

BUILDING JUSTICE PODCAST



CRISJ Building Justice Podcast

Season 2, Episode 33 : Why Are There Cops on Campus? The History of Campus Police

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Guests: Dr. Eddie Cole, Professor of Higher Education and History, UCLA

Please note: This transcript may be imperfect. Please contact Melissa Cardenas-Dow (cardenas-dow@csus.edu) directly should you have questions.

Music lyrics:

Company under construction, the function, justice for the human family we demand it. Justice, true freedom, equality is a must. Thus, decolonization of the planet. So bust this. People be the power now we're Building Justice. Pulling out divinations, now we're Building Justice. Welcome the planet to the Podcast, "Building Justice," "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Building is to add on, or to do away with.

Content:

Alexa Sardina (00:31):

Today's episode is about alternatives to campus policing. What do these alternatives look like? How can we reimagine safety for everyone on our campuses? Welcome to Building Justice, a podcast by Sacramento State's Center on Race, Immigration, and Social Justice. We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world. My name is Alexa Sarina and I am here with Professor Eddie Cole to dive deeper into the dialogue around campus policing. I'm an assistant professor in the Division of Criminal Justice at CSU Sacramento and also the Faculty Rights Co-chair of the California Faculty Association's Sacramento Chapter. Professor Cole is an associate professor of higher education and history at the University of California Los Angeles, and he is the author of the multi-prize-winning book, *The Campus Color Line: College Presidents and the Struggle for Black Freedom*. He has received grants and fellowships from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, the National Academy of Education, the University of Chicago, and Princeton University. He has published in the Washington Post, the LA Times, and Chronicle of Higher Education, and has served as an expert commentator for BBC World News and MSNBC, among others. So after hearing that lengthy and important bio, I wanted to just point out Professor Cole's expertise in the field. So thank you so much for being here today, Professor Cole.

Eddie Cole (02:08):

Hey, thanks for having me.

Alexa Sardina (02:09):

The inspiration for today's episode really stems from our union's commitment to anti-racism and social justice efforts, which includes examining alternatives to campus policing. But to start us off, I think it's important for listeners to learn a bit about the roots of campus policing before we dig into why alternatives are necessary. So I'm wondering if you can share with us a little bit about that history.

Eddie Cole (02:34):

Yeah. Well, much of my work focuses on college presidents and university chancellors during the mid-20th century, and that's the time period where we see the expansion of campus police. And so to a certain extent, there'd always been sort some, some level of policing on campus. But what we seeing in the 1940s and 1950s is certainly into the 1960s, this rapid expansion in development of departments that looks a lot like what we see on campus today. But when you think about the broader history of US higher education, that wasn't always the case. And so we have to think, as you think about this conversation, framing it around sort of alternatives and thinking differently, when you think about the history of higher education, police departments weren't always a part of it. And really the, the origins of sort of modern-day campus policing, really the expansion comes from post-War War II and the Great Migration.

Eddie Cole (03:26):

It's a direct connection between millions of black Americans leaving the US South, moving to major cities outside of the South, such as the New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit,

et cetera. And then because of racial restrictions on where people could live, oftentimes these neighborhoods where black people, uh, <laugh> found themselves landing or moving into these cities were near major universities because these neighborhoods weren't always predominantly black. And so you think about sort of a University of Pennsylvania, it's in West Philadelphia, Columbia University, it's right next to Harlem. University of Chicago, it's on the south side of Chicago. Right? And these are historically prominently black areas, right? And over time, migration shifts made university leaders to be--very frank, *white* university leaders--think about sort of, how they could insulate their campuses away from the community, right? Being open enough to enroll *some* black students, to have *some* black faculty and staff, but not too much blackness. And so a lot of justification for the expansion of policing was this idea of black crime. And as historian Khalil Gibran Muhammad has explained in his great book *The Condemnation of Blackness*, even though those crime stats were faulty to a certain extent. And so university leaders in the mid-20th century justified the expansion of campus policing and this expansion of campus itself around this idea of black crime. And it just sort of snowballed into what we see today.

