

WATERS

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Los Angeles Poverty Department

⋮ **AGENTS & ASSETS**

JOHN MALPEDE

Founded 17 years ago in L.A., the Los Angeles Poverty Department has become one of the country's most outspoken and profound Theater troupes.¹

—Natalie Haddad

¹ Natalie Haddad, *Real Detroit*
(October 16, 2002).

*A scene from the 2002
performance of Agents &
Assets in Detroit.
Photo © Sjoerd Wagenaar.*

The Los Angeles Poverty Department theater group (LAPD) conducted a month-long residency project in Detroit, during which six members of LAPD worked with eight Detroit residents whose communities had been heavily impacted by drugs and drug policy. Together, they produced *Agents & Assets*, a play that investigates the advent of the United States crack epidemic. In 2002, LAPD Director John Malpede made two visits to Detroit to plan the project. The first was a three-day visit in April and the second was a month-long stay in August, during which arrangements for all aspects of the residency project (from housing and publicity strategy to casting and community partnerships) were finalized and implemented. The month-long residency culminated in four performances and post-show discussions in October 2002.

Each performance was followed by a discussion of drug policy and approaches to recovery from addiction, including different models and metaphors (the current prohibition and military models, as well as proposed public health models that emphasize treatment



A scene from the 2002 performance of Agents & Assets in Detroit.
Photo © Sjoerd Wagenaar.

rather than incarceration) for dealing with the ravages of drugs and drug addiction. Each post-show public forum started with presentations from scholars, recovery professionals, drug policy reform advocates, community leaders, and politicians. These forums led to general discussions with the input of audience members. The emphasis was to create an atmosphere in which all present could speak as citizens on an even footing.

Agents & Assets (which LAPD had originally developed and mounted in Los Angeles in 2001), was recast with a combination of LAPD members and Detroit residents from communities that had been heavily impacted by drugs and drug policy. The project was conceived in this way as a means of achieving significant local community involvement in the production and the post-show discussions, and of increasing community involvement in the issues raised. These goals were achieved by the project, which attracted a diverse audience that included significant involvement and representation from the recovery community, the Detroit theater and arts community, drug policy activists, students, community residents from the Cass Corridor area of Detroit, peace activists, and others concerned with the issues presented in the play and post-show discussions. The project galvanized relationships among people active in arts, drug policy reform advocates, drug recovery program participants, and professionals in Detroit.

COLLABORATORS AND PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS

LAPD partnered with the Prison Creative Arts Program (PCAP); Urban Community Visionaries of the First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit; and Mariner's Inn, a non-profit drug rehabilitation program in the heart of inner-city Detroit (the Cass corridor). Five of the eight Detroit cast members were program participants and staff members

(who were themselves program graduates) from Mariner's Inn. LAPD continued to work with Peter Sellars' producing group, Old Stories: New Lives, which had co-produced the public conversations and panels in the original LA production of *Agents & Assets*. Old Stories: New Lives provided administrative support and creative input into the construction of the public discussions, and Sellars was a panelist on the rhetoric of war panel. PCAP worked with LAPD in constructing the panels and involved Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) and Citizens Alliance on Prisons & Public Spending (CAPPs) in the planning process as well. LAPD Producer Ron Allen worked with Urban Community Visionaries to create an ongoing dialogue with Malpede in the discussions leading to the formulation and construction of the panels and public conversations. The result was a profound series of public conversations that convened speakers and topics for discussion that has particular resonance in the host community and provided audiences with a broad context for discussing current as well as alternative policies.

