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FIELD REVIEW

Trends in Mobile Journalism: Bearing Witness, Building Movements, and Crafting Counternarratives

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ABSTRACT

This field review examines how African American mobile journalism became a model for marginalized people's political communication across the United States. The review explores how communication scholars' theories about mobile journalism and media witnessing evolved since 2010 to include ethnocentric investigations of the genre. Additionally, it demonstrates how Black people's use of the mobile device to document police brutality provided a brilliant, yet fraught, template for modern activism. Finally, it shows how Black mobile journalism created undeniable counternarratives that challenged the journalism industry in 2020 and presented scholars with a wealth of researchable questions. Taken together, the review complicates our understanding of Black mobile journalism as a great equalizer—pushing us to also consider what we lose when we lean too heavily on video testimony as a tool for political communication.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter, Darnella Frazier, George Floyd, mobile journalism, witnessing

Introduction

She lay awake many nights, apologizing to him.

As Darnella Frazier tearfully recounted her story to the jury, the teenager said she felt powerless to help George Floyd on May 25, 2020, when Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin kneeled on his neck for

more than nine minutes. All Frazier could do, she said, was take out her smartphone and press "record." So she did. Her hand was steady. She offered no exclamations or play-by-play commentary. She simply bore witness. Frazier captured the forty-six-year-old Black man pleading for his mother while handcuffed on the ground. Floyd told Chauvin, who is White, that he could not breathe more than twenty times (Singh 2020). As pedestrians stopped to observe the scene, they cried out for Chauvin to relent. Despite their pleas, Chauvin persisted. Floyd died on the asphalt. Later that day, Frazier went home and uploaded her video to Facebook. Within hours, it went viral around the globe. Black Lives Matter protests erupted in every US state (Buchanan, Bui, and Patel 2020). Movements of solidarity sprang up across the globe, too—in Australia, Belgium, China, England, France, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Scotland, Spain, South Africa, South Korea, Tunisia, and beyond (Poujoulat 2020).

In the eventual April 2021 murder trial, which many have claimed would not have been possible without Frazier's tragic footage, the prosecuting attorney Jerry Blackwell referred to the bystanders as a "veritable bouquet of humanity" (Salter 2021) whose decision to film the ordeal deserved to be met with justice. When the jury decided that Chauvin was guilty on all three counts brought against him—of unintentional second-degree murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter—some felt that justice had blossomed indeed (Wamsley 2021). Praise for Darnella Frazier and her quick-thinking journalism flooded the web. President Joe Biden said that the rare verdict was the result of "a unique and extraordinary convergence of factors"—including "a brave young woman with a smartphone camera" (Treisman 2021). The nation's top news outlets echoed these sentiments, with grateful headlines in the *New York Times* (Bogel-Burroughs and Fazio 2021), *USA Today* (Yancey-Bragg 2021), and the *Washington Post* (Sullivan 2021). Calls for Frazier to win a Pulitzer Prize even surfaced (Clark 2021).

This landmark case of mobile journalism—or news created using only cell phones—is fast becoming the most iconic example of how African Americans have used these devices to trouble the news production process in service of social justice. Before Darnella Frazier, African Americans filmed the fatal police encounters of Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Walter Scott, and Freddie Gray too. The success of their ability to leverage this technology, to galvanize movements, has inspired other marginalized communities to emulate their powerful blueprint. Indigenous communities filmed their standoffs with police during the #NoDAPL movement in 2016 and 2017 (Hinzo and Clark 2019). The Latinx community recorded the horrors of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids on its undocumented communities during Donald Trump's presidency (Helmore 2019). And, more recently, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) used mobile phones in 2020 to record hate crimes against their most vulnerable members in the burgeoning #StopAAPIHate campaign (Tessler, Choi, and Kao 2021).

