

## #34 (ED MAGUIRE)

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### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing Crime is a podcast featuring influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers.

Ed Maguire is a Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Arizona State University, where he directs the Public Safety Innovation Lab. We chat about the challenges involved in policing protests and demonstrations and balancing an appropriate response in highly dynamic situations.

Welcome. I'm Jerry Ratcliffe. In the last episode, the guest theme was Brooklyn Nine-Nine, a hilarious and an award-winning American police procedural comedy. The theme you just heard was from a short-lived cop series from the 1970s that had two seasons. And if the opening titles are anything to go by, probably two seasons too many. I mean the opening credits are just laughably bad. If you can't guess the show already, I will tell you next episode. But when you figure it out, please just go and watch the opening credits on YouTube. I mean hilariously awful. Just a van driving slowly down a road and a bunch of cops leaping about in almost a cartoon Ninja style.

Speaking of ninjas, for this episode, I chatted to the owner and head instructor of the Cactus Jiu Jitsu Academy in Scottsdale, Arizona. Don't roll your eyes like that, people. It's called a segue and yeah, not a very good one. You may, however, know Ed Maguire from his day job where he directs the Public Safety Innovation Lab at Arizona State University in Phoenix, and is a recognized expert in the policing of protests and demonstrations. Prior to moving to Arizona in 2016, he worked for the United Nations, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, that's the COPS Office, and both George Mason and American University.

He chairs the research advisory board for PERF, the Police Executive Research Forum, has a PhD from SUNY Albany, and is the author of over 70 research articles and other publications, including a new co-authored book called Policing Protests: Lessons from the Occupy Movement. In this episode, he tells me about protest policing, graded responses, comparisons between British and American approaches and Swedish innovations. Don't get excited, it's not that kind of podcast. I learn what transfer of grievance means, and no, it doesn't involve my ex-wife, and also discover what happens when an academic, a protester and a rabbi walk into... Well you'll find out. We caught up online, of course, because this whole pandemic thing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Your work, especially in the area of around protest policing, has suddenly become really important, hasn't it?

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. Here and in your home country.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, I don't know where home is anymore really. I think I'm a bit of a mongrel type nomad really. I've no idea where home is. Where am I paying bills for? The place I feel most responsible for. Out of interest, how did you get into this area?

**Ed Maguire:**

When I was a Professor at American University, it was during the Occupy movement and several of my graduate students were disturbed by what they were observing on the evening news with police responding to protests in New York City at the University of California, Davis. And so one day, I said to them, I said, "We've got an Occupy encampment just down the road. We can take a walk down the street and go visit the protesters and see what we can learn." So we did that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's a bit radical, you being an academic and actually wanting to get out of the office and go and see stuff.

**Ed Maguire:**

Crazy stuff, right?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Puts you in a tiny percentage of academics who actually leave the office, so good for you.

**Ed Maguire:**

But one of the interesting things that happened, it was quite unexpected like much of what happens in our careers, is that when we started talking to the protesters about their experiences with police, some of them started sobbing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Good grief.

**Ed Maguire:**

And it almost looked like a post-traumatic stress response or something like that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Strewth, yeah.

**Ed Maguire:**

And it was that response that I think led us to investigate further.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And so you've been working in this area for a decade now then.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There's a part of me that looks at how protest policing has emerged in the U.S. over the last probably seven or eight years. I mean it really came to my notice during the Occupy Wall Street movement when I was thinking, "Oh, wow, this is a really different kind of thing," because growing up in Britain and being a police officer in the UK in the eighties and the nineties, you either had a riot or you had planned demonstrations and marches, which is what the majority are. But now, we've got these hybrid things that crop up and then Occupy Wall Street can just be around for ages. It seemed like a decade ago everything changed.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. I think that one of the great challenges in these more recent events, including Occupy Wall Street, is you don't have one or the other, it's not a black and white world in the sense of you don't have a peaceful protest or a riot. Oftentimes, you have little bits of both, right? And so you have these events where people are mostly peaceful, but you've got a handful of people who are behaving destructively or engaging in violence. And those tend to be the events that police find to be the most challenging.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And have you found that there are definite groups of people in crowds who are looking to provoke a reaction, who are looking to provoke police? Is that common?