Alexa Sardina (04:58):

I mean, I think it's, it's really important too because a lot of times I think there's this sense or belief amongst folks that, you know, somehow campus police are less of a threat. They're not dangerous compared to, you know, municipal police departments. But I think when you put the history and context, you can start to see more of the similarities, you know, between the two. Can you talk a little bit more about that, you know, where that sort of perception comes from, from this less dangerousness to the realities of how campus police treat students and faculty, and specifically students and faculty of color?

Eddie Cole (05:46):

Yeah, that's a great question. And um, <laugh>, you have to flip the question, right? When people say, oh, well, you know, maybe campus police, you know, kind of functions different from sort of municipal police. But in reality, when you think about what universities say today, and they, you know, it's clockwork universal almost in terms of promoting diversity and inclusion, one in racial equity on campuses, right? But when you think about how does it feel to be a black faculty member or a black staff member who's leaving a building late trying to get home or a black student on campus, I don't think necessarily the feeling of looking at campus police feels any different from looking at, say, the city's police. Right?

Alexa Sardina (06:35):

While statistics on race and campus police incidents in the CSU system are not widely available, there have been many cases of faculty of color being racially profiled by UPD across the CSU. In the recent Sacramento State anti-racism and inclusive campus plan, one faculty member of color reported, "I have been pulled over by campus police while walking and driving on campus. Once I was forced out of the car and onto the curb, two campus police detained me in a long series of questions as to why I was on campus so late." Furthermore, a survey of Sacramento State students completed by Associated Students Inc. in September of 2021, showed that 43%

of students shared concerns about police on our campus. While only 17% of students shared positive comments.

Eddie Cole (07:24):

A perfect example coming out of Northwestern University in late 2020, there are a lot of protests on that campus up in Evanston, Illinois to where black students on that campus made up 6% of the student body. The stats just don't bear out. And so a lot of people of color on, especially on predominantly white campuses, find themselves still very much interacting with police at a disproportionately negative level than they would, whether they were off campus or on campus.

Alexa Sardina (07:54):

You know, I think too, there's been a lot of conversation around whether we're talking about campus police or police off-campus, is that somehow training and policy change within the police force is going to address issues of police brutality or racial profiling. I'm wondering what your thoughts are on that.

Eddie Cole (08:23):

Well, to a certain extent, we have to start thinking about broader operational changes, right? And not just sort of a one-off training, right? If we just sort of, our new hires are trained differently, then everything <laugh> would be different. Um, yeah, that's the fun part about my job. I get to say, well, history just doesn't provide that sort of evidence that that's the case. And so something that's clear from the past, and when you think about sort of campus policy and administrative decision making, you have to start sort of rethinking at large how things work, right? And what are the overall mission and goals of a department like campus policing? And does that align with sort of the academic mission? Because in a lot of ways, sure, you know, when you think of campus safety, it should have a different function in some extent compared to sort of municipal responsibilities.

Eddie Cole (09:17):

But in a lot of ways that's just not the case. And so, something <laugh> something when I'm giving these talks, um, I like to say, you really can't solve decades if not centuries of racial bias with one training, right? It just doesn't happen with one program. So all of a sudden, uh, you know, when we talk about sort of using police as justification to expand in the 1940s and 1950s, we are really coming up on 70, 80 years of this question around who should and shouldn't be allowed within campus spacing. And I don't think one training in 2023 is going to address that. We have to think about operational changes. How can we do higher education differently to where everybody on one campus, be it employee or student, feels welcome enough to sort of move about campus and grow and be a positive contribution to the broader educational enterprise.

Alexa Sardina (10:14):

And, you know, it sounds to me very much like what we hear, after a deadly shooting or a murder of a person of color at the hands of the police where we have, you know, body cam

footage and we have people not using choke holds or all of these things, and we still have people being murdered by police. And despite these changes or these trainings, there seems to be something inherent within, police organizations that cannot be addressed by a training or by different uses of different technology and things like that. You know, and that kind of brings me to an interesting question, and I'm curious to hear what your thoughts are, but do you, do you think there is a place for campus police or do you think that a more abolitionist stance is necessary?

Eddie Cole (11:11):

Well, you know, this is, this is the <laugh> this the tricky question of all higher education, because every campus has a different context.

Alexa Sardina (11:21):

Sure.