To understand how African American mobile journalism became a model for marginalized people's political communication across the United States, I offer the following field review in three parts. First, I explore how communication scholars' theories about mobile journalism have evolved since 2010, from technical inquiries to more critical-cultural investigations of the genre. Next, I share how Black people's use of the mobile device to document police brutality provided a brilliant, yet fraught, template for modern activism. Last, I explain how Black mobile journalism created undeniable counternarratives that challenged the journalism industry in 2020 and presented scholars with a wealth of researchable questions. Taken together, I complicate our understanding of mobile journalism as a great narrative

equalizer—pushing us to also consider what we lose when we lean too heavily on video testimony as a tool for political communication.

Mobile Journalism as Black Witnessing

Like many foundational studies of new phenomena, early scholarly investigations of mobile journalism sought first to define and appraise it. More specifically, researchers focused on (1) how closely mobile journalism resembled the news that legacy media produced, and (2) how mobile journalism disrupted the traditional news production process. To the first point, for example, Peter H. Martyn (2009) cautioned against the "degradation of the [journalism] genre" since early smartphone cameras and microphones were not very sophisticated and because devices created less-than-broadcast-quality content. Another concern centered on whether audiences would trust mobile journalism as a cruder cousin of slick television news packages. To the second point, scholars such as Oscar Westlund (2013) explored the actual process of making mobile news. He posited a production model that explained how humans and technology either customized or repurposed news stories for mobile audiences. This study was the precursor to exploring twenty-first-century newsmaking either through the lens of mobile journalists' labor (Andén-Papadopoulos 2013) or by studying the technological advances that afforded them new power (Anderson 2013; Diakopoulos and Koliska 2017; Dörr 2015).

Just as scholars began to examine the mechanics of mobile journalism—and what its arrival meant for legacy news outlets—a parallel body of literature emerged to explore the effects of witnessing poignant moments through video. Some scholars argued that their peers should investigate such media witnessing through an "archaic" religious frame to consider how someone changed as a result of what they saw (Blondheim and Liebes 2009). Others argued that scholars should work to separate eye-witnessing from bearing witness, since the latter "extends beyond seeing through practices of enacting responsibility" (Tait 2011, 1220). Both approaches signaled to intellectuals that there was labor involved in new forms of looking with smartphones (Chouliaraki 2006; Ong 2014). One was expected to *do* something after viewing a provocative piece of mobile journalism. The genre, after all, invited the participant into the action. Andén-Papadopoulos (2013) has explained that this is the dilemma of mobile journalism. While it provides "an immediate and embodied experience from 'inside' the event" (341), mobile journalists' moral and political claims can be interpreted in a variety of unintended ways. In a legacy media report, the claims are in the frames; professional journalists make the agenda-setting decisions *for* their audiences. In mobile journalism, however, witnessing born in crisis rarely lacks voiceover and other contextual signifiers (Allan 2013). Viewers are dropped right into a chaotic scene with little background.



Photo by: Clay Banks

Black mobile journalism, therefore, often has mirrored the embedded reporting that wartime journalists might do, in that both groups of storytellers put their bodies on the line to record injustice and deploy this footage as "graphic testimony in a bid to produce feelings of political solidarity" (Andén-Papadopoulos 2014, 753). We see this truth reflected in the risk that Darnella Frazier herself faced. Although she, too, could have been harmed physically by former officer Derek Chauvin (and traumatized by seeing a man die), she kept filming. Researchers have explained further that when African Americans use their cell phones to glare back at police brutality, they are engaging in "Black witnessing," which has three qualities (Richardson 2017, 673). First, Black witnessing adopts an investigative, or sousveillant, gaze that challenges authority figures from below. Second, this kind of "connective witnessing" (Mortensen 2015) stitches together current and historical testimony from African Americans in various subcommunities, so that you are just as likely to hear from a working-class Black Twitter user as you would a Black celebrity on matters of social justice. Third, Black witnessing hacks any useful social media platform to create a vibrant, ad hoc newsroom, which is where relevant movement building occurs.

Black witnesses [are] mobile journalists because they are performing the work that professional, embedded wartime reporters do. They are absorbing risk to relay a dispatch from the frontlines.

