

# Far-Right Infiltrators and Agitators in George Floyd Protests: Indicators of White Supremacists

[justsecurity.org/70497/far-right-infiltrators-and-agitators-in-george-floyd-protests-indicators-of-white-supremacists/](https://justsecurity.org/70497/far-right-infiltrators-and-agitators-in-george-floyd-protests-indicators-of-white-supremacists/)

By Mia Bloom

May 30, 2020



When anyone studies the Middle East for as long as I have, you become practically immune to conspiracy theories. The word in Arabic “muamarrat” is pervasive and after hearing my whole adult life about the hidden forces behind various catastrophes one automatically winces when someone tries to push *the real story* they heard somewhere or saw on social media.

The protests that have torn through the United States, following the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minnesota police officers, shift the emphasis in real time videos broadcast nationally. The images challenge our beliefs about **who is really protesting and for what reason**.

## Minneapolis

Minnesota Governor Tim Walz echoed this sentiment in a press conference on Saturday alleging that the demonstrations that caused so much damage included provocateurs, likely from outside the area. State officials said around 80 percent of those arrested in the Twin Cities on Friday were from outside Minnesota. Former FBI agent and CNN commentator, Josh Campbell wrote, that Minnesota “authorities have been monitoring alleged criminals

online, including postings by suspected white supremacists trying to incite violence.”

Before the rioting started in Washington DC, Brooklyn, Denver, Atlanta, and other cities, allegations emerged that undercover police officers might be to blame for some of the worst commercial destruction in Minneapolis. Experts on political violence (and not just Qanon conspiracy theorists) shared stories on social media that the May 27 looting and arson at AutoZone by an unidentified man in a gas mask carrying an open umbrella (dubbed #umbrellaman) was not necessarily a protester but could be an agent provocateur or member of the police. In video posted to YouTube, while this man smashed windows with a hammer, protesters at the scene accused him of being an outsider and began to film him.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/qv-O4rnUToU>

According to reporting in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, “The man’s actions were so odd that other rioters in the area paused their own protests to call him out and began filming. “Are you a f—ing cop?” someone else can be heard yelling to the man as he disappeared from view.”

People in St Paul (including someone saying they are a former fiancé) claimed to have identified #umbrellaman as Jacob Pederson, a member of the St. Paul police whose goal would appear to be to exacerbate racial tensions and instigate more property damage in order to undermine the legitimacy of the protests against police brutality. However, the Saint Paul Police Department issued an unequivocal statement saying the individual was not Pederson, and told reporters that Pederson had a complete alibi. “We spoke with his supervisor, who was with him. We spoke to his colleagues, who were with him,” said Steve

Linders, public information officer for the St. Paul Police Department. “We were able to verify where the officer was and who he was with. In fact, he was working, as a Saint Paul police officer, protecting people and property.”

## Atlanta

In Atlanta, the demonstrations began in the early afternoon and started out largely peaceful. Legendary civil rights leader John Lewis marched alongside a diverse group shouting slogans and the names of African Americans killed by police violence. I would have attended myself except for a global pandemic (which has also impacted the African American community at a disproportionate rate). Instead I followed along the peaceful march with my friend Shannon who attended with her children.

It appears that over the hours the demographics of the demonstration changed in real time in front of the cameras. What began in Atlanta was a protest to honor the memory of George Floyd and make a powerful statement about continued police brutality across the country, and more locally in Brunswick, Georgia. In February while jogging, Ahmaud Arbery was murdered by a retired police officer, Gregory McMichael and his son Travis. The case took over two months to come to light because law enforcement officers in Brunswick refused to bring charges and once the video of the lynching was posted to social media, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation took action.

By 7 PM the Atlanta protesters appear to have been joined by elements who had an ulterior motive. What explains the attack on the CNN building that Friday evening?

Glass getting broken outside the main entrance to CNN's Atlanta headquarters; protesters cheer [pic.twitter.com/EToiEj5Pom](https://pic.twitter.com/EToiEj5Pom)

— Fernando Alfonso III (@fernalfonso) May 29, 2020

That morning, the protests were galvanized further by the arrest of Omar Jemenez, a CNN reporter live on air, while his Caucasian colleague, Josh Campbell, two blocks away was not. White anchors said what people of color has been saying for years: that driving while black, jogging while black, reporting while black, bird watching while black, selling lemonade while black was perceived to be a threat by racists. At the hands of police with the power to arrest and kill (and not arrest the lynchers), this was the weaponization of race.

CNN became a target of right wing attacks on social media more so than usual on Friday. While some claim that the demonstrators were attacking CNN because there is a small Atlanta Police Department station inside the building, it is at the back of the building and has a different entrance. The attacks on the iconic red letter sign, and what the demonstrators were saying (and NOT saying) did not correspond with demonstrations in the other cities. Unlike earlier in the day at the protest with John Lewis, these protesters

were not calling out the names of victims of police brutality: George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile (the list goes on).