Eddie Cole (11:22):

And so, you know, in the same way that <laugh> in the same way that, you know, one size does not fit all on one end, you know, does, does one size fit all on the other end? I don't know in that regard, but leaning back into your question, I couldn't, I couldn't help but think of the history around sort of the University of Chicago in its expansion of campus policing. And what was the case was there were a ton of sort of off-duty Chicago police who were working on campus. And, you know, this is the 1950s and 1960s. And it makes me sort of think about the, your question in terms of sort of trying to distinguish the difference between what happens on campus and what happens off campus.

Eddie Cole (12:05):

Many times these are the same police officers. Yeah, that's my, that's the real point here, right?

Alexa Sardina (12:09):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

Eddie Cole (12:10):

So, yeah, I might have done 10 years for the city and now I work on campus, right? I might have done eight years on campus and now I work for the city, right? These are the same individuals moving back and forth. So, that's why you have to sort of rethink policing in general, right? Um, on campus. And it is not just sort of something that can be sort of one broad stroke of a brush and say, okay, now we're gonna do this. Well, I mean, you gotta start thinking about policing in general, and that's the real heart. And so in the same way that police departments were developed in bulk in conversation with municipal leaders and state leaders, there's a lot of federal support, wink, wink, um, that made these, made these departments happen. The same kind of conversations have to happen now between chancellors and presidents, mayors and city councilmen, state senators and congresspeople, right? So, you have to start thinking that way. This is a bigger conversation that's gonna take a lot of moving parts because as long as

there's local, state and federal money involved supporting campus police departments, you're gonna have to have sort of local, state and federal intervention.

Alexa Sardina (13:22):

Yeah. And our union CFA has worked towards passing Assembly Bill 1997. And that basically requires the CSU to bring together a working group of faculty, staff, and students to examine what some alternatives to policing look like and to make recommendations. And hopefully, you know, the CSU will take those recommendations and, and make some, take some action. As of now, that working group has not been established, although the CSU statewide alternatives to campus policing committee has been meeting all of this time. So that, that's to say we're prepared for when that call happens. But as we're thinking about this and, and talking about sort of re-imagining safety and re-imagining campus police, a lot of different alternatives have been proposed. And maybe, you know, those alternatives vary based on campus need. What do you see as the most viable alternatives or important reforms that maybe someone like our working group could, could think about?

Eddie Cole (14:41):

Well, I think since the pandemic of 2020, we've seen the rise in interests and reports around mental health, right?

Alexa Sardina (14:51):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

Eddie Cole (14:52):

And so this is something I think about often in terms of many of the campus incidents that police are called to respond to may not require your sort of traditional officer with a badge and a weapon, right? But it may actually require a different kind of professional equipped, a different way to address the situation. And there's been a terrible underfunding of mental health professionals, counselor psychiatrists on college campuses across the US, that's almost universal. And so if you sort of think about sort of the in-between, sort of we need to increase funding or we need to completely abolish campus policing, the in-between might be like, can we sort of rethink the funding that's there, right? So instead of, instead of a million-dollar budget to an individual campus police department, what if, you know, part of that million went to actually hiring full-time staff that could work in different shifts and somebody could be on call to respond at 2:00 AM or 2:00 PM. When you think about the stresses of higher education on top of the stresses of society, we're in a much different world than we were simply three, four years ago.

Eddie Cole (16:02):

I mean, in so many ways. And so we really have to genuinely reimagine what we are even doing in higher education and campus policing is part of it. And I think a viable alternative, a really viable alternative would be to sort of think about sort of having maybe an officer *and* a mental health professional show up instead of two or three officers. Because oftentimes some of these crises, students, staff, you know, faculty, administrators really don't necessarily need sort of the

traditional moment of danger response. They may be in a sort of a different kind of crisis, right? And so we have to sort of rethink all of that, and that will really just take simply looking at the current data around campus police reports and doing an analysis of what was the situation that officers have responded to,

Alexa Sardina (16:55):

On Sacramento state's campus, the budget shift that Dr. Cole mentioned, shifting policing money to mental healthcare response would be significant, especially in light of Sacramento state's 2020 to 2021 budget. During this time period, Sacramento State spent over 6.3 million dollars on the campus police department and spent less than half of that, 2.8 million dollars, on the psychological services budget, including administrative costs.