In this essay, I refer to Black witnesses as mobile journalists because they are performing the work that professional, embedded wartime reporters do. They are absorbing risk to relay a dispatch from the frontlines. The act of pressing "record," then, becomes an exercise in "strategic witnessing" (Ristovska 2016) that aims to seek justice for the slain. As a bit of disambiguation, I am *not* using the term Black mobile journalist here to refer to Black *professional* journalists who may use mobile devices to tell stories for their mainstream news outlet. Rather, I am speaking of the Black citizens who are activated by potentially deadly discrimination in their communities, who often report even before legacy media arrive.

Mobile Journalism as Black Movement Building

The Black Lives Matter movement would not exist without Black mobile journalism. From hashtags as news briefs to innovations in meme culture as visual op-eds, Black people with cell phones built a formidable genre of political reporting that drove legacy media headlines regularly in the 2010s. It may be helpful to review the movement's origins, before expounding upon how mobile devices aided its explosive growth.

The Role of Twitter in the Early Movement

The Black Lives Matter movement began as a hashtag in 2013, in the wake of a controversial murder trial (Garza 2014). It became an on-the-ground, grassroots organization in 2014, during the Ferguson uprisings. It first peaked in 2016, when police killed Alton Sterling and Philando Castile within a day of each other. Then it experienced its second, and most powerful, wave in 2020, when police murdered George Floyd (Anderson, Barthel, Perrin, and Vogels 2020). The story begins in 2013, when a jury found George Zimmerman, who is White-passing, not guilty of killing seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. Alicia Garza, a labor organizer in Oakland, California, took to Facebook to express her disappointment for the trial's outcome. She ended her post with three words: "Black lives matter." Her friend Patrisse Cullors added a hashtag in front of those words and reposted the message to Twitter.

The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag gained prominence slowly. During the second half of 2013, #BlackLivesMatter appeared on Twitter 5,106 times, or about thirty times a day. When Michael Brown, another unarmed Black teenager, was killed in Ferguson, Missouri, one year later, in August 2014, the hashtag went viral. It appeared an average of 58,747 times per day in the roughly three weeks following Brown's death (Anderson 2016). In November 2014, when a grand jury in Ferguson decided not to indict Officer Darren Wilson for killing Brown, the hashtag's use soared to 1.7 million times in the three weeks that followed. It has since remained a "continuous presence on Twitter," according to Pew Research Center, which has observed that its usage spikes when high-profile police brutality cases, like George Floyd's, emerge (Anderson 2016).

African Americans used smartphones and Twitter to keep the anti-police-brutality campaign alive during the first wave of the Black Lives Matter movement, from 2014 to 2019 (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2016; Richardson 2020a). It was, after all, a Black Twitter user named Emmanuel Freeman who broke the news that police shot Mike Brown on Canfield Drive in August 2014 (Richardson 2017). When the protests began in Ferguson, to oppose the fact that his uncovered body remained in the road for more than four hours, Twitter helped activists find each other. Perfect strangers like Brittany Ferrell, Alexis Templeton, and Ashley Yates met online and established Millennial Activists United (Templeton 2020). DeRay Mckesson, Sam Sinyangwe, Johnetta Elzie, and Brittany Packnett (2016) met on Twitter, too, and introduced Campaign Zero, which offered lawmakers policy solutions to end police brutality. Campaign Zero's influence coincided with the 2016 US presidential elections, and many of the candidates that year, such as Secretary Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders, took meetings with the team (Deshpande 2019). During President Barack Obama's time in office, he invited Campaign Zero activists to join his Task Force on 21st Century Policing (Ramsey and Robinson 2015).

