

What Mobile Journalism Means for Black Americans

In an age where over 80% of Americans own a smartphone with a camera, videos are unremarkable. However, in social media-based journalism, videos can become the push a movement needs to take action. Following the deaths of George Floyd, Eric Garner and Michael Brown - black men who died due to lethal police force, the videos of their struggles became a rallying point for the Black Lives Matter movement. In the summer of 2020 alone, the video of George Floyd's death and other Black Lives Matter videos were watched millions of times. These videos also have served as testimonies in court cases, legitimizing firsthand accounts of police brutality unlike in countless cases decades prior.

Social media movements have circulated these horrific and disturbing videos, catalyzing broader public support for police accountability. Breonna Taylor was killed after police in civilian clothing arrived unannounced at her door (a common practice for the "no-knock warrant" issued) forced their way into the apartment, causing her boyfriend to fire a warning shot. The police officers fired 32 shots, 6 hitting Taylor and killing her. Her death, and the lack of immediate action from the Louisville Police Department sparked the phrase "today is a good day to arrest the cops who murdered Breonna Taylor," a call which was sent to the Kentucky Attorney Generals office. As a result from all of the media attention, the Louisville police chief resigned, and the city council voted to ban no-knock warrants, and made body cameras mandatory for officers. Taylor was recognized but so many other Black women become invisible statistics, which is where the #SayHerName campaign started. Kimberly Crenshaw originated #SayHerName to bring attention to how few Black women's deaths were ever covered in media, and how few people seemed to care.

Social media activism often faces legitimate criticism for lending itself to performative actions – or users making superficial statements without understanding or participating in more challenging work. Past political activism has relied on physical protest, lobbying, and greater personal interactions, as compared to social media activism. However, the accessibility and ability to spread knowledge through platforms like Twitter should make anyone question how we think of activism, now and in the future.

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