Alexa Sardina (17:27):

Our campus is, it's a commuter campus. The majority of calls that the police receive, that campus police receive, have to do with, you know, drug or alcohol incidences, students partying, and then the other is mental health crises. And yet we see this increased funding being given to campus policing and a far, far less to mental health, even though, like you said, we're coming, quote unquote out of the pandemic with a better knowledge of, you know, how mental health is impacting our students. And unfortunately, what we've seen, even the most recent budget, is just an increased campus policing and militarization of campus police, rather than providing the support that our students need and are looking for.

Eddie Cole (18:18):

That's a great comment. And it makes me think so much about, you know, I think a broader campus-wide goal, administrative all the way down to campus police chief. The campus public safety, campus safety should be, should be a goal that we're striving to no longer need.

Alexa Sardina (18:42):

Yeah.

Eddie Cole (18:43):

Yeah. <laugh>, you know, it's one of those things where it's like, you know, instead of increasing the budget, right, we're getting bigger and bigger. We're getting more of everything around campus police in an ideal world, right? And the world isn't perfect, I understand that, but what I'm saying is when we have the ambitions of higher education, which has always been striving towards the solutions to the most complex problems, right? That's the point of the, that's the point of academia, right? We want to solve complex problems. And if crime is a problem, right? And if policing and disproportionality and sort of police stops is a problem, we gotta immediately start working towards solutions to that.

Eddie Cole (19:18):

And it's clear that one solution isn't increase in the budget, because we've been doing that for decades now and we still have the crime issues, right?

Alexa Sardina (19:24):
Right.

Eddie Cole (19:25):

And so, so like everybody, right? This, this isn't something that if you're a police officer listening, like, you should be offended, you want to do away with my career? Like, or you're a police chief administrator, you should be offended. No. This is something like we, we are all trying to solve problems so that our work in that area is no longer needed. I write about the history of race and racism within US higher education. I would love to not have a sort of a contemporary need to speak to these issues. And trust me, I will find something else to move on to and study. But these problems continue and we continue working on them. And so we've gotta start thinking about alternatives.

Alexa Sardina (20:04):

We've talked a lot about mental health counseling and sort of deploying those folks to mental health distress calls from students and things like that. We've also spoken about how restorative justice or transformative justice work can be used to address, you know, student disagreements between students or bullying between faculty members, which unfortunately is a thing, you know? So I think that there are the alternatives there, but much like with our own criminal legal system, there is such a fear of trying something new.

Eddie Cole (20:47):

In regard to sort of giving it a try, you know, or why people are afraid to try. That's probably what I'm most interested in.

Alexa Sardina (20:55):
Yeah.

Eddie Cole (20:56):

History gives us so much insight and to really, it should make us all question about the purpose of higher education, right? There's sort of the stated purpose, and then they're sort of the actual lived and real purpose of higher education. And in so many ways, colleges and universities have been spaces and places to maintain the societal status quo. And that's not anything that, you know, many people want to concede or admit. But when you look at the past and you look at this history of exclusion within American higher education, you look at this history of sort of class difference in access to higher education. You even look at the history of what I mentioned earlier with regard to universities getting bigger and bigger and bigger, which means adjacent communities must get smaller. And so people get priced out or policed out of their neighborhoods. When you look at this history from the 1600s, the 1700s, the 1800s, last century, and now in the 2000s, to a certain extent, when people don't want to change what we're currently doing, it raises a number of questions around, so the, their attachment to the status quo. Because what we're doing is maintaining what we've always done. And it's one thing that's clear about American history, what we've always done has been very far from equitable.

Alexa Sardina (22:30):

Right? Yeah. And I suppose if the status quo is working for you, then, you know, you don't really have a problem with it remaining that way. And I think a, a big part of this work has been, in addition, how do you know white folks or white allies in this work support our faculty, staff and students of color, as we try and make these changes? So I'm wondering if you can kind of comment on that and how you see universities being able to work together to address these issues.