Prior to this rapid movement building, the Pew Research Center reported that African Americans had been over-indexing already on Twitter. Although Black people comprise roughly 13 percent of the US population, researchers observed that, at any given time, Black people comprised 22 percent of the Twitter population (Smith 2015). This led scholars to declare that Black Twitter was a viable subset of the platform that journalists should explore (Freelon et al. 2018). Other scholars examined how messages flowed between activists on Twitter, to discover that more than 80 percent of #BlackLivesMatter traffic was generated on a smartphone (Richardson 2020b). Black mobile journalism during this volatile time was urgent and poignant, since the first wave of organizers were working in an incredibly hostile space. The hashtags #AllLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter emerged as a counter to the Black-centered campaign. Between 2014 and 2019, extremist violence against the movement surfaced. Dylann Roof, who is White, shot nine people in a Charleston, South Carolina, church in 2016, for example. White supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, led a "Unite the Right" rally through their city in 2017, which descended into a violent standoff against those who protested their presence. The two-day event ended when James Alex Fields Jr., a man who held purported neo-Nazi and White supremacist beliefs, rammed his car into a crowd of detractors, injuring several people and killing another (Caron 2017).

Black Mobile Journalism Meets Meme Making

Between causes célèbres, Black mobile journalism persisted. When there were no high-profile cases of police brutality making headline news, Black people continued to use their cell phones to film "everyday racism" (Essed 1991). They interrogated what it meant not only to die due to the "fact of Blackness" (Fanon 1952) but also what #LivingWhileBlack often meant (Williams 2020). They filmed incidents of White people calling the police on them for selling lemonade (Levin 2018); for attempting to enter their own apartment buildings (Gomez 2018); or for trying to barbecue in a park (Williams 2020). Some Black Twitter users remixed this footage to spawn a new genre of "BBQ Becky" or "Karen" memes, in which Black mobile journalists "call[ed] attention to, and reject[ed], White women's surveillance and regulation of Black bodies in public spaces—making an important connection between racialized surveillance of the past and contemporary acts of 'casual' racism" (Williams 2020).

One of the most viral instances of this style of #LivingWhileBlack mobile journalism is Christian Cooper's 2020 recording of Amy Cooper in New York City's Central Park. (Despite the shared surname, the two are not related.) The Black birdwatcher (Christian) asked the White woman (Amy) to put her dog on a leash along the trail, since signage indicated that was the rule. Amy refused, became hostile, and called the police. As she feigned distress in the video, pretending to become more breathless and tearful as she spoke to the 911 call dispatcher, the footage captured her inadvertently strangling her dog. She later lost her job and her pet (Maslin Nir 2020). Stories such as these represent the wide-ranging work of Black mobile journalism since the Black Lives Matter movement began in 2013. This style of reportage has shed light on casual (and potentially deadly) racism. Moreover, Black people's early adoption of Twitter, and their over-indexing on that platform, proved to be a boon for organizing in real life, too, as many activists met their eventual partners on Twitter. They created and shared policy suggestions there. They advised would-be presidential candidates. They even created and circulated memes that challenged racism. This groundwork was essential to building the support the movement would need in its 2020 wave.

Mobile Journalism as Embodied Counternarrative

By the time George Floyd took his last breaths in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, most of the nation had seen Mike Brown lying in a pool of his own blood in Ferguson in 2014. They had heard Eric Garner gasp, "I can't breathe," in New York in 2014. They saw Freddie Gray being loaded into the back of a police van in Baltimore in 2015. They knew that, at some point during his so-called "rough ride" in the back of that van, his spine was severed fatally—and that none of the police involved ever went to prison for it. They saw Philando Castile groaning in agony after Officer Jeronimo Yanez shot him fatally in 2016, while his fiancée and four-year-old stepdaughter bore witness. What news audiences may not have known was that, in every instance, Black people were on the other side of those recordings. They used their bodies to intervene in unprecedented ways, which offered contradictions to official accounts from powerful entities.