Speakers included:

- Jeff Edison, attorney, Detroit Lawyers Guild
- Felix Sirls, public health professional and Minority Aids Outreach Program coordinator, City of Detroit Health Department
- Jo Ann Watson, Michigan Drug Policy Reform
- Maureen Taylor, Detroit Welfare Rights
- Ed Gardin, staff counselor, Sobriety House
- Dawood Muhammad, minister, Nation of Islam
- Amanda Brazel, Students of Sane Drug Policy
- Chris Parks, University of Detroit, director of NRO, a nonresidential drug rehabilitation program, and specialist on arts in drug recovery

Panel moderators included:

- Ron Allen and Gwen Winston, Urban Community Visionaries
- Nkenge Zola, journalist and former Detroit NPR newscaster
- Alfred J. McCoy, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin and author of *The Politics of Heroin*
- Regina Schwartz, professor of Comparative Literature at Northwestern University and the author of *The Curse of Cain*
- Peter Sellars, theater and arts festival director and frequent critic of current drug and social policies

Partnering organizations provided enormous support in all aspects of the project, contributing to its success and its impact on the local Detroit community. PCAP provided in-kind housing during extensive organizational visits to Detroit to plan the residency, and its leaders—Buzz Alexander, Janie Paul, and Gillian Eaton—made numerous introductions that facilitated the production of the show and the public conversations. Eaton introduced LAPD to Allen, the community minister of the Unitarian-Universalist Church and a member of Urban Community Visionaries, which became our co-producers of the project. We rehearsed at the Unitarian Church and performed in the church's beautiful and imposing sanctuary. Eaton also introduced LAPD to Shawn Nethercott of Matrix

...Malpede told prospective cast members that from his point of view, "...everyone has a unique and valuable energy—and can be profound and beautiful in performance."

Theater, who provided in-kind set materials for the production as well as extensive assistance in promoting the production by e-mail. She also invited LAPD to speak at an anti-war convocation at her church. Eaton also provided assistance with the in-kind donation of props and a luncheon for one of our guest panelists through the theater department of Wayne State University. LAPD, in turn, was able to arrange for PCAP to use Zeitgeist Theater's mailing list, which Zeitgeist provided for us as an in-kind marketing contribution. Alexander made introductions to Penny Ryder of CAPPs and Laura Sager of FAMP, who advised us in determining the issues to be addressed in the public conversations, provided contacts and recommendations for speakers, and assisted us in gathering an audience for the events. We introduced Alexander and PCAP to Deborah Wright of Drug Policy Forum of Michigan, a sponsor of the treatment versus incarceration initiative that they were attempting to place on the November 5 ballot. PCAP and Michigan Drug Policy Reform intend to develop this new link in their ongoing work in Michigan for drug policy and penal reform. Allen worked closely with LAPD as the local producer of the event.

INCLUSION OF LOCAL PERFORMERS IMPACTED BY DRUG PROBLEMS AND POLICY

Poet and playwright Allen conducts art and self-esteem workshops regularly at two drug recovery centers—Mariner's Inn and Sobriety House. He immediately grasped the importance of our project to his community and mobilized his great variety of community contacts in producing the project. This included generating the partnership with Mariner's Inn. LAPD worked closely with Mariner's Inn in realizing the project, and its contributions were many. Five cast members were Mariner's Inn program participants and graduates (including two program graduates now on staff at Mariner's Inn). Mariner's Inn provided in-kind rehearsal time, staff time, use of copy machines, tables and chairs for the sets, some costume pieces for the cast, and transportation for other set pieces. They also provided a crew to run the show.

Malpede directed the performance project and Henriette Brouwers performed and worked as assistant director. LAPD core company members Rickey Mantley, Melina Bielefeld, Alexander Anderson, and Tony Parker also performed in the show. The LAPD company members worked one-on-one with the eight Detroit cast members in developing their parts in the show. Mantley and Anderson led performance workshops for members of drug recovery programs at Mariner's Inn and Sobriety House; Anderson led LAPD's extensive outreach to 12 recovery meetings and university groups in central Detroit; Mantley led outreach to the social justice community; and Parker led outreach to other community-based artists. In addition to the five members from Mariner's Inn recovery program, the cast included Therese Blanco, Elana Elyce, and Nelson Jones—all veteran performers who were themselves from communities significantly impacted by drugs and drug policy.

At Mariner's Inn, Malpede and Allen conducted auditions—invitations to people in the recovery program to get involved with the project as actors. At the auditions, Malpede told prospective cast members that from his point of view, "...everyone has a unique and valuable energy—and can be profound and beautiful in performance."

