October 5-7, 2022
Cambridge, Massachusetts
bearing-witness.mit.edu


Comparative Media Studies/Writing in the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology will host a three-day international conference, “Bearing Witness, Seeking Justice: Videography in the Hands of the People,” October 5-7, 2022.

The conference builds on scholarship and public policy that emerged as a result of the Rodney King uprisings in the early 1990s, continuing through the many police killings of black men and women, to the horrific murder of George Floyd, all in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement born during the past decade.

A history of videography will set the stage. Central to our discussion will be the role of videography in protecting our rights and civil liberties. The use of video technology on police forces, in banks, in hospital operating rooms, and in the matter of George Floyd and Darnella Frazier, Kyle Rittenhouse and Ahmaud Abery, among other high-profile events, will be analyzed from multiple vantage points. In particular, the two recent court cases of Rittenhouse and Abery, both claiming self-defense and vigilantism, featured videos as star witnesses, arriving at opposite verdicts for similar defense. The crucial role videography in seeking justice is complex. The roles played by both the mainstream and alternative press and by social media will also be scrutinized.

Video technology, a novel instrument in pursuing evidence, truth, and judicial integrity, can also be abused—infringing on civil liberties, for example, as when public and private agencies employ surveillance systems for facial recognition. And it can be subverted, its evidentiary status thrown into doubt by an environment increasingly polluted by deepfakes. Beyond and behind the images are the algorithms and platforms that can undermine as much as strengthen human rights.
The stakes are high and extend far beyond issues of everyday policing and surveillance. Videography offers a way to connect personal videos made by individuals, weaving a web that is critical in reconstructing events such as the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. Public schools are developing policies on the use of cell phones on school grounds, and some are evaluating the opportunities and risks of teaching videography. Further, legal experts, ethicists, and psychologists are examining policies and practices of videography as a way to shape guiding principles and frameworks for local communities, often at odds with the recommendations of mainstream policy makers.

The conference, open to the public, will provide a forum for diverse constituencies to express their views and to showcase findings on videography as a creative tool in the quest for social justice. Sample topics might include:

- The Uses of Videography in Protecting Our Rights and Liberties
- The Abuses of Videography in Denying Our Civil Liberties
- Videography as Narrative
- Behind the Image: Data, Digital Video, and Justice
- The Uses of Videography in the Public Schools
- Videography as Court Witness: The Rittenhouse and Abery Cases
- Videography and the Law
- Videography and Ethics
- Videographer as Writer: The Case of Darnella Frazier
- Historical perspectives on uses of film/video/photography in the pursuit of civil rights and social justice
- Uses of videography for surveillance (CCTV, etc.)
- International case studies on videography and activism and/or citizen journalism
- Videography as a medium and tool to tell the African/black story
- Videography as a tool to document human rights violations (atrocities, gender based violence, etc.)
- Videography as a tool of African entrepreneurship (media)
- The challenge of internet connectivity

SUBMISSION DETAILS

Please submit individual paper proposals, which should include a title, author(s) name, affiliation, 250-word abstract, and 75-word biographical statement to [email address] by March 14, 2022. Full panel proposals of 3 to 4 speakers can also be submitted, and should include a panel title and the details listed above for each paper, as well as a panel moderator. We will notify you of the status of your proposals by May 15, 2022.

REGISTRATION

Registration will open on May 15, 2022.

Participants will be responsible for covering their own travel and accommodation expenses, and there will be a registration fee of $150 for participants ($75 for college and graduate students, and high school students are free). MIT participants are exempt from this fee. Coffee and snacks will be provided each morning and afternoon. There will be a hosted conference reception on the evening of October 5 and a conference dinner on October 6, each with a keynote address. The five keynote addresses will be hybrid, in-person and virtual, so as to provide worldwide access to topics of the conference. Further information will be posted on the conference website.

Steering Committee for Conference Planning

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