Eddie Cole (23:10):

Well, well, a couple things, right? Well, the first thing is there are models of success, right? Because we, when we think about American higher education, our default thought tends to be predominantly white or historically white institutions. But there are tons of colleges and universities that for centuries, <laugh> now centuries, have been doing this. Be it historically black colleges, universities, or a number of tribal colleges and universities that really know how to support people across a range of differences and have been doing so for a very long time. So one, there are models already,

Alexa Sardina (23:45):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

Eddie Cole (23:46):

So, you know, one, I would say just go look at the people who do this well. All right. The other part, in terms of what can people, what can, you know, white people who feel <laugh>, you know, motivated to support, what can they do?

Eddie Cole (24:02):

You know, a lot of it is, um, <laugh> these, these solutions and answers, um, have been, have been before you in many ways. And so instead of sort of taking on the role of, hey, here's what I'm gonna do to help, have I asked the people most impacted what can be done to help, you know. This is this, this is why I always, this is the big gripe I always have about higher education. Because it's like, oh, we're gonna have another community partnership. And I was like, did we come up with that or did the community tell us that they needed that?

Alexa Sardina (24:35):

You know what they needed.

Eddie Cole (24:36):

Yeah. Right. <laugh> So the answers all around us, you know, it's all about stop ignoring those voices and stop silencing these concerns that have been around for so long. So in that way you just got to listen. And then get to work.

Alexa Sardina (24:56):

Yeah, I think that's, that's a really important point. And I think something that we can take from, you know, restorative justice and transformative justice movements is that it is about

centering the community and it is about, tell me how I can help you get there, but you know, best what your community needs. And that's, you know, what I think we kind of need to start thinking about when we have students saying to us, you know, we have a high percentage of students who are experiencing food insecurity on our campus. When we have them seeing the numbers of the money going to the police and barely any money going to address food insecurity. They're saying, we need to eat, we need to feel safe, we need counseling services. And when that's dismissed by administration or not addressed in a meaningful way, we're failing our students. And to me that's, it's problematic and it's heartbreaking in a lot of ways, because, you know, you would, we would think that we would be prioritizing the basics for our students, but in many ways we don't.

Eddie Cole (26:02):

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Students have to be able to eat. Because if you're <laugh>, if you're housing insecure, food insecure, regardless, you're not focused on your studies. So it's really hard to justify some budget items when it comes to issues like that. I mean, campus policing is one of them, but there's a list of things that we can go down and say, this is, this is out of line with the very basic mission of education. Right?

Alexa Sardina (26:33):

Right.

Eddie Cole (26:34):

Teach, learn, everybody universally accepted. Yet it is hard to focus on learning when you're hungry. Right. It's hard to focus on learning or you're not sure where you're going to sleep tonight. Okay. I mean, and if you, if you're not investing in that, I think as a campus, you've already told us what your priorities are.

Alexa Sardina (27:00):

Absolutely. And you know, I think that a lot of, sometimes the justification for increasing these budgets and things like that are when we have big crime events, so mass shootings on campus, or we have high rates of sexual harm on campus. And I feel like that's often used as a justification, whether it be by the university or in conversation with colleagues. Like, if we explore alternatives and now there's a mass shooting who's going to protect us? Or who's going to protect our students from, from being sexually harmed? You know, what do you, what do you think about that? What are your thoughts around those kind of justifications?

Eddie Cole (27:45):

Well, unfortunately, in this world, even though we've seen increased police budgets, both for K-12 school systems and for colleges universities, it's pretty clear that we've seen an increase in mass shootings as well, right? And so it's not as if increased policing has prevented mass shootings, unfortunately. You know, that, that's an easy justification if, you know, the two things really lined up together. But they just don't, unfortunately, we see the news and, it's something I think about every day working on a college campus. I mean, you hear something loud enough, you're going to pause and look because that's the world we in, despite the

hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions, that some campuses have for their campus police budgets. So there's *that* argument right there. But from a broader societal standpoint, we've gotta rethink so many things, right?