**Ed Maguire:**

It is common. You've got folks who show up with intention from the beginning of behaving in a destructive or violent or provocative manner. And then you've got a set of folks who may end up not having decided to behave that way until they get into the midst of the event. And there's some sort of-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

They get caught up in the moment.

**Ed Maguire:**

Well, I don't know if it's just that they get caught up in the moment, that's what we talk about a lot with contagion theories, where people get all caught up in the moment and become powerless to resist the urge to do crazy stuff.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I normally need alcohol for that.

**Ed Maguire:**

But more often than not what we find, and this is where social science has been really helpful, most of it coming out of the UK originally, is that how the police behave at these events can actually play a powerful role in stimulating people to behave destructively or violently.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So is it the case that you can't really tell how a demonstration or a protest is going to go beforehand? You see police departments, some turning up in just casual uniform and then others where they come preloaded. It seems that people are trying to guess beforehand and trying to anticipate what the likely outcome is, but in actual fact, they're driving those outcomes.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. I mean sometimes, they're driving those outcomes by how they choose to respond. I mean one of the things that I spend a lot of time talking to police leaders about is trying not to be surprised. And so really doing a good job of mining intelligence, including just open-source intel from Twitter and Parler and these other networks.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's horribly underrated the capacity for just reading what is freely and openly available. It's a lost skill that intelligence gathering seems to be, people seem to have forgotten about it.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. I mean I think even the Capitol, I put out a tweet the night before the Capitol riot that said, "Look out, folks." You've got people on Parler talking about behaving violently and tomorrow's going to be a civil war. I didn't have access to any inside information.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

This is the Capitol riot of 6th January 2021, right?

**Ed Maguire:**

Yes. Yes. And so people were-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That was a moment, wasn't it?

**Ed Maguire:**

That was quite an interesting time.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I bet your phone blew up after that, didn't it?

**Ed Maguire:**

Indeed it did. Indeed it did. But folks were telling us what they were going to do openly on Parler and Facebook and other social media sites.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

People talk shit all the time on Twitter and social media sites, and they usually don't follow through. So what made the Capitol riot different?

**Ed Maguire:**

I think that chatter before the Capitol riot was really significantly more abundant than what we typically see in protests that turn violent.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So there was either an intelligence failure not recognizing that, or a policy failure not acting on it?

**Ed Maguire:**

Or an intelligent sharing failure. I think the intel was out there, it's just whether it got to the right people within the Capitol police and other agencies in the D.C. area.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So you've made the comparison to the UK. I mean I remember going to a lot of demonstrations and protests and marches in the 1980s and the 1990s. When you're a police officer during the Thatcher era, it became de rigueur. So I feel like the UK learned a lot, but it's hard to tell when you look at social media these days. But are you saying that British approach is something that we've learned from here?

**Ed Maguire:**

It's a mixed bag. And so you've got some police forces that I think are really world leaders in this area.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Such as?

**Ed Maguire:**

Probably the West Yorkshire Police, for instance. But you've got others, including the London Metropolitan Police, that really are not even acting on their own guidance, right? I mean I think the London Metropolitan Police a decade ago had really learned a lot about how to handle these events. And just even in the last few days, we've seen examples where they're going against their own lessons. And we see this in both countries, in the U.S. and in the UK where you have this ebb and flow. You're doing pretty well for a while and then they revert back to some old negative practices that I think really hurt their legitimacy.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. It was interesting having observed police departments during the Occupy movement actually come out of things really well with decent public perception. And some departments just managed to screw it up royally. What were the lessons that we learned from that?

**Ed Maguire:**

I learned some really important lessons from just talking to police leaders from across the country. I got a Justice Department grant just after the Occupy movement to go around the country and talk to police leaders about what they learned from that event. And it was really interesting. Some of the police leaders said they were really happy that Occupy came to them a little bit later than it came to some other sites, because they were able to look on CNN and see how other departments were messing it up. A lot of them talked about just even talking to their officers, police chiefs talking to their officers saying, "Let's not make any viral videos, right? Let's not be caught."

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So roll call videos, it's basically, "Let's just show CNN," and everybody say, "Let's not do that."