## **Right-wing extremists and accelerationists**

The demographics of a largely white, young, and destructive group fit more with a movement known as accelerationists than Black Lives Matter.

The accelerationists, if you have never heard the term, are an extreme subset of white nationalism whose goal is to bring about chaos and destruction. The basic tenet of accelerationism argues that since Western governments are inherently corrupt, the best (and only) thing supremacists can do is to accelerate the end of society by sowing chaos and aggravating political tensions. “Accelerationist ideas have been cited in mass shooters’ manifestos — explicitly, in the case of the New Zealand killer — and are frequently referenced in white supremacist web forums and chat rooms,” Zack Beauchamp explained.

White Supremacists pretending to host a protest to honor Floyd George on Facebook to whip up violence in San Diego were posted on the BLMSD social media warning people not to go and that it was a white supremacist organized rally. People attending demonstrations remarked on the fact that the demographics were wrong, in places like Oakland where the majority of the destruction was perpetrated by young Caucasian men has inspired not just people on social media but reporting in the mainstream media to properly question whether this is a form of infiltration by outside extremist elements.

My heart hurts watching this. I don't know what their motive is or who organized these white people to come out, but they don't care about us. That one woman is about to burst into tears and they won't even look at her... [pic.twitter.com/35Hz5ldAaC](https://pic.twitter.com/35Hz5ldAaC)

— [JIMBlack](#) [HTAziz](#) [NGaNANsi](#) [TT](#) (@Freeyourmindkid) May 30, 2020

A report by Vice News about right-wing infiltrators in the protests notes “hardcore ‘accelerationists’ ... are encouraging their neo-Nazi followers to go to the protests and carry out acts of violence against black people.”

Accelerationists follow the blueprint laid out by neo-Nazi James Mason in *The Siege* (not the film with Denzel Washington) whose writing inspires Charles Manson types of killing sprees. Mason, living in obscurity in Denver until he was brought out of retirement by Atomwaffen, a right wing Neo Nazi group. The goal of accelerationism is to burn everything down and to use violence both to target enemies and instigate an overt and extreme response from the government. Their strategy echoes Gustavo Gorriti’s writings about the Shining Path terrorist group that the movement’s “goal was to provoke blind,

excessive reactions from the state... Blows laid on indiscriminately would also provoke among those unjustly or disproportionately affected an intense resentment of the government.”

Similarly accelerationists hope to “demolish the state apparatus that stands between them and a white-dominated future.” And the White Supremacists here could be of a different orientation too – organized to discredit the protestors with no clear or deliberate vision for greater political change in mind.

Bellingcat has documented the involvement in the protests of a largely white, and far-right movement called the Boogaloo, whose leaders “expect, even hope, that the warmer weather will bring armed confrontations with law enforcement, and will build momentum towards a new civil war in the United States.” “As protests over the death of George Floyd heated up in Minneapolis on May 26th, members of Boogaloo groups across Facebook considered it a call to arms,” wrote Bellingcat’s Robert Evans.

On Twitter, Evans has said he does not think the Boogaloo group is behind the destruction of property. Vice News’ Tess Owen wrote about the Bugaloo Bois, anti-government extremists recognizable by their Hawaiian shirts, that “in addition to their physical presence at the protests, the #boogaloo hashtag on social media has been flooded with memes in the last couple days egging on violence, and talking about how they hope this is the beginning of a civil war.”

Sounds like a subplot of the X files, sounds unlikely, or too conspiratorial...maybe. But recall the Russian Internet Agency posted ads and pages for demonstrations for Black Lives Matter as well as Pro Trump anti immigrant groups on Facebook in the months leading up to the 2016 election. The protests have changed the national conversation from over 100,000 dead and counting to rising violence and chaos on American streets. Tossing gasoline onto an already explosive situation, President Donald Trump tweeted and posted on Facebook about the George Floyd protests, including one in which the president warned, “when the looting starts, the shooting starts.” The president tried to walk back the tweet later saying he had no idea of the racist use of that phrase to support extrajudicial killings by police. Yet he can’t deny that several hours after experts pointed out the origins and meaning of the phrase, the official White House twitter account reposted Trump’s statement. Then on Saturday, the president retweeted a post saying, “In an ironic twist of fate, CNN HQ is being attacked by the very riots they promoted as noble & just.”

It is worth reiterating what Loren DeJonge Schulman argued, that even if the protests include outsider participation to foment chaos and spark an overreaction it doesn’t mean that the driving sentiment launched by these protests should be minimized or ignored.

If the protests are being infiltrated by police provocateurs, accelerationists or other bad actors, we can expect a lot more violence in the lead up to the 2020 election.