

Go read this history of smartphones as tools to document police brutality



In 2020, almost anyone in America has the ability to record and instantly share high-definition video at the press of a button. Smartphone cameras let people share videos of things like vacations and family events. But with increasing regularity, they're also letting individuals document instances of horrific police brutality and share them with an audience that wouldn't have otherwise heard about them or wouldn't have believed it if they did.

The phenomenon is the subject of a new piece in *The Wall Street Journal*. It's a fascinating look at how our ability to record instances of police brutality has evolved over the last 30 years, and it's well worth a read.

Over the last decade, while tech companies were focused on marketing megapixels and multiple lenses to better record pastries and puppies, smartphone cameras found a greater purpose.

"This is our only tool we have right now. It is the most effective way to get us justice," Feidin Santana told me. Mr. Santana used his smartphone in 2015 to film a police officer killing Walter Scott in South Carolina.

In 1991, George Holliday had to use a dedicated piece of equipment, a Sony Handycam, to film police officers beating Rodney King in Los Angeles. But in 2014, Ramsey Orta filmed police officers wrestling Eric Garner to the ground using just a Samsung Galaxy phone.

Mr. Orta filmed police wrestling Mr. Garner to the pavement and putting him in a chokehold. On the video, he said he couldn't breathe 11 times before he died.

Mr. Orta originally shared the video with the New York Daily News, and it quickly spread across Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The phrase "I can't breathe" became a slogan of the Black Lives Matter movement. Though Mr. Garner's death was ruled a homicide, the officer involved was not indicted.

Although video capabilities have been around for over a decade, it's taken some time for phone cameras to be good enough to fully capture an incident. When Karina Vargas witnessed a police officer shooting Oscar Grant III in 2009, she opted to film the incident on her Fujifilm Finepix digital camera rather than her Motorola Razr. The officer was convicted of involuntary manslaughter a year later.

But with this ability comes risks. *The Wall Street Journal* notes that filming comes with the fear of retaliation. For Orta, this took the form of targeted harassment and eventual imprisonment. Vargas says that an officer tried to take hold of her camera after she filmed the shooting of Oscar Grant III.

The risks are real, but the benefit of being able to spread

awareness of incidents like these is massive, and the *WSJ*'s writeup gets to the heart of how this has changed over the years. Its feature is well worth your time.

<https://www.theverge.com/2020/6/16/21293013/smartphone-cameras-police-brutality-incidents-capture-wall-street-journal>