**Ed Maguire:**

Exactly. Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. Oh my goodness. Is that the learning mechanism to 21st century policing? This is how we're learning? It's like watching the television going, "Oh, that doesn't look good."

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. Yeah. We don't want to look like that. And unfortunately in the United States, we're in a moment right now where the Capitol insurrection is probably on the minds of every police chief in the country. And they don't want to be caught in a moment like that. And so in that ebb and flow that we talked about, now we're at risk of things getting worse again, because there's a tendency to over respond, following dramatic under responses like we just saw in D.C.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And it's not even an over response, it's an over preparation, because it's not really a response, right? Because you're almost coming with all the militarization and with all the hardware and the riot shields and all this stuff before any demonstrations even happen.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah, that's right. And so what we've learned from a lot of the research coming out of the crowd psychologists in the UK is that when police respond that way initially, they often end up provoking the response that they're looking to prevent.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I seem to remember that we did spend a lot of time putting just uniforms out with the crowd, but having van loads of the heavy mob around the corner with all the equipment as necessary, but out of sight.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. And that's what we recommend. I think when you put officers dressed in full riot gear at a largely peaceful protest, it really angers protesters and ends up leading to some people rebelling.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So the concept that I think some in policing think we have to turn up with a show of force to quell trouble has exactly the reverse effect.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. We've got 60 years of crowd psychology research suggesting that that mode of thinking is just... Some crowds psychologists called it not only wrong, but dangerously wrong.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well speaking of dangerously then, at what point do you flick the switch? Because at some point, you have to worry about officer safety in these environments, right?

**Ed Maguire:**

Absolutely. And so one of the things that we talk about is having a graded response plan where officers gear up as the need arises. And so when people start throwing things which police referred to as air mail, so when you start seeing air mail, it's probably time to put helmets on. And as things start to worsen, you start rotating in officers who have heavier gear. And this all needs to be trained and choreographed, right? This isn't something that can just happen on the fly without practice.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Do police departments do decent training around this area?

**Ed Maguire:**

They do terrible training around this area.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well that's good to know. We're right in the middle of discussions around defunding policing, but if we ever decide to reverse that idea, this seems to be one of the areas where it would be in everybody's benefit, the police and the public, for an increase in police training, right?

**Ed Maguire:**

I agree. I've looked at training materials for some large cities in the U.S., I've looked at training materials put out by federal government agencies who train local police on these issues. And some of the things that these training

materials say about crowds remind me of outdated ideas from the 1890s or 1900s. I don't know where they come up with this stuff.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You can tell a criminal by measuring the size of his hair.

**Ed Maguire:**

We have the equivalent of that kind of thinking and protest policing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But we also don't like to learn from other people. We feel like it's a mission of our own failure. Police departments in the U.S. say, "Well we really need to learn from West Yorkshire Police," a police department that they've probably never even heard of.

**Ed Maguire:**

Right. And it's difficult to change the way people think about these things, and particularly in this case because of the officer safety issues. So, the concern is that if we follow this new thinking about how to handle crowds that our officers are going to get hurt. And what I'm constantly telling police leaders is your officers are going to get more hurt doing what you're doing now than adopting these newer ideas.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. Well, I think for some people that's a tough lesson because they know best, right? Because you're an academic, what do you know, right?

**Ed Maguire:**

Right. Exactly. Which is why I think having practitioners be a part of that change effort is what's absolutely needed.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Not just practitioners, but I think people have to listen to the research a little bit more. I think that's really important. Plus also, you get on the ground. I mean I follow you on Twitter and you've had your moments out there on the street being on the receiving end of some, well let's say percussive management.

**Ed Maguire:**

It's a tough industry to both study protests and to cover them as a journalist because you end up with lungfuls of tear gas and sometimes being struck by less lethal weapons, officers come by and shove you back. And this is even when you're attempting to comply. And so there's not a lot of differentiation at some of these events between bad actors and people who are just there for peaceful purposes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And if I recall correctly, you've taken a rubber bullet round, haven't you?



