

# Infiltration of Occupy: PART I - Infiltration to Disrupt, Divide and Mis-direct are Widespread in Occupy

By [Kevin Zeese](#) and [Margaret Flowers](#)

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## PART I

*This is Part I of a two part series on infiltration of Occupy and what the movement can do about limiting the damage of those who seek to destroy us from within. This first article describes public reports of infiltration as well as results of a survey and discussions with occupiers about this important issue. The second article will examine the history of political infiltration and steps we can take to address it.*

In the first five months, the Occupy Movement has had major victories and has altered the debate about the economy. People in the power structure and who hold different political views are pushing back with a traditional tool – infiltration. Across the country, Occupies are struggling with disruption and division, attacks on key persons, escalation of tactics to property damage and police conflict as well as misuse of websites and social media.

As Part II of this discussion will show, infiltration is the norm in political movements in the United States. Occupy has many opponents likely to infiltrate to divide and destroy it beyond the usual law enforcement apparatus. Others include the corporations whose rule Occupy seeks to end, conservative right wing groups allied with corporate interests and other members of the power structure including non-profit organizations allied with either corporate-funded political party, especially the Democratic Party which would like Occupy to be their Tea Party rather than an independent movement critical of both parties.

On the very first day of the Occupation of Wall Street, we saw infiltration by the police. We were leaving Zucotti Park and were stopped in traffic by the rear of the park. We saw an unmarked van open, in the front seat were two uniformed police and out of the back came two men dressed as occupiers wearing backpacks, sweatshirts, and jeans. They walked into Zucotti Park and became part of the crowd.

In the first week of the Occupation of Freedom Plaza in Washington, DC we saw the impact of two right wing infiltrators. A peaceful protest was planned at the drone exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution. The plan was for a banner drop and a die-in under the drones. But, as protesters arrived at the museum two people ran out in front, threatening the security guards and causing them to pepper spray protesters and tourists. Patrick Howley, an assistant editor for the American Spectator, [wrote a column](#) bragging about his role as an agent provocateur. A few days later we uncovered the second infiltrator, Michael Stack,

when he was urging people on Freedom Plaza to resist police with force. We later learned he was from the Leadership Institute which trains youth in right wing ideology and tactics. We were told he had also been at Occupy Wall Street provoking violence.

There have been a handful of other reports around the country of infiltration. In Oakland, CopWatch filmed an [Oakland police officer](#) infiltrating. And, in another video CopWatch includes audio tape of an Oakland police chief, [Howard Jordan, talking](#) about how police departments all over the country infiltrate, not just to monitor protesters but to manipulate and direct them.

There were also [reports in Los Angeles](#) of a [dozen undercover police in the encampment](#) before they were forcibly evicted by the police. The raid by the LA police was [brutal](#) and resulted in mass arrests, with most charges dropped, but with others mistreated in jails. Similar pre-raid undercover activities were [reported in Nashville, Tennessee](#).

Los Angeles also had infiltrators from the right wing group, Free Republic. They [posted on their webpage](#) a call for infiltrators to block a vote concerning an offer from the City of Los Angeles for virtually free space for Occupy LA: "Need LA Freepers to show up to block this vote by the Occupy LA General Assembly. How brave are you?" In the end, the LA occupy decided not to accept the offer from the city, something also opposed by other elements in the encampment.

In New York, there were reports of infiltration. For example, [a protester described](#) how undercover police infiltrated a protest at Citibank and were the loudest and most disruptive protesters. Later at the station listening to the police the protester said in an interview: "It was a bit startling how inside their information was - how they were being paid to go to these protests and put us in situations where we'd be arrested and not be able to leave."

#### Survey and Interviews of Occupiers Shows Common Tactics, Common Infiltrators

These scattered reports seem to be the tip of the iceberg. As a result of experiencing extreme divisive tactics and character assassination on Freedom Plaza against us we began to hear from occupiers across the country about similar incidents in their occupations. We decided to speak to and survey people about infiltration and have found similar stories around the country.

