

Espionage Journalism Groups Go Head-To-Head

'Project Veritas Exposed' is putting a face on James O'Keefe's employees.

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY LYNE LUCIEN/THE DAILY BEAST

A few months before the 2016 election, an undercover operative working for conservative sting-meister James O'Keefe posed as an intern to infiltrate Democracy Partners, a Democratic consulting group.

The O'Keefe associate captured footage that—after undergoing O'Keefe's thorough editing—appeared to show staffers at the firm discussing potential voter-fraud schemes. In the aftermath, Democracy Partners' founder "stepped back" from a role in Democratic efforts to elect Clinton, and a Democratic operative at another organization was fired.

Lauren Windsor, then an associate at the firm, had a front-row seat to the deception—and the fallout. She then decided to try and stop O’Keefe and his group, Project Veritas, from doing it again.

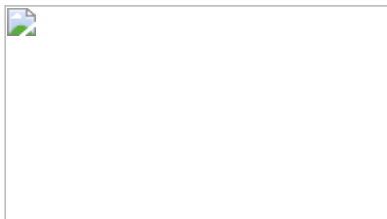
Windsor began cataloguing everything she knew about Project Veritas and the O’Keefe operative that had infiltrated Democracy Partners. The project began as prep work for potential litigation, but Windsor eventually circulated it privately among other liberal activists. Now the dossiers Windsor created on operatives associated with O’Keefe and Project Veritas have grown into “Project Veritas Exposed,” a collection of online profiles and—more importantly for O’Keefe’s targets—pictures of people known to work with O’Keefe.

The site, launched in January, is based around pictures of O’Keefe’s associates—what Windsor describes as “a photo array that you might get from a police lineup.” It’s a layout that Windsor hopes potential O’Keefe targets can use as a reference if they suspect they’ve been approached by a Project Veritas agent, even one disguised with a wig or fake mustache.

“Most people would not be able to recognize James O’Keefe if he walked into their organization or place of business,” Windsor said. “It doesn’t need to be him, it could be any of the 30 people that are on his staff, you’re never going to be able to memorize all the faces.”

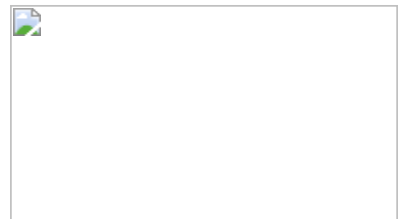
O’Keefe and Project Veritas didn’t respond to The Daily Beast’s requests for comment.

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Along with aliases used by ~~President Donald Trump~~ and First Lady Melania Trump also attended the meeting, the site also notes the outlandish clothing affectations that can give away associates of O’Keefe, who became famous for dressing as a pimp during one sting.

One alleged Project Veritas associate, for example, has an “affinity for wearing kilts” in his stings. The site also warns to be on the lookout for people wearing unusual clothing, specifically citing lederhosen as an example.

Not everyone in the Project Veritas Exposed site is going undercover for O’Keefe—Donald Trump is on the list because his foundation made contributions to Project Veritas, for example. But Windsor says everyone listed on the site has documented professional ties with O’Keefe or Project Veritas.

While O’Keefe has pulled off a number of noteworthy successes since he entered the public consciousness with his 2009 sting against liberal community group ACORN, some of his other efforts have blown up in spectacular fashion.

Those failures are often because his operatives were outed in advance, either by their targets or by someone within Project Veritas. In 2010, O’Keefe tried to lure a CNN reporter onto a boat filled with sex toys (it’s a long story), only to have a Project Veritas staffer alert his target before the sting could take place. And in 2016, O’Keefe inadvertently self-sabotaged by accidentally leaving a voicemail detailing a sting during a phone call with one of his targets.

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Increasingly, though, groups targeted by Project Veritas are launching counter-stings of their own. Last year, *The Washington Post* busted an O’Keefe operative who had approached the paper claiming to be a victim of molestation by then-Republican Senate candidate Roy Moore. The O’Keefe associate kept repositioning the hidden camera in her bag during one meeting with a *Post* reporter—unaware that she was filmed by the *Post*’s own hidden camera a few tables away.

Windsor’s data-gathering on O’Keefe’s crew saw its first public success in January 2017, when anti-Trump activist Ryan Clayton, using a tip from Windsor, began a counter-sting against an O’Keefe operative. Clayton eventually filmed the O’Keefe associate unrolling the scheme he was supposed to be caught on tape agreeing to: offering large sums of money in exchange for disrupting the Trump inauguration. When confronted, the O’Keefe staffer fled, saying she wanted a lawyer.

Windsor, now the executive director of American Family Voices, a progressive nonprofit, said she fields dozens of requests a week from liberal groups who think their latest intern or potential donor could actually be working for O’Keefe. Her top piece of advice: Be wary of little-known donors suddenly offering large sums of money.

“If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is,” Windsor said.

With O’Keefe’s sting on Democracy Partners now the subject of a lawsuit, Windsor doubts O’Keefe launch a sting against her. But then, she reconsiders: “I wouldn’t put anything past James O’Keefe.”