Arthur Doster came reluctantly to the interview. A former professional football player, he is a big man with an unusually gentle nature. He is also dyslexic. He had a very difficult time doing a cold reading from the script, but the energy that he brought to the reading was beautiful. He was ambivalent about being in the piece, but he did feel that once he'd learned his text he'd do okay. Malpede strongly encouraged him to continue, telling him how special he found Doster's energy to be. Malpede expressed total confidence that Doster would do a great job. And he did. At the end of the performances he was hugely proud of himself and was looking forward to future theatrical opportunities.

The project was a catalyst for new initiatives among our partners in Detroit, even among those who already were in contact with one another. One outcome was the beginning of a recovery theater, a group comprising people in recovery in Detroit who will work together to learn theater craft and develop and present theater within inner-city Detroit. Allen was inspired to start Artists in Recovery after the residency. He plans to work with people who have been in recovery for a year or more to create and produce theater projects. This involves taking the recovery workshops much more seriously, because he and the workshop members will be presenting their work to the public.

The LAPD residency also resulted in the Drug Policy Forum of Michigan initiating an ongoing series of community dinners at the Unitarian-Universalist Church, co-hosted by Urban Community Visionaries. Through these dinners, the Drug Policy Forum of Michigan intends to include and involve a greater number of community members from communities severely impacted by drugs and drug policy in their organizing efforts. In an evaluative discussion months after the event, Wright said, "We started our dinner and dialogue meetings. This happened as a result of coming to the play. We invited people from the community to come in and talk about the issues and get involved in our ongoing activities. *Agents & Assets* was a great way of getting beyond us policy people just talking to ourselves—the play was a great way to reach out to and involve community members."

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ASSESSING IMPACT

LAPD developed a series of follow-up questions to assess the impact of *Agents & Assets*, including the performances, public discussions, and strategies employed in building these events.

I. Was the event effective in reaching new people? Did it reach new people regarding the issues of the war on drug and drug policy reform?

The residency succeeded in reaching a very wide range of people. I had discussion with various people in the audience and particularly Wayne State theater students, art students, and students from the engineering school. They hadn't been political and they found the evening to be truly eye opening.

—Gillian Eaton, PCAP and theater faculty at Wayne State University

People were informed in new ways—getting a greater context for what's in front of their faces every day and what their communities are confronting. The panel was really effective. We wanted to invite some of the panelists to speak at some of our events.

It's something we intended to do and still want to do. The LAPD project definitely reinforced the sense of what a resource the Unitarian-Universalist Church is and Ron Allen also. Your project gave us new Detroit contacts and reinforced our previous Detroit contacts. It definitely added a Detroit dimension.

—Buzz Alexander, Director, PCAP

The whole notion of the draconian nature of the drug laws and the fact that Detroit residents have been the recipients of these highly punitive laws was important.

As I said in my one-line biography in the program for the performances, "I thought I didn't care but I do." When I entered into the project, I thought I was just doing a job. As I worked, I was really impressed and moved by the efforts and the accomplishments of the others in the piece—especially the cast members from Mariner's Inn, who had never acted before. They had so much heart. It became a beautiful opportunity for me to contribute to the community. These people were trying to pull themselves up, recover from drugs, and get jobs and apartments. They were sweet, sweet people. I discovered that I enjoyed working with them and helping them develop their parts. I discovered that we were doing something really important and that my character, Maxine Waters, had something really important to say.

—Elana Elyce, Detroit actress who played Representative Maxine Waters

We got more people involved in and informed about the issues—people who were unaware, or had only a vague idea of the rationale behind drug policy and the drug issue. We alerted them to a vast, deep, complex issue and how people of color, especially minorities, are affected. We brought home who these policies target and how much havoc they've wreaked in our communities. Some of these new people were in recovery, who came in large numbers from Mariner's Inn, Sobriety House, and



A scene from the 2002 performance of Agents & Assets in Detroit.

Photo © Sjoerd Wagenaar.

Alexander's Outreach to Narcotics Anonymous meetings. Also, theater people and college theater students from Wayne State came—a whole new audience of people who were getting into the issues.