Recently we toured occupations on the west coast, where we spoke to many occupiers and have attended General Assemblies at Occupy Wall Street and Philadelphia. We heard stories in Arizona of someone with website administrative privileges deleting the live stream archive which included video that was to be used in defense of some who were arrested. In Lancaster, Pennsylvania someone took control of the email list, making it an announce-only list and when the police threatened to close the camp, that person put out a statement that the Lancaster occupiers had decided to go without any conflict. In fact, no such decision had been made and 30 occupiers had planned to risk arrest when the police tried to remove them. The false email resulted in no resistance.

Our west coast trip ended at the Occupy Olympia Solidarity Social Forum. We were able to survey 41 people representing 15 different occupations primarily on the west coast but including Missoula, MT and New Orleans, LA. Participants were questioned about 10 different behaviors. The most common behaviors, seen in roughly two-thirds of those

surveyed and covering 12 of the 15 occupations, were:

1. Disruptions of the General Assemblies and attempts to divide the group: Individuals would interrupt General Assemblies with emergency items or sidetrack the agenda with their personal needs or issues. When proposals were presented to the General Assembly on principles for the occupation or plans to prevent division, individuals would question the authority of the writers of the proposal, launch personal attacks or question their abilities. There were frequent attacks on people who did the most work and were perceived as leaders. The anti-leadership views of many occupiers were used to essentially attack the most effective people. [Sue Basko](#) wrote about this in Los Angeles in a comment on a Chris Hedges article, writing that there was an “ongoing campaign of harassment and coercion against the Occupy LA participants and volunteers. Each day is a fresh set of victims.” She describes the use of Twitter, list serves and blogs to “defame and harass anyone giving their efforts to help Occupy LA.” This has included attacks on “social media workers, the website team, the lawyers (including me), the medics, the livestreamers, the writers, and on and on.” She also writes “there is the very strong belief that some among them are FBI or DHS agents placed there to start the group, egg it on, control it.” Conversations with others in Los Angeles confirmed this report. Our experience in the area of personal attacks included outlandish lies calling us criminals and thieves and near daily email attacks since early December. We found that when we respond and correct lies, it does not stop them and have concluded that if someone has the intention to be a character assassin there is nothing you can do to stop them except to expose them. While that does not necessarily stop them, it at least gets those in the occupation who are not gullible to doubt the undocumented personal attacks.

2. Individuals who took over the website and/or social media and then removed them or hacked them and took control: As noted above, these networks have been used in personal attacks, as well as to send inaccurate messages to the media and other occupiers. One mistake made is to allow a large number of people to have administrative privileges on the website. Being an administrator allows people to erase critical information as occurred in Phoenix. In Washington, DC we have been removed as administrators of a Facebook page we created because we allowed people who turned out to be untrustworthy to have administrative privileges. Note, people can blog or post to Facebook or websites without being administrators.

Division over how money was being spent was an issue reported by 50% of respondents and in 12 out of 15 occupations, individuals persistently questioned transparency and use of funds. In General Assemblies in New York and Philadelphia we saw disruption by people who complained about money issues. In New York, an argument about access to free Metro Cards resulted in a 30 minute argument. In Philadelphia, it was a vague complaint about “where is the money?” We saw something similar at a 99%’s meeting in San Francisco where one of the questioners complained about missing money. And, we have seen the same in Washington, DC with false accusations of missing money. Sometimes these disruptors seem like homeless or emotionally disturbed individuals. They could be acting out their concerns or they could be encouraged by police to attend meetings to cause disruption and could be paid a small amount to do so. Whether paid or not, the impact is the same – it takes the Occupy off of its political agenda and turns people off to participating in the movement.

Finally, the issue of escalation of tactics to include property damage and conflict with police: The euphemism for this is “diversity of tactics.” In fact, there is great [diversity](#)

[within nonviolent tactics](#). This is really a debate between those who favor strategic nonviolence and those who favor property destruction and police conflict. In 11 of 15 occupations there were reports of verbal attacks on police and/or escalation of tactics from nonviolence to property destruction or violence. In one occupation, an individual took over the direct action working group and escalated the tactics used beyond what the group had agreed upon. In one occupy, the GA approved putting up a structure but agreed that if the police wanted it taken down they would promptly do so in order to prove the structure was temporary. When the structure was up, a handful of people refused to take it down causing a 10 hour police conflict and undermining public support for the occupy. In another occupation, because a minority of the occupy refused to adopt nonviolent strategies, a protest with the teacher union was cancelled preventing a major opportunity to expand the movement. When it comes to the issue of violence vs. property damage, it is particularly hard to tell whether the differences are political or instigated by infiltrators.

