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Why Do Cops Fear Cameras? Maybe It's Accountability

by [Charles Davis](#) September 14, 2010 11:37 AM (PT) Topics: [Civil Liberties](#), [police](#)

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Law enforcement is quite fond of video surveillance technology, as you no doubt realized when that first citation arrived in the mail with a photo showing your car speeding through a red light. When citizens attempt to record the actions of police, however, that fondness quickly turns to fear -- presumably of accountability.

It's not really hard to see why cops might be wary of an iPhone-wielding public. Were it not for the release of video captured on a bystander's mobile phone, there may never have been any public outrage over the murder of [Oscar Grant](#), the Oakland man shot point-blank in the back by a police officer last year. And but for footage uploaded to YouTube last week, cops in Philadelphia likely would have gotten away with [beating an unarmed man and then cutely charging him with assault](#), the public none the wiser.

Not all cops are bad and abusive, obviously. And police departments across the country often claim, sometimes justifiably, that videos captured by citizens do not tell the whole story -- that they may not show how an incident began, for instance, or what an officer saw through their own eyes. Fair enough. So why, then, in an age when every traffic light and mobile phone is outfitted with a camera, are police forces not outfitting their officers with the same sort of recording capabilities? Wouldn't officers executing search warrants, or even just out patrolling the streets, benefit from the ability to accurately record their dealings with the public -- assuming, of course, that they have nothing to hide?

That's the question posed by Clark Neily, a senior attorney with the Institute for Justice, [in a new video](#) released this week by the Cato Institute, a libertarian-leaning think tank based in Washington.

"[The] kind of accountability that comes with making accurate recordings of a citizen's encounter with a police officer has every likelihood of helping police officers just as much as it helps citizens," Neily says. "When everybody is behaving properly and doing their job right, no one needs to worry about having that interaction accurately recorded."

The hostility many police officers show toward video recording equipment -- when it's used by the citizens they're supposed to serve and protect, rather than by a crew for [a Fox television series](#) -- suggests that perhaps they may not always be doing their jobs as properly as they would have us believe.

Watch the video from Cato below:

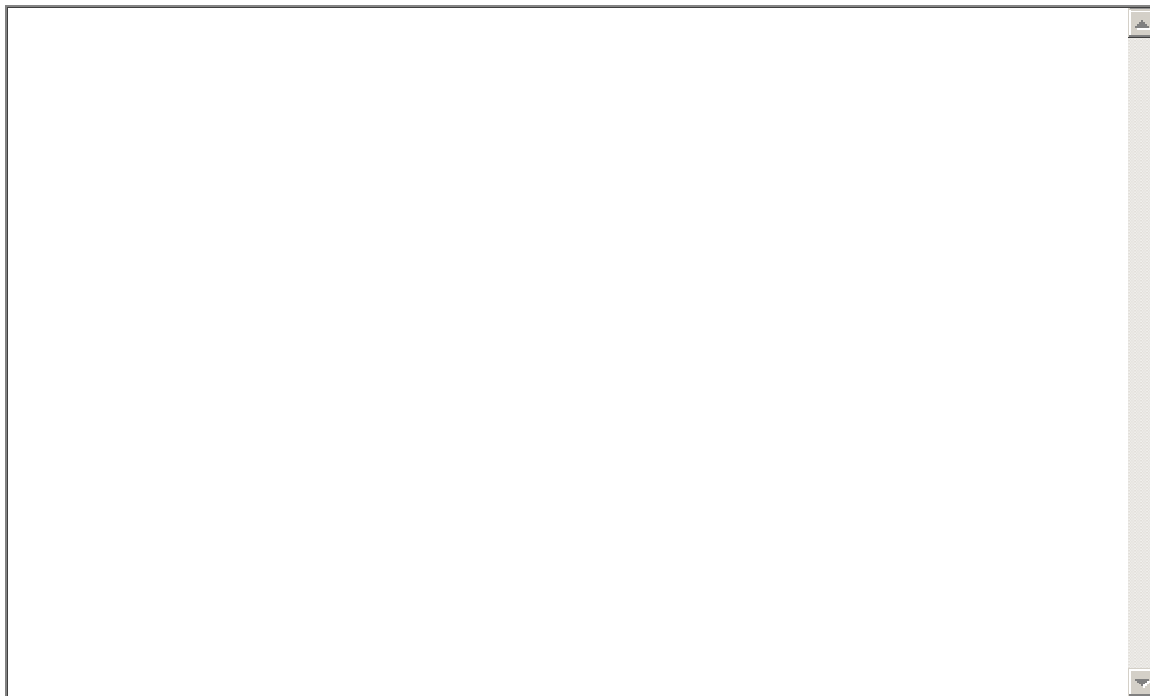


Photo Credit: [Thomas Hawk](#)



[Charles Davis](#) is a Change.org editor. He has previously covered Congress, Latin America and the war on

drugs for public radio stations and Inter Press Service.

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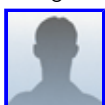
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Seriously, we need to stand up for civil liberties.

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