### Instructions:

Title = Heading 1

Subtitles (Data and Sources & below) = Heading 2

Bodies/Bullets = Normal Text

# Witness Media Lab: A Project Review

**Reviewer(s):** Marisa Iovino & Anthony Wheeler

**Digital Project:** <https://www.witness.org/>

**Review Began:** March 30th, 2022

**Review Concluded:** April 6th, 2022

## **Data and Sources**

The primary sources collected…

* Downloadable PDF guides
* Graphics demonstrating how to safely record
* Video interviews/resources from activists and victims

## **Processing**

According to WITNESS’s main site, as technology evolves, the organization works to identify scenarios where citizens would benefit from tailored resources for activism against political violence. They also launch campaigns to draw attention to under-reported human rights issues that surface across the globe. Lastly, they provide several avenues for community participation through events, employment, and a community newsletter.

## **Presentation**

The project’s presentation comes across, while aesthetically pleasing, slightly (or more than slightly) disjointed. The original domain (listed above) is the origin page of the project with the ability to send you into one of five (yes, five) subsites housed within the project. These subsites include the project’s official home page, a media lab site, a library resource site, a video editing tip site, and a tech advocacy site. The complexity of the project’s presentation(s) of the material is expanded on in-depth within the review.

## **Digital Tools Used to Build It**

WordPress, MySQL, Matomo, Google Analytics/Tools

## **Languages**

English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Arabic

## **Review**

 Founded by Peter Gabriel in 1992, the organization [WITNESS](https://www.witness.org/) provides people with the knowledge and tools for effective filming. Appalled by the injustices he witnessed on his world tour, the musician partnered with Reebok Foundation and Lawyers from the Committee For Human Rights to create WITNESS. The organization places a strong emphasis on harnessing filmed footage as evidence in situations of injustice. It currently partners with activists, tech companies, civil rights lawyers, communities, and non-governmental media makers. Through collaboration and education, WITNESS renders accessible tools in the effort for human rights. The organization is not necessarily a memory project but provides resources for individuals to record their memories. In this way, WITNESS contributes to memory production.

Since its inception, WITNESS has partnered with nearly 600 organizations, trained over 11,3000 globally, and has expanded its operations across 135 countries. By teaching the basics of film production, the organization promotes a counternarrative, particularly as it relates to state-based violence. Since COVID-19, WITNESS has mainly used the internet to distribute PDF guides with this information. These toolkits include how to shoot the incident, efficiently edit it, preserve it, and distribute it. In addition to the toolkits, WITNESS has developed two apps. Through collaboration with the Guardian Project, they created an app called [Proofmode](https://guardianproject.info/apps/org.witness.proofmode/). This program adds pertinent metadata to videos like where and when the footage was captured so it can be used as evidence. The organization also created [ObscuraCam](https://guardianproject.info/apps/obscuracam/), which blurs the faces of activists and victims of abuse. WITNESS has developed its founding mission and adapted to technological development.

The organization has reached great success in terms of its outreach. However, we find their website inaccessible. Users have to laboriously dig through tabs to find pertinent information. It is extremely easy to get lost. Once they discover the resource they are looking for, they often have to then download it to their personal computers if they want more than a preview. We disagree with this approach and argue that the material should be accessible through a web browser. Another element we are skeptical of is their donors. For example, Google is one of its top donors. We find this problematic since Big Tech perniciously invades every aspect of our lives. While the organization contributes to knowledge production and preservation of memories, we remain critical of these elements.

To drill further down into the infrastructure of WITNESS, we have found that their project site expands across **at least 5** different website domains, all of which have slight variance. These five sites slightly overlap with one other in a ven diagram fashion; we would argue, without providing avenues to go back to previous site pages. The various websites all represent sub-sections of WITNESS’s resources, such as their personal [library](https://library.witness.org/), their [tech advocacy](https://technology.witness.org/) site, their “[Video as Evidence](https://vae.witness.org/)” collection, and their [media lab](https://lab.witness.org/)— what is confusing is that these subsites have a plethora of resources separate from those available on the original home page. Whereas the media lab has toolkits for honing practical skills such as “[How do we work together to detect AI-manipulated media?](https://lab.witness.org/projects/osint-digital-forensics/)” and “[Creating Databases for Community-led Police Accountability](https://lab.witness.org/berkeley-copwatch-database/),” the library site houses guides such as “[Data Diagrams for Police Accountability Projects](https://library.witness.org/product/data-diagrams-for-police-accountability/)” separately (for example). There is a slight discrepancy here, though, in that in addition to it not being clear why these are held in different domains, the media lab offers extensive pages with multimedia for users to explore, whilst the library resources only permit a preview of the content, unless you wish to download it. The reason for this could not be indicated. Lastly, we believe that there were originally more than 5 website domains since they offer an archiving site grouped with these other collections, but the link is currently broken.

To note a few other things on their content: we began exploring these various arenas and found that the resources expand into field guides and case studies, as well as even more resources under the “[Curriculum](https://library.witness.org/product-category/curriculum/)” tab on the library site. This page features an extensive list of documentation of training materials for educating groups on justice and digital literacy. Across the entirety of the project, you can find extensive PDFs detailing strategies, approaches, safety measures, technical support, and more. While these guides are critically thought through and well-constructed, we also found them to be a bit superfluous at times, given the audience. The target audience appears to be the general public and smaller-scale organizations, but in just looking at a handful of PDFs, we encountered hundreds and hundreds (not exaggerating) pages of content. While these documents are super resourceful in an organizational setting, the general visitor, whom we argue would is much more likely to explore these resources, might be deterred by the vastness of some of the documents. There are a handful of graphics available on certain topics, but not enough to cover a majority of the conversations taking place within their community.

Ultimately, we believe the WITNESS project is among the more successful of the memory project reviews conducted this semester. As initially stated, it expands across over a hundred countries, being one of the largest memory projects reviewed in this collection. The resources include first-hand accounts from activists and victims and provide multiple modalities of tools (text, video, apps, activities/worksheets, etc.) to use when educating civilians on capturing political violence, fostering a heightened sense of accessibility in that regard. It also extends itself to the community and increases awareness in the real world by [hosting events](https://www.witness.org/category/participate/) and reaching people who would not otherwise locate it. However, the site falls a bit short when considering the accessibility of its website(s) and the difficulty associated with navigating its content. Our only other main critique would be encouraging WITNESS to be more explicit about who their partners are and what role they play in further developing the project (specifically their tech-collaborators). We hope to see more of the resources featured in their larger documents become condensed into bite-sized resources for any visitor to implement in their activism.