**Ed Maguire:**

I took a pepper ball round about half inch above one of my eyes. And so I'll be forever grateful that it missed ever so closely my eye. I think I probably would have lost the eye.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. I've been on the receiving end and seen a lot of pepper spray within 10 minutes of being on duty. I finished my field training and joined my shift and we got called to a nightclub around the corner from the police station, which is awfully convenient. And I went inside and I'd never experienced pepper spray before. And in this nightclub on night shifts, somebody had sprayed pepper spray in the place. There'd been a massive fight. A bunch of girls grabbed me, dragged me into the women's toilets and there's a guy covered in blood. He's got half a beer glass in the side of his face. There's pepper spray throughout the whole place, CS gas, and I remember thinking, "I flipping love this job. It's just going to be great."

**Ed Maguire:**

Good times, good times.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But it was particularly concentrated in a nightclub, but is it really that effective in the outdoors, which is where police departments tend to be using it these days?

**Ed Maguire:**

Well I mean it certainly makes people back up. The problem with it is it's not very targeted, right? So you're not just spraying the people who are engaging in illegal behavior, you're also often spraying people who haven't done anything wrong. Some of the protests I've attended, people who've got sprayed are in wheelchairs. They're elderly, their children. This is not okay. We can do better than this.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And again, I'm sure it takes the moderate people in the crowd and it flips them to being anti-police.

**Ed Maguire:**

That's exactly right. And that's what we're trying to avoid. Actually, this language comes from the UK, but we call that process the transfer of grievance. And in all of my teaching and training on this topic with police, I say your ultimate measure here is if people come to a protest and it's not about you, don't do anything that makes it become about you. That's a simple concept to understand.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You'd think so, right? So what you're saying is when people are going to protest around school closures or the environment, just chill out and be part of the crowd and just facilitate freedom of expression, right?

**Ed Maguire:**

Exactly. And let them stay focused on what they're focused on. And so what we saw during the Occupy movement was a movement that had nothing to do with the police initially almost entirely turned against the police because how police handled those events.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What about situations where the police are the targets? So thinking about George Floyd.

**Ed Maguire:**

So the last year has been an interesting one indeed, sir. And so-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You are the master of understatements.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. I mean since George Floyd's death, you've got people out there protesting against police brutality and what they experience when doing that is police brutality. And so you're reinforcing the reason for the protest in the first place. And where we see this in its most just dramatic form is in Portland, Oregon.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So what's made Portland so special?

**Ed Maguire:**

I think police have responded to protests in Portland in a particularly violent and unwise manner. And by doing that, essentially what they're doing is they're guaranteeing that there will be a protest the next night. And so then they go out the next night and do the same thing and they're guaranteeing that protests will continue to be held. If we can handle these types of events using de-escalation, using research evidence, trying to calm people down, be very targeted when we use any type of force, we can let things simmer down. But when we keep behaving violently, it ends up perpetuating the protests.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I think officers have struggled with trying to figure out how to police the incidence around Michael Brown in Ferguson and George Floyd. When the protests and the demonstrations are about police, even if it's not police in your town, I mean I'm in Philadelphia, you're in Arizona, for both of us, I think Minneapolis was about a thousand miles away, but it seemed very local if that made sense.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. And I mean a lot of people don't truly understand the nature of policing in the United States. I mean even my students sometimes refer to American policing as the police force, as if there's just a one, right? And so there is that

tendency in the public to think of policing as this monolith. And so if police in Minneapolis did something wrong, they're probably doing that same thing in my city.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I think even in big departments, what you can end up with is it feels like that there are 20 police departments within one police department. Because again, it's like the crowd, isn't it? You just don't have that homogeneity of perspective.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah, exactly. And we see differences across shifts, we see differences across precincts. Indeed.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Have you seen examples where it's been done well, when police departments have successfully managed a crowd that contains both, for want of a term, agitators who want to start trouble with the police and a whole crowd of people who come with a legitimate grievance?