Participants were asked about attempts at co-optation by law enforcement, individuals or organizations affiliated with the Democratic Party and about suspected infiltration by right wing groups: 8 of the 15 occupations (41% of respondents) reported Democratic groups attempted to co-opt the occupation, using it to push or prevent a legislative agenda or using the occupation's social media to change the times of protests or meetings. Far fewer reported suspicion or evidence of right wing infiltration (12% of respondents in four occupations), most stating that the corporate media provided poor or misleading coverage. The most common form of infiltration was by law enforcement agencies (49% of respondents; 11 of 15 occupations). Some respondents reported having video evidence, some reported law enforcement officers having more information than they had been given, police using names of occupiers when names had never been provided and some suspected police infiltration but had no proof.

Of course, there is a lot of suspicion, but people are rarely able to prove infiltration. These incidents could be people with real political disagreement within the Occupy, or they could be people who are emotionally disturbed, mentally ill or who bring other personal challenges with them. Or, it could be an infiltrator manipulating these people, playing on their fears and prejudices. This is not a simple issue, as we will discuss in Part II, it is best to judge people by their actions and not label them as infiltrators without direct proof.

Some may wonder why Democrats or groups closely affiliated with the Democrats like MoveOn, Campaign for America's Future, Rebuild the Dream or unions like SEIU would want to infiltrate the Occupy (note: individuals who are Democrats, union, MoveOn or members of other groups are not the same as the leadership). Essentially, leaders of these groups see Occupy as the Democrats' potential answer to the Tea Party. Occupiers do not see themselves that way, but these groups want the Occupy to adopt their strategy of working within the Democratic Party. In one example, Eric Lottke, a senior policy analyst for SEIU who has been involved in Occupy DC, [appeared on a radio show](#) with two other occupiers from Occupy Washington, DC and Occupy Oakland. Lottke said he was speaking as an occupier from Occupy DC and talked about 'taking back Congress in 2012', the need for an electoral strategy and gave the usual Democrat rhetoric about Obama needing more time. The two other guests said Lottke was completely out of step with most Occupiers who say we should not focus on electoral politics but instead should build an independent movement to challenge the corrupt system. We doubt the Occupy DC General Assembly agreed with Lottke's pro-Democratic Party, pro-Obama views but Lottke had positioned himself to speak for them. [Van Jones of Rebuild the Dream](#) similarly was appearing in the media as if he were

an occupy spokesperson claiming there will be [2000 “99% candidates”](#) in 2012; again trying to push Occupy into Democratic electoral politics. These are just two examples of many Democratic Party operatives trying to send Occupy into Democratic Party politics despite the movement consistently describing itself as independent and non-electoral.

In Washington, DC we have seen some occupiers attacking the National Occupation of Washington, DC ([www.NOWDC.org](http://www.NOWDC.org)) scheduled for this April, while other occupiers have shown enthusiasm for it. Solidarity with NOW DC has been shown by 19 General Assemblies of occupations from around the country. InterOccupy classifies it as a national Occupy event. The attackers have been criticizing NOW DC by attacking the authors of this article. This attack is occurring at the same time that Democratic Party aligned groups have announced their own project which occurs at the same time as NOW DC, the “99%’s Spring.” Thus far the dividers have succeeded in preventing solidarity from the two DC occupations with the rest of the Occupy Movement. Is the timing a coincidence?

No doubt the information in this article is incomplete. We have only been able to survey and talk with people at about 20 occupies. We would very much like to hear from others around the country about experiences at their occupation as understanding these tactics is the first step to confronting and addressing them. (Send your comments to [research@october2011.org](mailto:research@october2011.org).)

In Part II of this series we will focus on the history of government infiltration and destruction of political movements and political leaders and will examine steps that can be taken to minimize the damage from these tactics. One thing evident from the history: infiltration has been common in political movements for a century and the tactics of division, attacks on leaders, escalation of tactics, fights over money and misinformation to the public are common throughout that history.

*Margaret Flowers and Kevin Zeese were among the original organizers of [Occupy Washington, DC](#) and are currently among the organizers of the [National Occupation of Washington, DC](#).*

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[Margaret Flowers](#)

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