Photo by: Allison Bailey

Tracing the "Oppositional Gaze"

For the first time in American history, the mobile device allowed Black people in the 2010s to document atrocities against them in real time. If one considers the three overlapping eras of domestic terror against Black people living in the United States—which include slavery, lynching, and police brutality—this was not possible before. During slavery, those who were in bondage could not look, lest they too incur the wrath of their master. There is an iconic scene in the 2013 film Twelve Years a Slave, for example, when Solomon Northrup (played by Chiwetel Ejiofor) stands on his tiptoes as he tries not to be hanged. Slaves in the background continue their daily routine as they avoid gazing upon his demise. Looking in real time was punishable.

As one progresses through time, to consider any number of the well-known lynching photographs of the twentieth century, one does not observe Black people huddled in its margins (Allen et al. 2000). African Americans commonly fled town en masse when large lynch mobs descended upon them (Waldrep 2008, 157). Even Ida B. Wells—who rose to prominence as a premier Black documentarian of lynching with her iconic publication *Red Record*—was run out of Memphis as a would-be lynch mob burned down her newspaper office (Wells 2020). White townspeople were angered by her thorough report of three Black men who had been lynched just days before. Looking in real time was punishable.

During the civil rights movement, when the evening news lasted only fifteen minutes, Black people knew to stage their sit-ins and marches around the time of those broadcasts. People like the late

Representative John Lewis, who headed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), wooed the White press with grand media events (Raiford 2007, 2011). Police often met SNCC activists at these demonstrations with fire hoses, German shepherds, and police batons. Looking in real time was punishable. In the twenty-first century, however, Black people have used mobile devices to bear witness exactly when the human rights violation transpired.

Reporting Live, on Behalf of the Dead

When Darnella Frazier made the decision to film Floyd's murder, she was saying to him in that moment: *I will not leave you. I will make sure people know what happened to you. I will make sure people say your name.* This is important because mainstream media were notorious for reporting that lynchings in the United States happened "at the hands of parties unknown" (Jean 2005). This journalistic failure to name the perpetrators cloaked their participation in mob violence and made legal accountability difficult. Perhaps one of the most striking contributions that Black mobile journalism has made in the last decade, then, is that it has rendered visible the persons who enacted the human rights injustice. Whereas Derek Chauvin's status as a police officer may have granted him "parties unknown" status in the past, so that he could slip back into his everyday life, Black mobile journalism no longer allows such eliding. The narrative of nameless police, as invisible enforcers of White supremacy, has been forever disrupted.

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Black mobile journalism has demonstrated its ability to challenge official police narratives. Danielle Kilgo (2021) has noted that initial police reports about Floyd's death claimed he had a "medical incident" in the back of a police car. Police also stated that Floyd died on the way to the hospital. Many news organizations parroted that official report in the first few days of his death, until Frazier's video surfaced. Scholars will observe that this is a familiar pattern from 2015, in the case of former officer Michael Slager in South Carolina. He claimed in an official report that Walter Scott lunged for his taser, so he shot him fatally. Feidin Santana's mobile journalism video later offered the counternarrative. Slager was charged with murder and sentenced to prison for twenty years (Blinder 2017). In both incidents, when professional journalists echoed the "police said" narrative, Black mobile journalists contradicted those stories.

This is remarkable when one considers that it was once deadly for Black people to engage in an "oppositional gaze" (hooks 2003) against their oppressor. Former officer Derek Chauvin does, indeed, look directly at Frazier in her video. Those who dared to watch her video had a chance to lock eyes with him too. Although scholars have not yet explored the impact of this exchange, I venture to say that Chauvin's gaze did indeed break a fourth wall, in film parlance, and made what researchers call "distant suffering" (Kyriakidou 2015; Martini 2018) feel far less remote. This invited the audience to imagine itself in Frazier's place, to feel the terror of hopelessly watching someone else's life slip away. Viewers did not

get this opportunity to peer back into the eyes of the four police who battered Rodney King on video thirty years ago, in 1991. Likewise, in the Philando Castile video, we saw only Jeronimo Yanez's arm wielding his gun. This "agony at a distance" (Sumiala 2019) is absent from Frazier's video. Her footage is intimate and immediate. In this manner, Black mobile journalism has allowed us to document who committed the human rights violation, so that they cannot evade accountability with false "official" reports. With all gifts, however, there are curses. Acknowledging them creates a wealth of researchable questions.