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. In our national study of the Occupy movement, we saw that a lot. So in Boston, for instance, just really targeted anytime they chose to take enforcement action, it was not enforcement action against the entire crowd. It was really targeted toward people who were behaving violently or destructively. Salt Lake City, we saw the same thing, saw some of that in Milwaukee. I mean I think there were several departments where police chief sent out the right message and I think officers followed the guidance issued by their chiefs.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Do you know if they were doing more training, given that officers are going into what can be a very stressful situation, having been in a number of disorderly protests and riots? When you're right in the middle of it, it's a thing.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. And so they absolutely have to train these kinds of things. And particularly if they adopt that graded response model I was talking about, because it's no easy feat to rotate officers out either to put on riot gear or to put on some intermediate level of protection like a helmet, maybe a longer riot baton, and then rotate them out again to put on full riot gear of things head in that direction are warranted. All that needs to be choreographed and trained and very carefully practiced so that it can be executed under stress.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. I mean I'm thinking about what you're saying, and it absolutely makes sense, but once you start bringing out long sticks and stuff like that, I just wonder at that point, is it even possible for a police department to come out of this looking good? It feels like there's going to be just variations of how bad do you want the department to look and that's as best you can do.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah, I think so. One of the things I appreciate about how the Swedish police are handling things, some UK forces, they're putting officers out in the crowd, they're wearing different colored vests. These folks are out there trying to calm things down. So you don't have just the one response. You've got officers who are more armored up, but you've also got officers who are out there in the crowd trying to keep people calm, trying to talk to people, trying to deescalate, lots of communication, and American police are resisting those types of approaches for officer safety reasons.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. That's an interesting one for officer safety reasons. And I get it. Certainly after George Floyd, having seen Erika Shields, for example, out walking in the crowd surrounded by a lot of very angry people as a result of George Floyd. And there's a lot of genuine anger kicking around with that. I mean you run a martial arts studio. I mean if you were with me, I'd be fine. I wouldn't have any problem with at all. But out there on my own in a very, very angry crowd, even though I'm the nicest guy in the world, I would certainly have some concerns. Will you come and be my bodyguard if it ever gets to that? Can I just hire you as a bouncer?

**Ed Maguire:**

Happy to do it, sir. But what's interesting is when you-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What's your dojo cover?

**Ed Maguire:**

Oh, we're Cactus Jiu Jitsu. We teach Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Good stuff. Yeah, I'm definitely hanging around with you. Yeah. A little bit of [inaudible 00:22:44] training, there we go.

**Ed Maguire:**

There you go. But yeah, when we talk to officers who do this kinds of work, I mean certainly there are moments when they're afraid and they make the choice to exit the crowd for officer safety reasons. But a lot of times, they turn out to be the middleman, if you will, between the protesters and the rest of the officers. They're the people who are out there handling the negotiation and the communication. And they often tell me that they feel very comfortable being out there. And if they're not comfortable, they exit the crowd and go back behind the line of police officers. But there are people who I think are very good at this kind of work and are meant to do it. It's not something I think you can just assign to anybody. You've got to pick the right people.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And it sounds to me like it's something that a chunk of crowd psychology training and understanding is going to be essential.

**Ed Maguire:**

Absolutely. It's interesting. I was talking with a Sergeant from a pretty big police department here in the U.S. a couple of weeks ago, and what he wanted to do is he wanted to check to see if he understood the crowd psychology, if he was getting it right, because he's training his officers on it. And what I really appreciated about it was he took everything I was saying and he put it in cop language. It was amazing. I thought he did a great job of it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You should get yourself a copy of that.

**Ed Maguire:**

Absolutely.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Sounds like its gold.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. And I think that's the hard part with this, right? Because once you start using terms like crowd psychology and the transfer of grievance.

**Ed Maguire:**

Right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You just know that a bunch of cops who have just done a whole pile of night shifts and a bunch of overtime, who are asleep deprived, they haven't had enough coffee, the kids are playing up, all sorts of drama's going on, they're just can look at you're like, "What?"

**Ed Maguire:**

Well Jerry, you've worked in a lot of police departments and man, we need translators sometimes. We need people who can take what we teach and put it in a different language that not only the cops understand, because I think they understand what I'm talking about, but he put it in a language that almost made it seem silly not to do this. If you're smart and you want to remain safe in these types of events, you should do what the professor's suggesting and here's why.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. And he sounds like a good potential police pracademic in terms of finding that balance between policing in the academic world. And I think you have a winning argument when you start dressing it up in terms of officer safety, because everybody does want to go home at the end of the day.