—Rickey Mantley, LAPD core member who played CIA Lawyer Fred Hitz

2. Did it get more people involved in the issues and mobilize them for change?

It gave myself and the other drug reform activists that I work with new ideas of how to engage people about the subject. Also, it was energizing, and a boost to our efforts, because there were people from LA also concerned about and working on the same issues. It was refreshing and gave us a tangible experience of being part of a national effort to reform drug policy—something we, of course, knew we were a part of. But, with the freshness of the LAPD approach, we felt supported, that's for sure. It was great to make links nationally.

—Deborah Wright, Drug Policy Forum of Michigan

In February 2003, I did one of the Lysistrata² project readings: 850 people in the audience and 70 actors onstage. At that moment there was an awareness of lies that were told by government. That was an important door that had been opened by LAPD.

—Gillian Eaton

3. Did the strategy of the event succeed in bringing media attention to the issues? And in particular did it inject different points of view into the media coverage that it did generate?

I don't think there had been any media coverage of the issue—the CIA involvement issue and the direct link of the fallout for Detroit. The Metro Times article stimulated a lot of interest. There is a shift in consciousness in the community. The whole notion of the draconian nature of the drug laws and the fact that Detroit residents have been the recipients of these highly punitive laws was important. And the use of the word "war" that you brought to everybody's attention—how the war on drugs really is a war, not just rhetoric, but a war on whole communities—that really illuminated things and created much greater awareness, as well as how you made the links between wars—the drug war, the war on terror, and the impending war in Iraq.

—Gillian Eaton

The Michigan Chronicle, Real Detroit, the Michigan Citizen, public radio, Jo Ann Watson's show—the media coverage was substantial in the minority and alternative press, not so much in the mainstream media.

—Ron Allen, venue producer,
Urban Community Visionaries, First Unitarian Universalist Church of Detroit

I think it did. There were many articles and they wrote significantly of the issues within these articles. It did interject different points of view into the media, because they interviewed the cast, people who had been victimized by the drug war, and people from different parts of the county.

—Henriette Brouwers, assistant director and cast member

The readings were organized by the Lysistrata Project, which began in the wake of 9/11. It is dedicated to bridging the spiritual, social activist, and women's communities, and humanizing the global agenda. www.lysistrataproject.org

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4. Did the structure of the organizing process and the event succeed in convening people from different strata and perspectives? Did it succeed in creating a situation where they could talk on an even footing?

The place was very safe. There were very different people present on different nights.

—Gillian Eaton

The organizing process consisted of contacting people, attending events, and passing out flyers. We got a good response from progressive, liberal people. Going to peace demonstrations was very effective. Mariner's Inn also reached out to other rehabilitation centers—people impacted by the drug issue—and they responded. Buzz Alexander and I did workshops at Mariner's Inn and got a positive response. They were on the bottom end—we alerted them to bigger picture they didn't know about. We were very effective in outreach and organizing among those people. Yes, everyone could talk on equal footing: at forums and in the workshops we talked about why we were here, dramatizing the hearings. They said, "Ya, we knew there was some governmental complicity on some level. This play let it be known that there was some kind of access facilitated at the highest levels of government: gun dealing for Contras. It seeped into our community and I'm a victim of it." People there understood that there was something going on, a big social thing, that had effected them personally. Someone targeted our community. It wasn't an accident that minority communities were affected. We could have reached out in a more organized way to the downtown business community.

—Rickey Mantley

"The drug policies we have in place are wrong, wrong headed, discriminatory. Now that I'm informed, I have an obligation to speak out."

Theater people (Matrix Theater, college theater students); drug rehabilitation people; politicians and activists; other artists (Tyree Guyton, others); church people—Unitarian, Catholic, etc.—union people; peace activists—all were present. Even footing: yes, especially because the panels had so many known community people and important topics. People came because of what each panel subject might be and then the floor was open and there was a real discussion.

—Ron Allen

5. Did people involved leave feeling more like citizens—that there was a place for their voice to be heard and to make a difference in making social policy?

I think they definitely felt they could speak. I'm not sure they felt like they could make any change. They were informed. Unfortunately, it made them more angry. I'm skeptical that they feel empowered because of how overwhelming it all is. But being an informed person who feels impotent is different than being an uninformed person who feels impotent. Some of my students had an awakening to activism in art and this first happened as a result of their being present at Agents & Assets. For the first time, they could see a correlation between their business in theater, being an actor or director, and their activist life. I was thrilled about that.

