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The Associated Press State &amp; Local Wire

September 24, 2009 Thursday 3:21 AM GMT

## How the ACORN 'pimp and hooker' videos came to be

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**SECTION:** STATE AND REGIONAL

**LENGTH:** 2018 words

**DATELINE:** LOS ANGELES

Much of America discovered James O'Keefe III and Hannah Giles through their hidden-camera, make-believe pimp and prostitute videos of ACORN employees giving advice about establishing a brothel with underage hookers.

But as far back as 2006 well before the videos became a national sensation and conservative rallying cry the fresh-faced O'Keefe and Giles connected with a pair of Washington conservative institutions that boast programs training ideological journalists.

Now, due to coordinated promotion of the undercover sting footage by influential players in the conservative media, Giles and O'Keefe have gone from part of the pack to movement superstars.

Giles, a 20-year-old sophomore at Florida International University, spent the summer on a \$1,200-a-month internship with the National Journalism Center, a training organization whose alumni include conservative commentator Ann Coulter. Immediately after graduating Rutgers University in 2006, O'Keefe, 25, was paid to set up magazines and newspapers on university campuses for the Leadership Institute, which recruits potential conservative public policy and media stars.

Each has other credentials that place them squarely in the network of activists who believe liberal-leaning mainstream media willfully ignore stories that illustrate the failings of the political left and its leaders.

O'Keefe and Giles insist that no one helped them conceive, execute or finance their video project, which with remarkable speed has devastated the activist community service group Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, commonly known as ACORN.

They have said a shoestring \$1,300 budget was all it took to shoot video in at least five ACORN offices.

In the footage, workers at various ACORN offices advise Giles to list her occupation on financial documents as "freelancer," "performance artist" or "entertainer" instead of prostitute, offer tips on how to claim the underage girls who were to be trafficked in from Central America as dependents on her tax return, and give their opinion on the best place to illegally cross the U.S.-Mexico border.

There's no proof of a coordinated effort to commission the project, but O'Keefe and Giles did discuss it with several conservative activists starting at least a month before its Sept. 10 premiere. One key result of those discussions was phenomenal promotion.

The mastermind behind the release strategy was Andrew Breitbart a Web impresario, Washington Times columnist and critic of Hollywood liberalism who was readying the launch of a new Web site, biggovernment.com.

O'Keefe approached Breitbart with his video; Breitbart said he shopped the material to a prominent network news personality at least a week before the eventual launch, but was told the network would never air it because of the politics behind it. He said he then gave Fox News the exclusive.

"I wanted maximum exposure and so I knew that I held powerful documented evidence, and I shared it with those that over time I recognized as truth tellers," Breitbart told The Associated Press.

Along the way, he said, he showed the footage to about a dozen people, including Fox talk show host Glenn Beck.

"I let people in conservative talk radio witness it, and I knew that they would think it was newsworthy," he said, adding he also showed it to some liberals "who were freaking out."

During an interview of Giles on Sept. 10, the day the first video was posted on biggovernment.com, Beck said he had seen footage Sept. 5.

Through a spokesman, Beck and his production company declined comment on any possible role in orchestrating the story's roll-out. Michael Clemente, senior vice president of news at Fox News, said through a spokeswoman that he would not discuss how Fox got the videos because that would reflect editorial process. He did say that "Fox was not involved in the shooting or releasing of any of the videos," and did not pay to make or air them.

With the images heavily played and plugged on the cable network as "breaking news," biggovernment.com temporarily crashed from all the traffic that first day so, Breitbart said, O'Keefe referred readers through a Tweet to YouTube, where the video was already hosted, and it went viral from there.

Fox's continuing coverage made the story a cause celebre. Day after day, it delivered new footage from a different ACORN office the initial splash from a visit in Baltimore, then Washington, D.C., Brooklyn, San Bernardino, Calif., and San Diego.

The fallout was swift for an organization that long has been a target of conservatives, who've cited charges including voter registration fraud and misuse of public money. Congress has cut funds to ACORN, the Census Bureau cut its ties, and President Barack Obama, who once represented the group as a young lawyer, said it deserves to be investigated.

The IRS said Wednesday it cut its ties with the group, but ACORN said it had already suspended its tax program.

ACORN has also fired several of the employees, whom it described as not representative of important work it does for low-income families nationwide; ordered additional organization-wide training; suspended its housing assistance programs; and appointed a former Massachusetts attorney general to independently audit its operations. On Wednesday it sued O'Keefe, Giles and Breitbart over the Baltimore video, saying Maryland law requires consent to create sound recordings.

Brian Kettenring, deputy director of national operations for ACORN, contended that conservative media, including Fox, was behind the project.

"O'Keefe and Giles try to make it sound as if they concocted their sordid video scheme on a whim as if they had no major backers," Kettenring said. "ACORN's lawsuit will smoke out the true motives and conservative money behind these attacks on a community organization that works to better the lives of ordinary Americans every day."

O'Keefe and Giles, neither of whom responded to multiple interview requests from the AP, said during appearances on Fox that they were not kicked out of any ACORN office.