**Ed Maguire:**

Right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That would be nice, right?

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. I think that's right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Is there a difference between how to think about managing pop-up demonstrations as opposed to planned demonstrations? At least with planned demonstrations, we manage those better, right? Please tell me we do.

**Ed Maguire:**

For sure, because we have intel leading up to the event that helps us shape our response to the event. And so with these pop-up demonstrations-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The Capitol riot insurgency notwithstanding.

**Ed Maguire:**

Absolutely. Yeah. I mean we had one right here in Scottsdale, Arizona, where there are not a lot of riots, but we had a riot this summer and it came very suddenly and it took the police department by surprise through no fault of theirs.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well it's a bit like a music festival. Everything happens in the summer, right? [inaudible 00:25:31].

**Ed Maguire:**

There you go.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What was the riot over?

**Ed Maguire:**

It was related to George Floyd, but honestly it was more just people breaking into stores and breaking windows. And it was just more destructive than principled.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

More destructive than principled sounds a little bit like my Twitter feed.

**Ed Maguire:**

Exactly. What a lot of police departments face with these is resource issues. And so in New York City, I mean any protest I've ever been to in New York City, they're typically deploying more officers to a single event than most police departments in the United States even employ. They're not having to think about mutual aid and these kinds of issues. But for most police departments, like here in Scottsdale, just simply getting enough bodies there to deal with these events, particularly when they're pop-up events like that, it can be a real challenge.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'm sure once you start also calling for aid from other police departments, that just increases the capacity for confusion, because you've got people on different radio networks, you've got different uniforms, you've got different operating structures. So people are turning up to help out. But I'm sure it just adds to the confusion, right?

**Ed Maguire:**

Absolutely. And it's a big problem with these types of events because in Ferguson, for instance, there were nearly 60 police agencies that responded to the protests and riots after the death of Michael Brown.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'm sure they're all bringing their own perspective of what the crowd is going to be like, their own equipment and how they're going to approach things, before they've even turned up in the town.

**Ed Maguire:**

Absolutely. And so you have dramatic differences in training, in equipment, in ability to communicate via different radio systems and so forth. And I think one reporter got it right. A beautiful quote, he said it was a mish-mash of tactics and confusion. One of these police departments had dogs. Look, we learned the lesson 60 years ago in the United States. You're not going to have dogs chasing after a bunch of African-American protesters. It's not good.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean I've only been in the states 20 years, but I saw those photographs about a week after I arrived here.

**Ed Maguire:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. Maybe a confusion should be the collective noun for police departments whenever they gathered together in herds of more than three.

**Ed Maguire:**

But you've got agencies, and I think the Washington, D.C. area is a perfect example, because in Washington, D.C., there's a protest nearly every day, right? We don't hear about most of them, but there's virtually always protests in

Washington, D.C. And these agencies working together in Washington, D.C., it's a regular phenomenon. And so when mutual aid requests go out in that metro area, it's a common thing. In Ferguson, Missouri, not so much.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So in D.C., with all the experience they had, does that almost compound the errors that might have been made? And I'm not looking to Monday morning quarterback people and get anybody fired, but it did seem to go south quickly when people are saying they knew a lot about what was going on.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. I mean I think there were political pressures on the agencies involved in these events in terms of trying to manage the optics and not letting police do what police do. I think if police were left to their own devices to handle these types of events without the political pressures that they were facing, very intense political pressures, I think we would have seen a better response in D.C.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean it seemed that the police departments weren't tooled up with all the right equipment. So at least they started with the right approach though they'd been criticized for almost being too friendly with the crowd. Was that a reasonable critique? Or is that more people playing politics?

**Ed Maguire:**

I think it was an unreasonable critique. I think the reasonable critique here is at an event like this, you want to have multiple layers behind the curtain in case something goes wrong. And in this case, there was nothing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Who is that attorney general that had a semi-naked statue of-

**Ed Maguire:**

Ashcroft.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's right. Yeah.

**Ed Maguire:**

And he covered up the... Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

John Ashcroft covered up a semi-naked statue. That's the only thing that's behind the curtain, mate. Yeah. You were saying, there's nothing else behind.