The Future of Mobile Journalism Research

Black mobile journalism in the last decade has forced not just everyday Americans to reckon with how their hidden biases show up to marginalize others. This genre of reporting has also forced professional journalists to challenge how they may have contributed to the nation's racial morass too. In this vein, this final section offers two broad areas of future mobile journalism research. First, I suggest that scholars investigate how professional news outlets have handled the arrival of Black mobile journalism. Second, I propose a review of the traumatic effects that news audiences have experienced while watching some of the more tragic dispatches of Black mobile journalism.

Studying Mobile Journalism's Effects on American Newsrooms

Amid the uprisings that sprang up to protest Floyd's killing in 2020, newsrooms across the United States dealt with internal mutinies that spilled over into public view. Whether it was *Washington Post* journalists writing an open letter to its upper management to request stronger diversity and equity goals (Lowery 2020); the trending #BlackLAT hashtag that highlighted problems at the *Los Angeles Times* (Scire 2020); or Senator Tom Cotton's call for President Trump to "send in the troops" to disrupt the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in a *New York Times* op-ed (which led to the resignation of some of the newspapers' highest-ranking editors), the industry found itself in the eye of the maelstrom (Klein 2020).

News organizations were also lambasted for their historic representations of Black people. Some publications apologized for amassing wealth from selling runaway slave advertisements. Others reckoned with their historical support of the Confederacy during the Civil War era (Torres et al. 2020). Yet others apologized for disseminating racist ideas about African Americans, either inadvertently or purposefully (Joseph 2021). These introspective moments in American newsrooms reflected what media scholars had already discovered during the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement: that these outlets struggled to cover it fairly due to deeply entrenched anti-Black practices. Osagie K. Obasogie and Zachary Newman found that local newspapers during the movement's first wave routinely engaged in subtle victim blaming of Black police brutality victims, for example, by suggesting that they could "minimize or evade the injustices associated with discriminatory attitudes by behaving in a so-called respectable manner, i.e., dressing, acting, speaking, and even protesting in certain acceptable ways" (2016, 541). The scholars deemed this respectability politics "troubling" since it "minimizes the lives lost and overstates the legitimacy of police use of deadly force" (542).

Similarly, Colleen E. Mills found that right-wing media outlets such as Fox News leaned heavily into

racist framing when reporting on Ferguson by using five key tropes: "blaming Black victims in the characterization of Michael Brown and his shooting death, blaming Black leaders, blaming the Black community, attacking Black protesters and their movement against police brutality, and discrediting attempts to address issues of racism as the 'politics of racial division'" (2017, 39). Even left-leaning news outlets have relied on these frames, as Joy Leopold and Myrtle P. Bell found in their examination of the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. All three publications resorted to a "language of crime, lawlessness, violence, blame for nearby acts of violence, and inflammatory quotes from bystanders and official sources" (2017, 720). Moreover, the team found that "there was little discussion of key issues associated with the formation of BLM" (720). A few years later, in 2020, two of these three newspapers—the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*—experienced public admonishments from its Black reporters amid the protests in support of George Floyd.

This is where future Black mobile journalism studies can intervene. There have not yet been any studies that explore whether professional journalists have become more conscious of their biases due to exposure to Black mobile journalists' reports. Have legacy media, for example, become more aware of anti-Black framing when reporting on the Black Lives Matter movement? If so, how have their rituals and practices changed when deciding on sourcing, word choices, and even accompanying visuals for a story? Have any news outlets created editorial oversight committees or advisory boards, which can provide cultural sensitivity guidance when reporting on vulnerable or grieving communities? How often do journalists listen to external criticism from Black Twitter?