ACORN says it kicked the pair out of its Philadelphia office and furnished a police report that said O'Keefe had been "causing a verbal disturbance with employees," but had departed by the time the officer arrived.

Giles told Beck in her first interview that she concocted the undercover video plan after taking a wrong turn during a jog in May, soon after arriving in Washington.

Her running route that day led her past the Washington office of ACORN, a group which, according to one mentor, she had read about but had not researched extensively.

"I was like, you know, I'd never seen them before. I don't like them," Giles told Beck. "And I came up with the idea."

The premise was that she would walk in dressed as a prostitute and see whether ACORN would help her get a house and start an enterprise involving girls as young as 13 from El Salvador. She contacted O'Keefe, whom she had not met personally but whom she knew of for at least a year.

In a September 2008 column for townhall.com, a clearinghouse for conservative news and opinion where Giles is an occasional columnist, she described her admiration of O'Keefe's activism. She cited his work surreptitiously taping phone calls with staff at Planned Parenthood clinics, who entertained and, in some cases, accepted his proposition of giving money as long as it was used for black women to get abortions.

Giles and O'Keefe first met in person the day before making their first ACORN video, according to Richard W. Rahn, a free market advocate at the libertarian Cato Institute and an economics columnist for the Washington Times who mentored Giles during her summer.

Rahn had met Giles through a mutual friend of her father and helped her, treating her to a few meals and generally helping her talk through the policy issues she was tackling. He described Giles as personable, energetic and poised, someone who "had read up quite a bit on" ACORN's past troubles and devised the video project on her own.

Giles was paid for her internship at the National Journalism Center, which she got in part because she had attended for three years conferences held by the center's parent organization, the Young America's Foundation, a group focused on teen and twentysomething conservatives.

But much of Giles' time was spent at an unpaid internship Rahn helped arrange at the Center for Freedom and Prosperity, a think tank focused on lowering taxes.

Giles served as a legislative assistant, attending Capitol Hill briefing sessions and researching arcane tax issues.

"Let's see if she could sink or she could swim" was the approach, said the center's president, Andrew F. Quinlan. "She wasn't doing the butterfly, but she wasn't drowning."

Quinlan said he knew little about Giles' ACORN project until her departure breakfast at an IHOP on Aug. 7. "Hannah did tell me about what she was doing. At the time everything was private and hush hush," he said.

Giles' father, Doug a pastor at the Miami-area Clash Church and a conservative commentator wrote in a townhall.com column that he gave no money to the project and Fox paid only for hotels and airfare when his daughter and O'Keefe were interviewed.

"Having my kid dress like a hooker and infiltrate such a place is not in my repertoire," Doug Giles wrote. "That was Hannah's baby from start to finish."

O'Keefe's story has become familiar to those following the ACORN saga: The self-described skinny nerd has a taste for the absurd; he delights in turning the tactics of liberal community organizers against them; the crowning touch on O'Keefe's pimp getup was his grandmother's chinchilla shoulder throw. He is now a student at Fordham University's graduate business program in Manhattan, though not taking classes this semester, according to the school.

Though he has said he has no formal training as a journalist, O'Keefe helped found a conservative monthly journal called The Centurion as an undergraduate at Rutgers, an hour's drive south from his family's home in the comfortable suburb of Westwood, N.J.

The magazine soon landed a \$500 "balance in media" grant from the Leadership Institute, according to Morton C. Blackwell, the organization's president. After graduating in 2006 with a degree in philosophy, O'Keefe went to work for the institute in Northern Virginia. As a student publication school coordinator, he traveled the country helping establish conservative campus magazines and newspapers.

One such success was an anti-abortion magazine at UCLA called Live Action's The Advocate founded by then-freshman Lila Rose. O'Keefe's work with Rose against Planned Parenthood in 2007 which included recording staff's willingness to let him donate only for black women to get abortions eventually prompted Blackwell to ask O'Keefe to leave the institute, according to Blackwell.

Blackwell said that while he supported O'Keefe's work to "expose the absurdities and illegalities of the left," he was concerned the projects could be interpreted as advocacy that would risk the institute's tax-exempt status.

So after just a year, O'Keefe left and started putting together videos lampooning everything from the bailout of financial giants to the willingness of some passers-by to become pen pals with accused terrorists held at Guantanamo Bay.

Breitbart said he learned of O'Keefe's work from Maura Flynn the wife of biggovernment.com editor-in-chief Mike Flynn, and an assistant producer of the 2004 film "Michael Moore Hates America."

Breitbart said that on Aug. 7, he greeted O'Keefe at his Los Angeles home, went into his basement office and watched the Baltimore footage on O'Keefe's laptop. He wanted to see more.

After O'Keefe sent the Washington and San Bernardino videos, Breitbart concluded it was a natural fit to launch his new site.

Now, biggovernment.com is a go-to Web site for political junkies, O'Keefe is under contract there and ACORN, long a resilient target of many conservatives, is wobbling.

Associated Press researcher Monika Mathur in New York, and AP Writers Victor Epstein in Westwood, N.J., and Ben Nuckols in Baltimore contributed to this report.

**LOAD-DATE:** September 24, 2009

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Newswire

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