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Many people shared information and announced other actions and events—a network was being created during the public discussions. They used it as a platform for what they were working on.

—Henriette Brouwers

“...because it’s theater, it’s a different form for activism to take. It presents the issues in a fresh way and allows for everyone to reassess their views and strategies.”

After the discussion, people were sort of galvanized, politicized. They were aware that there was more to the drug problem than met the eye. It became apparent that the government and current drug policy just focus on the arrest of users—the little guys—but don’t go after the bigger players. They wreck lives of the little people, go after the easy targets, while maintaining a policy of covering up governmental involvement. The drug policies we have in place are wrong, wrong headed, discriminatory. Now that I’m informed, I have an obligation to speak out.

—Rickey Mantley

6. Did the participating community groups build new constituencies as a result of the LAPD residency work?

I’ve been doing my community change work and that includes teaching self-esteem and poetry workshops at Mariner’s Inn and Sobriety House. At the same time, I’ve been writing my plays and having them produced at Zeitgeist Theater and elsewhere. My plays are challenging, nonconventional, definitely cutting edge in Detroit. I was really impressed by what LAPD was able to accomplish with first-time actors from Mariner’s Inn. It really made me see how I could expand my serious creative activities by bringing more of them to my community work. I saw what value it was for the people here who worked on the LAPD production, and I saw that quality work could be achieved. That’s what I want to do by working to form a Recovery Theater so that the creative work I do in a recovery setting gets out into other parts of the recovery community and beyond.

—Ron Allen

It deepened the connections. There were existing connections, but LAPD’s work deepened them in varying ways and they were all positive. LAPD’s work created an awareness that there is a community that exists and it’s not just you. Ron Allen and the church are doing their activism and community-building work; PCAP is doing our work; the peace activists are doing their work; the drug reform activists are doing theirs. LAPD brought all these people together—and people in recovery programs, community people from the Cass corridor, and Wayne State students. Suddenly, at the LAPD events it was as if all these people were rising up and being together. Because it’s so very fragmented in Detroit, LAPD was really a catalyst here. That was enormously important! Validation, unity, is what came out of LAPD’s residency work.

—Gillian Eaton

Activist groups all know about each other. There’s past history and sometimes a history of competing for scarce resources within the community. It’s good when people come in from outside and just relate to the issues. It’s pure and can reunite people. And, because it’s theater, it’s a different form for activism to take. It presents the issues in a fresh way and allows for everyone to reassess their views and strategies.

—Henriette Brouwers

Dawood Muhammad, Mariner's Inn, Sobriety House, and faith-based organizations generally do a lot of recovery work but are disconnected from the policy advocates. The project brought together faith-based, student, recovery, and civil rights groups. The project brought home how through the targeting of minority populations, drug policy as it is now is a threat to the civil rights of minority groups. John Conyer's office, Jeff Edison—they've worked in the arena of civil rights.

—Ron Allen

7. Did the theatrical component work on its own artistically—bringing in new performers and creating an artistically compelling result?

Yes definitely. I'm sure that the actors from Detroit had never done anything like that before.

—Gillian Eaton

"...it was exciting to see such a variegated cast; people from LA and Detroit, actors and nonactors, working together seamlessly and at such a high level."

The show was very professionally done, and it was exciting to see such a variegated cast; people from LA and Detroit, actors and nonactors, working together seamlessly and at such a high level. You couldn't tell who were the experienced actors and who were the first timers—that showed what a strong ensemble sense had been achieved through the rehearsal process. One of the great inspirations of this work, as always, is to see what people are capable of.

