

# Organizer's Edge ▶

## Greetings!

### **Agents Provocateurs Inciting Violence and Discord**

**By Walter Davis**

Organizers must understand how infiltrators and agent provocateurs divide our movements to maintain power and control.

During demonstrations and rallies, emotions can run high and such agents provocateurs can sow violence and increase discord. After the killing of George Floyd, in Minneapolis, “the Umbrella Man”, armed with a hammer and spray paint appeared dressed in dark clothes coldly breaking windows of an Auto Zone store in the community of the killing. What appeared to be an act of angry vandalism was a coldly calculated act. The “Umbrella Man” turned out to be a known white supremacist who “wanted to sow discord and racial unrest.” This critical fact got little coverage. His identity was not pursued in subsequent reports and has largely vanished from the news.



Agents provocateurs seek to push the envelope from non-violent to violent tactics to justify repression. Political infiltration by police forces of community organizations unites the power of the state and repressive forces in conflict with basic aspirations for freedom and justice. It has no respect for “constitutional norms.”

### **Need for Security Discussions**

How many meetings have you attended where security was discussed? In a period of digital meetings, even our normal discussions are channeled through platforms over which we have little control.

Organizers need to study and share how to counter the infiltrators. The most common intent of infiltration is to disunite – to create divisions among those who have common interests and demands. Political infiltration by police is not about catching criminals. It is ideological. It is unaccountable and even more dangerous when the Attorney General and/or judges back it up and

in far too many recent cases actively promote it.

The agenda of agents provocateurs is to demoralize people. They seek to convince us change cannot happen, even for the smallest demands made. You see that a lot in the trolls on the Internet. They misdirect the course of discussion, picking away at sores and encouraging fights between people who are on the same side. It is a skill nurtured by this White House.

Ultimately, you must take responsibility as organizers to prepare. Know how to detect the signs of infiltration, to block it and stop making it easy for those who want to infiltrate.

Do not surrender group process or your vision to individuals.

One of the basic precepts of community organizing is to choose tactics that are uncomfortable to your opponents (the “targets”) but not to go beyond the comfort level and capacity of your members and those you represent. That requires an accountable process. We are often reluctant to debate tactics for “the people” even if the actions of some individuals are not from experience of the people. You are not speaking for those who suffer if you impose your own methods and leave others to bear the consequences of your actions.

Some may say we do not have time for this. One of the hardest things to accept in a democracy is that if you are effective, you are being observed. You must take time to learn and prepare, do it with your members and share what you learn.

*Somewhere to start: Download the manual, *Weathering the Storm*, at <https://roadmapconsulting.org/programs-and-services/>*

If you have any had any incidents or suspect an agent provocateur, please let us know.

**Walter Davis** has been an organizer, agitator, and “good trouble” maker for over 55 years. His path has included civil rights work, antiwar and civil liberties organizing in Canada, developing popular education resources, research on impact of uranium mining, nuclear weapons proliferation, international development and solidarity, immigrant and refugee organizing, anti-apartheid, early gay progressive organizing, union education and support, training community organizers and grassroots leaders (Southern Empowerment Project), nurturing the work of organizers (National Organizers Alliance), interfaith collaborations, health care organizing (former director of Tennessee Health Care Campaign), and today working at the Appalachian Community Fund.

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## Feedback Welcome

We want to hear from you, your reactions, ideas, what is at the edge YOUR "envelope." Just go to...

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Who else you will hear from.....

We are just starting, but so far you can expect to hear what the following people are thinking:

Jessica Tang: Boston Teachers Union, AFT

George Luse of the Mass Teachers Assn,

Scott Reed with the PICO Network, ,

Cathy Howell, in Oregon and El Salvador, formerly with the AFL-CIO,  
Caesar McDowell of MIT,

Diana Bell of Community and Labor United,

David Hernandez of the California Education Assn,

Attica Scott, State Rep Louisville, Kentucky

Walter Davis, of the Tennessee, Health Care Coalition.

Debra Askenase, of Community Organizing 2.0,

Deb Fastino, of the Coalition for Social Justice in New Bedford, MA,

Rebecca Gutman, with SEIU-1199,

Tim Dean, of SEIU-1199,

Mary Ochs, long time organizer in Los Angeles  
and others, hopefully, including YOU

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Other Useful Links

<http://michaeljacobybrown.com/>

[Road Map Consulting](#)

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# Building Powerful Community Organizations

A Personal Guide to  
Creating Groups that  
Can Solve Problems  
and Change the World

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