at the Dearborn STEM Academy. I'm currently a sophomore there. So my stance on police officers is actually quite clear. Police officers have an unchecked sense of authority. Honestly, we can not rely on police officers, the enforcers who are meant to protect. And in short order within our country to guard our schools and students for many school is already a struggle due to multiple variables and factors that are at play and adding police officers on top of it, the people who are constantly actively oppressing students of color is not a good idea. Thank you for listening to my opinion. And honestly, yeah.

Berkshire Well Jack people, after listening to this episode know that I have held up my end of the bargain. They heard results of my conversations with scholars about LA, about Chicago, about Boston. Now everyone is waiting to see if you're going to come through. You've spent this time reflecting on why the police ended up coming into schools, show us what you got.

Schneider Oh, okay, great. Um, well, let's see. I think, I think there are probably three big reasons, uh, that we can identify

Berkshire Sound more authoritative than that!

Schneider I know, well, I'm counting them in my head right now, and I know I've got three things to say here, so I'm going to go with three. I think there are three reasons that we can rely on to explain why police were essentially invited into the schools in the second half of the 20th century, despite students really being opposed to that and being really resistant over time. Uh, the first is that in the first half of the 20th century, whites were really not responsible for the schools. And what I mean by that is that they largely worked to deny schools attended by students of color, uh, the equal resources that they were due, and then they essentially washed their hands of those schools.

And so we have some really wonderful historical accounts of, uh, African American schools or Mexican American schools or native American schools, uh, that were being run by. And for those populations. Um, they struggled in many cases because they did not have equal resources. Um, but they often had tremendous strengths rooted in the fact that they were really responsive to the students they were teaching and the experiences that those students had outside of school.

In the second half of the 20th century, as whites become more quote unquote responsible for the schools attended by nonwhite students, by students of color. Um, they really begin to bring their assumptions and ideologies to bear on those schools. And those assumptions and ideologies, uh, are really bound up with thoughts about, um, the, the nature of students of color, um, the sort of the dangerous element that they may present a sort of unwillingness to see them as, uh, active agents in advocating for change and instead viewing them as noncompliant and disobedient. Uh, so one way of simplifying it is to say that, um, prior to the second half of the 20th century, Black schools were Black spaces and Brown schools were Brown spaces.

Um, but that changes in the second half of the 20th century, uh, that schools become white spaces full of Black and Brown bodies.

A second reason is that the credential of the high school diploma was really watering down in the second half of the 20th century, right in the first half a high school diploma was a really valuable credential, but in the sixties and seventies that begins to change. And so students of color are really responding rationally to compulsory schooling that fails to offer opportunity, right? They're being systematically denied entrance into higher education and really

systematically denied a college preparatory curriculum in high school. And so these students are seeing, okay, I'm going to graduate with a high school diploma that isn't actually worth that much anymore. It's not going to gain me access to social and economic opportunity. What is this place that is essentially controlled by white people, whether it be the teaching staff or the district administration or state legislation, and the thing I'm going to get out of this is not even really worth anything anymore?

The third reason that I think is worth talking about is that in the second half of the 20th century, the conversations that were being had about racial inequality, which were really centered on questions of power, really begin to migrate towards discussions about prejudice. And when the discussion is about prejudice, then we are no longer recognizing the fact that systems and structures are a way of enforcing power. And that students who were challenging that power structure, if we see it as challenging of a power structure are really political actors. But if instead we see racial inequality as a problem of prejudice as a personal problem, as an individual problem, then students engaging in noncompliance at school are no longer political actors engaged in a kind of legitimate protest. Instead they're individual actors who have a problem with authority. And this is a shift that really changes the way that we would view student noncompliance, as it is beginning to peak in the wake of a devalued credential in schools that are increasingly white spaces full of Black and Brown bodies.

Berkshire We often talk about this show as you know, our obsessive focus on schools is because they really are this sort of social microcosm. And I've never felt that as strongly as I did in working on this episode, I felt like going back and looking at what was happening to students and their schools during this time helped me understand things that I just have not been able to make sense of before. So thank you Jack, for that explanation and for being an historian.

So Jack, this is the point in the episode where typically we would share 60 Seconds of Sunshine with our audience. It's a highlight. Alas this time we don't have any sunshine, but I have something instead which you are really going to enjoy. We've been getting some great listener mail and some pretty amazing comments. And there's one in particular that I want to share with you, just because I know that it's going to make your heart sing. Are you ready?

Schneider I do like when my heart sings.

Berkshire "I'm always surprised by the wide range of issues and topics covered each week, yet the thoroughness of their research and understanding. They don't simply regurgitate headlines or points you'd see elsewhere. They bring unique insights, which I'm not otherwise exposed to. I'm not a big fan of the banter between Jack and Jennifer, but this podcast is so educational I have to keep listening."

Schneider Oh well! That is, that is lovely. It does, I suppose, make my heart sing a little bit. But the thing that would really make my heart sing would be if we got flooded by submissions for 60 Seconds of Sunshine, because that is the best one minute of every episode. So if you're

listening to this, then, you know, consider what are the ordinary and remarkable things that are happening every day in your school, whether you're a student, a teacher, a parent, a family member or community member. What's going on in your community, in your school, in your district that might otherwise be overlooked, but which is actually a part of the exceptional work that happens every day in American education? Send us your 60 Seconds of Sunshine pitch and we will more than likely reach out to you and set up a time to record it and put it on the show.

Berkshire And just a reminder that if you're a fan of Have You Heard consider supporting us at [Patreon.com/haveyouheardpodcast](https://patreon.com/haveyouheardpodcast). A small monthly donation gets you extras like a custom reading list for each episode and an extended player version that we call In the Weeds. And today's topic: racial justice protests versus opportunity hoarding, or as *New York Times* education reporter Dana Goldstein put it on Twitter, and this is a quote, "As we see multiracial crowds fighting for police reform, I keep thinking of how so many white liberals react when policymakers attempt to integrate their children's schools and gifted classrooms or construct affordable housing in affluent neighborhoods." We will be discussing In the Weeds for our Patreon subscribers.

Schneider If people want to support the show in a way that does not cause them to open their wallets and pocketbooks, uh, they can go on and give us a rating wherever they're getting their podcasts, share the show with their friends and coworkers and neighbors. And they can send us something for the, have you heard mail bag, which always manages to surprise and delight. Until next time I'm Jack Schneider.

Berkshire And I'm Jennifer Berkshire. This is Have You Heard.