SHOULD I COLLECT & ARCHIVE THESE VIDEOS?

Human rights video collections are increasingly being used to illuminate patterns, tell stories that challenge mainstream narratives, or serve as legal evidence. Whether the videos are social media posts of police violence during protests, or fact-finding documentation showing the systemic removal of a community from their homes, or an oral history given by a survivor of state violence, it is crucial to preserve the content for the immediate fight ahead and for longer term transformative justice. **But collecting and archiving videos takes time, persistence and resources, and it can put people at risk. Are you in the best position to collect and archive them? Ask yourself these questions to make sure it's the right move.** *This resource was originally published in 2020 during widespread protests against police brutality and racism in the United States, and lightly updated in 2022.*

1. DO YOU HAVE A CLEAR REASON FOR COLLECTING OR ARCHIVING THESE VIDEOS?

YES

NO

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NOT SURE?

👁 Ask yourself key questions from the Responsible Open Source Investigations Workbook.

👁 Q&A with Berkeley Copwatch is an example of one group's reasons.

2. DO YOU HAVE THE RESOURCES (TIME, SKILLS AND TOOLS) NEEDED TO COLLECT, ORGANIZE AND ARCHIVE THESE VIDEOS?

YES

NO

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NOT SURE?

👁 WITNESS's Activists Guide to Archiving Video outlines what is involved.

👁 The Sustainable Heritage Network's Digital Stewardship Curriculum covers topics to meet the needs of Indigenous institutions.

3. FROM AN ETHICAL STANDPOINT, ARE YOU THE BEST SITUATED TO COLLECT THESE VIDEOS? (FOR INSTANCE, ARE YOU PART OF THE MOVEMENT OR CONSULTING WITH THOSE INVOLVED?)

YES

NO

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NOT SURE?

👁 Consider this Call To Action: Archiving State-Sanctioned Violence Against Black People.

👁 Pause and follow Project STAND's SAVE Methodology.

4. DO YOU HAVE UP-TO-DATE INFORMED CONSENT FROM THE VIDEO CREATOR(S) TO COLLECT AND ARCHIVE THEIR WORK?

YES

NO

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NOT SURE?

👁 Follow the steps in WITNESS's Obtaining Informed Consent tipsheet.

👁 Use Texas After Violence Project's consent flowchart before, during, and after an interview.

5. COLLECTING AND ARCHIVING CAN CREATE NEW RISKS FOR THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE VIDEOS (E.G. SAVING A VIDEO THAT SOMEONE DELETED TO PROTECT THEMSELVES OR OTHERS). HAVE YOU TAKEN STEPS TO REDUCE THESE RISKS?

YES

NO

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NOT SURE?

👁 Assess who could be impacted and the risks with WITNESS's Getting Started with Digital Security post.

👁 El Grito/WITNESS Video Database Project Planning Workbook has a security worksheet and sample assessment.

6. DO YOU KNOW HOW YOU WILL CONTROL WHO CAN (AND WHO SHOULDN'T) HAVE ACCESS TO THE COLLECTION?

YES

NO

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NOT SURE?

👁 Consider impact on individuals filmed, creators, and audiences with WITNESS's Ethical Guidelines on Using Eyewitness Video in Human Rights Reporting and Advocacy.

👁 Be aware that confidentiality agreements do not give archives legal privilege and may not protect you from a legal subpoena. Learn from The Belfast Case.

7. DO YOU HAVE A PLAN FOR SUSTAINING (OR, IF NEEDED, INTENTIONALLY DESTROYING) THIS COLLECTION IN THE LONG RUN?
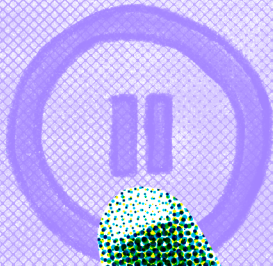
YES

NO

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NOT SURE?

👁 WITNESS's Archive! Video gives examples of the long-term value of collections.

👁 WITNESS's Planning to Preserve Video for Human Rights video explains what you need to plan.

👁 Use The Blackivists's Five Tips on Donating Your Materials if working with archival institutions.

ARCHIVE

BEFORE YOU COLLECT AND ARCHIVE!

THINGS TO CONSIDER

→ **Identify why you are archiving these videos and for whom.** This will help inform your decisions.

→ **Build trust with movements.** Support existing community-led initiatives and/or archives in collaboration with others to share time, labor, skills, and resources.

→ **Informed, explicit consent is a key ethical and legal obligation.** If it's important to collect video but not possible to obtain consent, consider how to reduce harm and protect individuals' safety, security, and dignity.

→ **Circumstances change and people change their minds.** Plan to obtain ongoing or up-to-date consent, and/or have a way for people to request removal from your collection.

→ **Consider who can be impacted and the seriousness of the risks** (e.g., legal exposure, possessing incriminating evidence). Can you mitigate them? If you're likely to cause harms that you cannot address, do not proceed.

→ **Put appropriate access controls in place.** Use up-to-date methods and tools to restrict content (e.g., editing/redacting, scrubbing metadata, blurring faces, etc.).

→ **If your collection has long-term informational, cultural, historical, or legal value, devise a plan**, possibly in collaboration with others, to preserve the collection. Consider if records need to be destroyed.

COLLECTION EXAMPLES

Photo by Julian Leshay on Shutterstock

Don't Shoot Portland & SITU Studios

Don't Shoot Portland sued the Portland Police for excessive use of tear gas and "less-lethal" weapons during a Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. The judge restricted the use of these weapons, but the police continued using them in the following days. Advocates requested the judge hold the Police in contempt for violating the injunction and collaborated with SITU Studios to collect and analyze protest videos and visually reconstruct the events where violations occurred. The strength of their arguments resulted in an unprecedented ruling in favor of the Don't Shoot Portland and other protesters.

Berkeley Copwatch

Berkeley Copwatch maintains a People's Database for Community-Based Police Accountability that documents daily abuses by police, such as illegal searches, racial profiling, and harassment. It serves as an internal resource for the group, and is used for organizing purposes and shared with trusted sources and community members. Learn more about their work and download the database template and supporting resources.

Interference Archive

Interference Archive is a volunteer-run organization that encourages public engagement with the history of social movements through an open stacks collection, publications, a study center and public programming. It sees the use of its collection as a way to preserve and honor histories and cultures marginalized in mainstream institutions.

Texas After Violence Project

Texas After Violence Project records, shares, and archives interviews and other materials in the aftermath of state-sanctioned violence, including police killings, incarceration, and the death penalty. Because they work carefully and in close partnership with their interviewees, who are often moving through their own trauma, it can sometimes take months or even years to archive and publish archival materials.