—Buzz Alexander

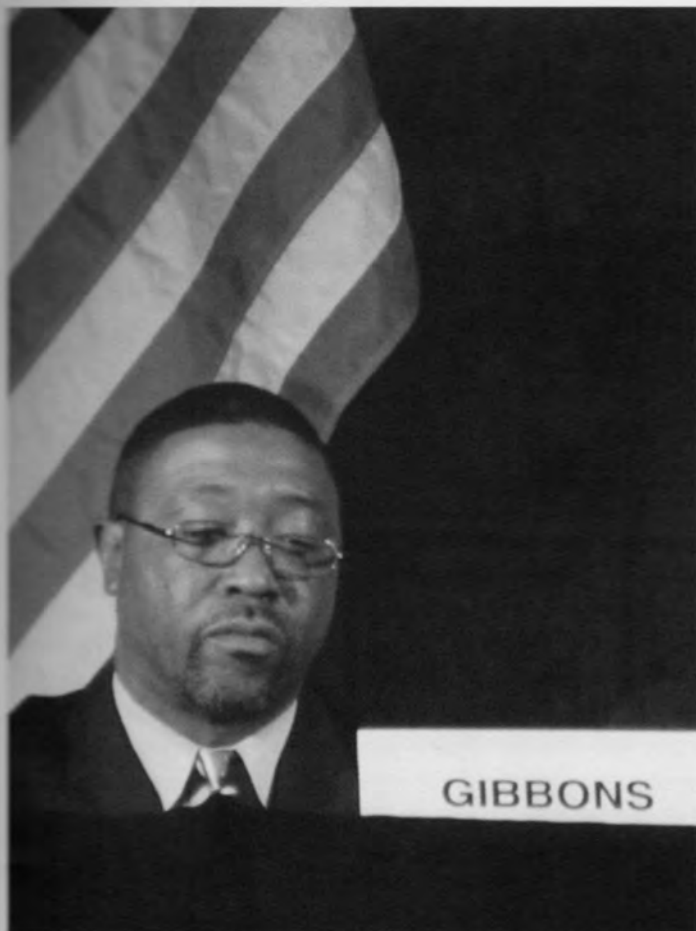
Definitely. I think the performance improved from the original LA version. Tighter, better timing. The LAPD actors had a deeper understanding of the characters they were performing and they understood more about acting. The Detroit people: three were more experienced actors. They had a real revelation that people not trained as actors could do such a great job, and the non-actors too were surprised that they could do such a good job and hold their own with pros.

For Elana, Nelson, and Teresa, it was a big discovery that what they expected to be bad community acting turned out to be very good. Also, because of the commitment of the whole group, they became dedicated to the group. And they were challenged by the text, just to deliver a performance on the par with the rest of the company. They also were educated by the subject of the performance and they began to understand what was happening in the country and to their communities. They realized they were working with victims of the war on drugs. They realized that everyone together were doing something important. And because they were more formally educated they started doing research, educating themselves, and bringing resource material to the group.

—Henriette Brouwers

I was going through a lot of difficulty at that time, and that made the show all the more important for me, because it was a good thing. People thought maybe I wasn't going to make it to the performances. The subject of the show, what the government has done to our communities, that's too important. And my character, Mr. Bishop, he had some important things to say about that, and I wasn't going to miss saying them. I knew I'd do a good job and I did.

—Michael Dabney, performer, Mariner's Inn



A scene from the 2002
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Photo © Sjoerd Wagenaar.

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I was really impressed that we were able to take dull conventional transcripts, add elements of dramatic conflict, protagonists, and antagonists and make drama. Through editing, staging, and selecting who are the heroes, we made it as compelling as the Shakespearean drama hero, villain, and chorus. That's why it worked so well. A very important social issue was dramatized in a way that it never had before. It was an artistically compelling way to stimulate discussion and change social policy. It affects many people adversely. Subtly, the play says look at what's here, what Maxine Waters found out, what Gary Webb found out, how the CIA was nevertheless exonerated, it all ties in to the larger social problem.

We should take it on the road, to as many communities as we can. The aim of the Drug Policy Forum of Michigan and the other groups is to try to change the terrible drug policies that exist in this country. The play is an important way to get people to think about what's going on. It should stir up debate in as many communities as it can. It's good theater that doesn't hurt. It's novel theater. With panel and wide-range discussion you can talk about the issues after the play.