To answer some of these questions, researchers can conduct longitudinal studies to determine how mainstream news outlets descended into and emerged from the crises that Black mobile journalism introduced. Scholars can conduct ethnographies to investigate what friction emerged in American newsrooms after a Black mobile journalist's video emerged to counter its official report. For example, since the *New York Times* was one of the newspapers that parroted the Minneapolis Police Department's initial statement—that George Floyd died in the back of a medical van on the way to the hospital—what was the fallout of staff viewing Frazier's video? What professional steps did they take to repair their reputations and to improve their sourcing? In terms of using Frazier's video, what steps did they take to ensure she was credited with its production? Did the staff attempt to engage her, or any other video witness, as a subject-matter expert? If the witnesses could not comment due to the nature of an ongoing police investigation, what efforts did the journalists make to contact other Black mobile journalists who were conducting ongoing coverage at the site of Floyd's death?

Another ripe area for study includes a broad survey of whether legacy media shifts its tone when it realizes a mobile journalism video has refuted an official police report. Do these outlets retract their error formally? If so, then how? If the outlets do not issue retractions, then what language is used to signal to the audience that new facts have emerged? Moreover, when police are caught making false official statements, how do these news outlets engage the department? Do they request second interviews with public affairs officials from these departments, which would allow that police force to explain itself? If so, what explanations did reporters receive from police? If a second interview was not granted, then how did the police department communicate that it made a false report?



Photo by: Fred Kearney

Last, we need studies that explore how the journalism industry views the genre of mobile journalism itself. Are journalism educators, for example, still fixated on training future mobile journalists for work in professional spaces (Kraft and Seely 2015)? Are hiring executives still recruiting aggressively for professionals who have mobile journalism skills (Kumar and Haneef 2018; Salzmann, Guribye, and Gynnild 2021; Wenger, Owens, and Thompson 2014)? On the other hand, is there any evidence that Black mobile journalists have been invited into legacy media spaces by virtue of their high-quality work? Do they want to be part of these spaces? All of these questions would help media scholars better understand the impact that Black mobile journalism has had on professional journalists and their practice.

Studying the Trauma of Black Mobile Journalism

Another area of potential investigation involves the "spectatorship of suffering" (Chouliaraki 2006) that Black mobile journalism has introduced. For African American news audiences, seeing Black death looping on TV, with the casual air of a sports highlight, can cause trauma similar to post-traumatic stress

disorder (Downs 2016). Moreover, both journalists and scholars have pointed out that news media refrain from showing final moments of White people dying, while disproportionately centering Black death (Dwyer 2016; Richardson 2020c; Smith 2015). Others suggested that news outlets should handle Floyd's fatal video as delicately as one would regard a lynching photograph (Richardson 2020b). Still others said that they would no longer watch these videos at all. Touré, who is a professional journalist, equated fatal police videos to Black "snuff films" (2020). April Reign, writing for the *Washington Post*, added that watching is "a sick sort of voyeurism" (2016).

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There is trauma in American newsrooms too. While some journalists believe that fatal police videos educate the public, others believe that showing these images is inadequate (Zuckerman 2020) and indecent, especially without the victim's family's consent (Richardson 2021). Moreover, Black journalists working in mainstream newsrooms are pushing their employers to consider the undue stress and trauma that covering the anti-police-brutality movement caused them. In an extreme case, for example, Omar Jimenez, a Black Latino journalist working for CNN, was arrested reporting live on-air—even though he presented his press credentials (Tompkins 2020).

A deep exploration of how Black news audiences and Black professional journalists have processed traumatic mobile journalism is warranted. Are Black people tuning into or away from news outlets that feature police killings in their entirety? What might their turning away from the broadcasts mean for news outlets that believe they are airing these videos from a service-oriented stance? Moreover, how are Black professional journalists influencing these types of editorial decisions? Are they lobbying internally for more or less on-air and online footage? Does upper management seem to value and apply their guidance? Additionally, what relationships have Black professional journalists built with Black mobile journalists? Are they positioning the mobile journalists as subject matter experts in their own communities? Are they working together? Finally, how are both Black professional journalists and Black mobile journalists working through any grief they might feel during the course of their reporting? The nation heard Frazier, for example, share with the jury that she has had trouble sleeping after filming Floyd's death. Did Black professional journalists experience that same grief? If so, how can newsrooms be proactive in their response to these mental health concerns?