**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. There's nothing else behind the curtain. And so we always say, you hope for the best and plan for the worst. I think they hoped for the best and they just didn't plan for the worst. And so when the worst started to happen, there was no more assets behind the curtain to bring in and help deal with this event.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. At least a lot of the stuff that I went to in London, we may have been walking with a crowd, but we know the TSG were a couple of blocks away.

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So if things went south, We could pull back and people who've got a chunk more training and a lot more equipment could be wheeled into position.

**Ed Maguire:**

And that's how we need to approach these things. And I don't know why we're still having to learn that lesson.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. That distinction for me is really important. When there's a failure of planning, that seems to be a huge error. But it also seems that it strikes me that things go so much better when there's also planning on the demonstrator side as well. I mean I policed a lot of these things in central London back in the late eighties and the early nineties. I think my favorite was having to spend a Saturday and a Sunday. The Saturday was a student union protest, which was absolutely chaotic, not least of which because the wind was blowing hard and these guys had a massive banner. And there was a headwind and they were just not making any progress because they were trying to go two steps forward and the wind was just blowing them back.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And then on the Sunday, it was gay pride. And those guys were just in great shape. The banner had slits in it to let the wind through, they were heading down the road. They knew where the route was. They had the post-parade cocktail location planned out. The gay guys had it all squared away. It was fantastic.

**Ed Maguire:**

Made it nice and easy for you.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Absolutely. And I was just impressed at the level of organization and "We've got our goals. This is what we want to do." And the students were just a mess, which doesn't surprise anybody I suspect. But also, that level of disorganization

created much more of an environment for chaos and for more people to get hurt, which is what happened. Should we be spending more time educating demonstrators on how to demonstrate well, does that sound contradictory?

**Ed Maguire:**

No, I think it's a great idea. The problem that police and demonstrators are dealing with right now is people who can help protesters remain peaceful actually come under great pressure from fellow protesters who view them as sellouts. And so these intermediaries between the police and the more extremist protesters actually end up coming to lose the trust of their fellow protesters if they go too far. There's a whole literature in crowd psychology on stimulating within crowds the ability for self-control. And so police communicating with crowd members and crowd leaders and so forth, and using those people, much like Lorraine Mazerolle and Janet Ransley talked about with third-party policing, this idea of getting other people to act on your behalf and help you. We can do that in a crowd situation.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's a great example, having place managers, using people who already have trust and relationships and knowledge to actually help convey your message.

**Ed Maguire:**

The problem with this approach on the ground is that police often will blame the intermediary if things go wrong, but this is not a formal organization. There's not a hierarchy within the protest crowd. The intermediaries are often just doing the best that they can. And sometimes, people don't listen to them. And so these communication networks are fragile. And I think both on the police and on the protest side, we need to work really hard to keep those communication channels open.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean reading some of your work in preparation for this, and that's going to surprise a lot of people that I actually do one, read, and two, prepare, is this notion that crowds take on different identities. So is it possible to anticipate who those people are likely to be and work on those people or to marginalize them before they start creating problems? I mean we want to encourage the people that are supportive of lawful, safe protesting and demonstrations, right?

**Ed Maguire:**

Yeah. We just need to be really careful in having police work with those people while not expecting them to work miracles. There are going to be people in the crowd who don't listen to them. So I'll share a quick story with you, Jerry. I was observing the Occupy Wall Street protests in New York City at the six month anniversary of the movement. And I attended a meeting of protesters and a rabbi came to speak at the event.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Sorry, this is starting to sound like a really bad joke.

**Ed Maguire:**

Exactly, right?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

An academic, a rabbi and a protester walk into New York. Yeah.

**Ed Maguire:**

So the rabbi delivered this beautiful, beautiful talk on the importance of remaining non-violent during protest and very Gandhian, and really amazing talk. And while he was talking, two fights broke out in the audience among people who disagreed with his message.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Brilliant.

**Ed Maguire:**

So these protest groups are not homogeneous. And there are really powerful debates among protesters about whether it's a legitimate form of protest to be violent, or to damage property, or to steal things.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. I mean there is a perspective that you don't get on the news, which is what people want to amplify their cause, unless you are throwing a trashcan through a Starbucks window.