Eddie Cole (28:52):

And that's probably even sort of access to guns, right? This is, this is the, the issue becomes with campus policing, if there are still moments of sexual assault, and we see that's a national crisis right now, still moments of sexual assault, there are still mass shootings, which is another form of crisis right now. What then does increased police budgets actually protect? And in many cases, it's probably more about institution property than people. And so we've got these very expensive universities with state-of-the-art facilities, and there's a lot of attention toward this competitive arms race in American higher education to where we all look the same and we're building new buildings and we're in, and we're interested in protecting that much more than people.

Alexa Sardina (29:40):

I like that you mentioned that because it's, it's really visible and becomes really clear, as you see in, you know, these really high tech, you know, usually STEM related buildings being built on campus. And, yet we still have sexual violence happening, yet we still have students who are hungry, who don't have a place to live, who are staying in their cars, who have to sit in a parking lot on campus to connect to wifi. You know, these are, I feel like, the things that we could be addressing and doing something about with that money if it wasn't being diverted to policing as much as it is.

Eddie Cole (30:22):

Yeah. Yeah. And, and it's about the proportion, you know? That's, that's, I think that's how I started this conversation. I just want to come back to that, right? We've got to, we've got such an uneven distribution of resources, right? And that's, that's really probably the most alarming thing because again, I can talk about the history of campus policing and I mentioned, right. Campus policing, sort of campus security, that has been around for a long time, right? But it hasn't always been around, but it's sort of about the rapid expansion that's really sort of more bothersome about this. Right. So it is one of those things where it's like, wow, when you just look at budget items and look at the size of people and say, how many campus police officers do you have in compared to full-time counselors on campus, it's almost universal.

Eddie Cole (31:14):

You've got more high equipped police cars that cost as much as the salary of what a full-time counselor would be. So that's the shocking part, when you just look at, wow, we were, we're so uneven in how we spend. Right. Even if you didn't believe in complete abolition, right. That, let me sort of talk to maybe of most people, right? Because it's going to, I think it's hard to get most people on board with complete abolition, complete police off campus, right? Let's say that's difficult. But you still had to think, even if you're somewhere in the middle, the proportion of spending is really hard to justify, right? To how we're skewed one way so much toward these things and almost absent in regard to other things.

Alexa Sardina (32:04):

Absolutely. I, I'm glad you drove that point home because I think it's something, you know, we've been talking about time and again, and it's come up in student-led panels and all kinds of things when this, you know, you, you get to see the campus budget, it's pretty disturbing. Well, is there any final thoughts that you want to share with us today about this issue or things you want the listeners to know that maybe we didn't touch on?

Eddie Cole (32:33):

The one thing I would say in parting is think about the world around you, not necessarily with regard to institutional history, but think a lot about the social history of these institutions. And that's what's really at the heart of this conversation around campus policing. Because institutions have a history of themselves. They have a justification for what they do as an institution, but the day-to-day experience is shaped by people. And that's the social history, that's the people's history of these institutions. And when we start paying more attention to the social history, we start to prioritize people in how we think about academia more than we prioritize the institution itself. And that's the big takeaway here. Whether you're currently in higher education, formerly in higher education, or never really engaged with higher education as simply a fan from afar, American colleges, universities impact your lives because these are some of the largest real estate owners within any city or county. They have some of the largest budgets within any state or county, and they also employ probably a number of people in any sort of area. And so you're impacted by decisions on these campuses, whether you know it or not, and history reminds us of that. And we're seeing that today, and we'd be well-served if we understood that connection between the past and present so that we can actually see a better future.

Alexa Sardina (33:54):

Thank you so much for spending time with us today, Professor Cole. We really appreciate it.

Eddie Cole (33:59):

My pleasure. Thanks for having me. I'm glad to be part of this conversation. And all the best.

Alexa Sardina (34:04):

You've just heard, part one of a two-part series on alternatives to campus policing. Be sure to keep an eye out for part two scheduled to be released this fall. Thank you for listening. We hope our ongoing conversations spark understandings, empathies, and motivation to join the struggle for a better future for all. You just listened to the Building Justice podcast. The information contained in this podcast, including its title and description, represent the views and opinions of the hosts and guests, and do not necessarily represent the view or opinions of Sacramento State, CRISJ, and/or the Building Justice Podcast Committee.

Outro Music Lyrics

No more penalties and no more wars. Based on the actions. Now, time for "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Time for building justice, justice.