The final layer to studying the trauma that some Black mobile journalism has introduced involves a survey of non-Black journalists' feelings too. We need to know how those who are not Black regard urgent dispatches from the frontlines. Do non-Black journalists, for example, feel as if they have enough resources to report on the anti-police-brutality movement without bias? Do they have enough tools to identify their biases? Are they aware of racially tinged tropes that tend to marginalize their Black news audiences? Are they aware that citing official police reports without deeper investigation can sometimes harm their news audiences? Finally, what emotions have non-Black journalists felt if their newsroom

instituted new practices, such as allyship training or diversity, equity, and inclusion workshops? Did journalists participating in such activities find them useful? Did they experience compassion fatigue? Did they feel a mixture of both sentiments? How have they, as a result, changed the way they see themselves among the greater tapestry of American journalists in this historic moment? When scholars explore the impact of Black mobile journalism not just as a technological innovation but also as a critical and moral intervention into standard newsmaking practices, new areas of study open wide.

When scholars explore the impact of Black mobile journalism not just as a technological innovation but also as a critical and moral intervention into standard newsmaking practices, new areas of study open wide.

Conclusion

Darnella Frazier was quiet for most of 2020, as legal proceedings around George Floyd's killing ensued. On April 20, 2021, however, when the guilty verdict for former officer Derek Chauvin was announced, she broke her silence. "I just cried so hard," she wrote on Facebook, adding: "This last hour my heart was beating so fast, I was so anxious, anxiety bussing through the roof. But to know GUILTY ON ALL 3 CHARGES!!! THANK YOU GOD THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU" (Knowles and Bella 2021).

Soon after crowds outside of the Minneapolis courthouse burst into jubilant cheering and cries of relief that day, lawmakers in many states began to introduce laws that stifle cop watching. In Florida, for example, Governor Ron DeSantis passed what he called the "strongest anti-rioting, pro-law enforcement measure in the country," according to NPR. In an April 19, 2021, episode of *Morning Edition*, the outlet announced that the law creates a new crime called "mob intimidation" (Allen 2021). The legislature is silent on what constitutes intimidation. This is important, since one of former Officer Chauvin's legal defenses was that an "angry mob" of onlookers made him feel threatened as he kneeled on Floyd's neck. Professional journalists wondered how nine people on a sidewalk—some wielding smartphones, and two of whom were children—could have been deemed a mob. Laws like Florida's may make it easier for police to consider Black mobile journalists as mob intimidators, which would facilitate the process of confiscating their devices at a crucial time.

[E]very aggrieved group that seeks some form of equity now knows that mobile journalism must be part of its activist toolkit… less certain is whether news audiences can move past the need for visual proof of Black humanity.

In many ways, this fear of a smartphone-wielding "mob" is a testament to the power of Black mobile

journalism. The genre allowed “the people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen 2012) to create the news they wanted to see. Black mobile journalists used their urgent dispatches—which often resembled those of embedded wartime journalists—to showcase the brutality of their local police forces. Other marginalized groups have emulated this model. Indigenous protesters at Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, for example, published their mobile journalism to a Facebook page, “Digital Smoke Signals,” to dissuade President Obama from constructing the Dakota Access Pipeline through their sacred lands and waterways in 2016. They garnered his attention—and stalled the project temporarily—until President Trump overturned the decision when he assumed office in 2017 (Martini 2018). Likewise, the AAPI community leveraged video of hate crimes leveled against its most vulnerable members to urge President Biden to pass the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act in 2021.

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I would like to thank Ms. Darnella Frazier for the incredible courage she demonstrated on May 25, 2020. May she have the space to heal and rest now, knowing that she need not apologize to Mr. Floyd any longer.

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