**Ed Maguire:**

Exactly. And so we really, really want police to focus in on those people who are behaving violently or destructively, laser-like precision on those folks whilst simultaneously allowing people behaving peacefully to continue doing so.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But does that really work? I mean once you start forming just a quick snatch squad to dive into the crowd and pick out one or two people, haven't you lost at that point?

**Ed Maguire:**

Not yet. If there's communication that accompanies it that tells the crowd, "This is what we're doing. This is why we're doing it. As long as you're behaving peaceful, you can continue to do so," then it works. If you do it without communication, then rumors spread and all of a sudden, it looks like a kidnapping squad.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. In light of the last year where we've had on one end, George Floyd and how much that had a massive impact across the country, and then we've got the Capitol insurrection, I mean are these changing the nature of protests and demonstrations across the country? I mean are we heading down a path that's pretty dark?

**Ed Maguire:**

So the two events work at cross purposes from one another. So all the protests in response to George Floyd the narrative was that the police over responded and violated people's constitutional rights. And I think in a lot of cases, that criticism is appropriate. And then in the Capitol insurrection, we see a police department that just dramatically

under prepared and under responded. And so the tendency of American police will now be to gear up and adopt harder responses. And so these things are working against each other at the same time that all these class action lawsuits are being litigated over the dramatic over response to the George Floyd protests. And so things are chaotic in American policing right now. I think police are genuinely struggling with how do we handle these types of events?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. It strikes me that there's just no way to win. You just try to lose with the least amount of damage as you can. And a police commissioner or a police chief may come out of a major public order situation and somebody says, "That went pretty well," that chief should buy a lottery ticket, right?

**Ed Maguire:**

That's a huge victory.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**Ed Maguire:**

So we've got one coming up in the Phoenix area. We've got the national socialist movement, which is a group of Bio-Nazis planning a rally here in the Phoenix area. We know it's coming. We know what date it's happening. And hopefully, the agencies around here will do a good job of dealing with the intel and processing and putting in place appropriate plans.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So I look forward to seeing the one selfie that an officer takes trying to build a rapport with a crowd, so he doesn't run into trouble and that will become the defining characteristic of the entire event, right?

**Ed Maguire:**

Agreed, agreed. And hopefully, this time, if pepper balls start flying, I'll do a better job of ducking.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. For a Ninja warrior, you shouldn't be out there headbutting pepper balls, mate. That's just definitely not the plan.

**Ed Maguire:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

If people want to know a little bit more about this area beyond the podcast, Ed, where can they go to?

**Ed Maguire:**

We have a new lab that we've just stood up at Arizona State University called the Public Safety Innovation Lab. And so people can visit the website for the lab. And also, we have a guide book for policing protests that's available free online. And so they can visit the website for that and download the guidebook.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Fantastic. And I'll put a link to that [reducingcrime.com/podcast](https://reducingcrime.com/podcast) and then link it to this episode. Brilliant. What's next for you?

**Ed Maguire:**

Well my long-term goal is to emulate something that I observed in Britain, which is I think in Britain, the crowd psychology researchers have formed really amazing partnerships with a variety of different police departments, not only in the UK, but also elsewhere in Europe. And although I think we have a lot of those partnerships in the United States on a number of different topics, we don't have those partnerships when it comes to how to handle crowds and public order situations. And so I'm envisioning a future where academics have a louder voice and are working much more closely with police leaders in crafting these responses, testing alternative responses and just trying to partner to see what works and what doesn't.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So invest a little bit more in understanding crowd psychology and evidence-based policing and a little bit less in water cannons.

**Ed Maguire:**

Exactly. Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well Ed, it's been a pleasure. I'm glad to see that your eye has recovered and thanks for spending some time with me, mate.

**Ed Maguire:**

Thank you so much, Jerry.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That was Episode 34 of Reducing Crime, recorded online in March 2021. New episodes are announced on Twitter @\_reducingcrime. You can find a transcript of this and every episode at [reducingcrime.com/podcast](https://reducingcrime.com/podcast), where you can also find links to Ed Maguire's policy lab and the protest policing guide mentioned in the episode. If you're an instructor and want multiple choice questions for Reducing Crime episodes, just DM me.

Be safe, and best of luck.