—Rickey Mantley

Agents & Assets was a creative way to bring in normal people through the art. It was a very artistic and engaging way to present the issues—very concrete. Because it was from a government hearing, you really saw how the government functions. I learned things from the play about the policy issues, especially by combining it with the discussions. The two dimensions of the program worked very well together—each reinforced the other, the play made the discussion more important and the discussion amplified and brought home the issues raised in the play. The combination made each part more effective. It would be great to have LAPD return to Detroit.

—Deborah Wright

Also, extending the themes of discussions beyond the immediate concerns of one community generates a conversation that opens people's minds and builds the links needed to broaden the movement for change.

LESSONS LEARNED

We didn't foresee that the treatment versus the incarceration initiative would be knocked off the ballot. We timed the residency so that it would take place immediately before the November 5 election, so that our efforts could directly enter into the public discourse as people thought about how to exercise their vote. As it turned out, no one got to vote on the issue. This didn't make the issue go away, however, and all the machinations leading up to its not getting on the ballot (the elections board, the state court appeal) kept the issue in the public eye. Also, there were legislative initiatives sponsored by Representative Bill McConico in the legislature that also addressed the issue of mandatory minimums and these moved forward and were ultimately signed by Governor John Engler just before he left office in January. The passing of this legislation was helpful in returning sentencing discretion to the judiciary, but left untouched stacked sentences, life sentences, and many other areas in need of reform. Also, a similar ballot versus incarceration initiative in Florida was knocked off the ballot through bureaucratic foot dragging on the part of the state judiciary. In Ohio, the initiative was on the ballot but it was defeated due to an aggressive anti-initiative campaign led by the governor that involved dubious use of public funds and public office to unduly influence voters and the vote. What we learned from all of this is that, on the one hand, what we thought to be strategic, i.e., scheduling the residency directly in front of the vote on the initiative, was ultimately way beyond our control. On the other hand, it became clear that the issue of drug policy reform is a long, protracted struggle, involving pushing and shoving from those on both sides of the issue. But the issue is one that is building momentum in the public consciousness. This ultimately gives us more flexibility in thinking how we might contribute to the debate through our residencies. It gives us increased flexibility in thinking how we might formulate, locate, and time future residencies while still making relevant contributions to the public re-evaluation of these policy issues.

*Agents & Assets, as a play, was effective in putting into context and making the link between foreign policy and domestic policy. It achieved this through the text itself and the incidents of which it speaks, dramatic in themselves. Both the show and the panels about drug policy reform make the point that if we privilege foreign policy objectives over concerns for the citizens and specific communities in this country, people suffer greatly. To summarize, *Agents & Assets*, effectively built momentum in the public consciousness because:*

- **The message was built into the text of the play.**
- **The activist intent was built into LAPD's organizing efforts leading up to the play and panels.** LAPD did extensive outreach to and participated in anti-war organizing connected to the war on Iraq. Staff worked with drug reform activists and made presentations at drug reform events before their event. Jo Ann Watson, who interviewed Malpede on her radio program, was on one of the LAPD panels. She worked with the Michigan ballot reform people and also worked for Representative John Conyers. We met Representative Conyers at a peace rally in front of the Federal building and at the Michigan Drug Reform forum.
- **The message was amplified and expanded in the formulation of the post-performance panels and discussions.** In Detroit, LAPD worked extensively with people in the community to determine conversation topics and invite panelists who spoke to the concerns of the community. One panel was specifically formulated around the rhetoric of war and why the military metaphor "war" was used to show resolve, whether in war on terror, Iraq, drugs, or even good things like determination to ameliorate poverty. By having one conversation on this topic, LAPD expanded its audience and linked issues that were very much on everyone's mind at the time. When LAPD did *Agents & Assets* in Los Angeles, it held one panel specifically on Project Columbia. This, too, brought a somewhat different audience to the event. This discussion helped people in our community (in that case, downtown LA) understand how their suffering was linked to the suffering of others in other parts of the world. The important point to be made here is that it contributes significantly to the residency process to identify significant themes that extend the issues of the play and to structure public discussions around these themes. Also, extending the themes of discussions beyond the immediate concerns of one community generates a conversation that opens people's minds and builds the links needed to broaden the movement for change.