

# [Are incidents caught on tape hindering officers?](https://assignbuster.com/are-incidents-caught-on-tape-hindering-officers/)

“ For Cops, Citizen Videos Bring Increased Scrutiny. Are Incidents Caught on Tape Hindering Officers? ”

Kevin Johnson, a USA Today reporter, provided both the positive and negative effects that the video recording of police officers can produce. In his selection, “ For Cops, Citizen Videos Bring Increased Scrutiny. Are Incidents Caught on Tape Hindering Officers?,” Johnson begins by introducing us to former law enforcement officer, Diop Kamau. During Kamau’s tenure as a California police officer; he witnessed, first-hand, the devastating effects of police misconduct (Johnson 524. His own father was on the receiving end of it during a traffic stop conducted by another California police department in 1987 (Johnson 524). This particular event caused Kamau to become a videographer of the various police contact made with civilians all over the U. S (Johnson 524).

Johnson seeks to illustrate the varying degrees of the effects that videotaping police officers has within our communities and police departments. In an interview with Kamau, Johnson learned that Kamau (a black male) was paid by his clients to drive a 1968 Chevrolet Impala that was equipped with microphones and cameras; to scrutinize police for racial profiling (524). Kamau feels that conducting undercover stings, like this, are necessary for police culpability (524). Some others, in addition to the police themselves, view public surveillance of police officers as a divisive tool (Johnson 524). They believe that although transparency may be the goal; it may further erode the trust of the very people that they are sworn to protect (Johnson 524). Critics believe that officers may feel more restricted to act in their own best interests; therefore, placing officers in a more precarious position (Johnson 525).

Johnson also points out that in an effort to combat videoing police officers; law enforcement in some areas are maintaining compliance of existing laws to curtail the videotaping (524). While on the other end of the spectrum, some police departments have chosen to become pro-active by using the experiences as teaching moments for officers (Johnson 527). For example, at the Broward County Sheriff’s Department in Florida, Kamau, who worked for an investigative firm called policeabuse. com and a client at the time, entered the facility reception area wearing a concealed camera (Johnson 527). Kamau stated that he observed numerous conflicts with how the officers and other employees of the sheriff’s department interacted with citizens (527). Kamau stated that those conflicts involved staff providing misinformation to the citizens or they were uneducated regarding proper department regulations; including how to file a police grievances (Johnson 527).

Johnson interviewed law enforcement, former law enforcement and others associated with the criminal justice system during this selection; but one of the first videotaped incidents involving police brutality that I had ever seen, was the Rodney King incident. This incident was extremely brutal and uncalled for. John Burris (Rodney King’s attorney at that time) stated, “ It used to be that the police officer always got the benefit of the doubt (525).” I completely agree with his assessment. I believe that the presence of surveillance during the incident, King’s life was saved at that time; but unfortunately, without the camera presence, no one would’ve believed that the incident occurred. As previously stated, some police departments are attempting to deal with the act of videotaping, from a legal standpoint and claiming that it interferes with police duties (Johnson 524). For example, in a case in Maryland, Anthony Graber(motorcyclist) recorded a traffic with several felonies, based on Maryland’s wiretapping law (Johnson 525). The law deems it necessary to have permission from both individuals to record a private conversation (Johnson 525). Graber was facing a 16 year sentence in prison, if he were found guilty (Johnson 525). Fortunately for him, on September 27, 2010, Judge Emory Pitt, dismissed the case, stating, “ Those of us who are public officials and are entrusted with the power of the state are ultimately accountable to the public (Johnson 525).” I wholeheartedly agree with the judge’s statement. I believe that when you are in a public position, you’re supposed to be working for the people; and if you are performing your duties as expected (professionally, fairly, & honestly) you should have nothing to hide.

Although I concur with some of Johnson’s sources, I disagree with some of the other sources’ points. In my second example, a weaponless man was shot by an Oakland transit officer on a train platform (Johnson 526). The case ended with the officer that shot the unarmed & handcuffed man, being charged with involuntary manslaughter; rather than first degree murder (Johnson 526). I found this ruling to be extremely unjust because the officer’s defense attorney justified the officer’s actions by stating that he was actually reaching for his stun gun, but unintentionally grabbed his gun (Johnson 526). In my opinion, the attorney still did not illustrate why it was necessary for the officer to deploy the stun gun against the man when he was not only unarmed but handcuffed. Lastly, I disagree with the officers’ handling of an incident in Maryland. It involved a University of Maryland student & Prince George’s County, Md. police officers (Johnson 527). The officers assaulted the student with their batons during a Maryland basketball triumph; claiming that in an earlier incident, the student had assaulted some of the officers on horseback, in addition to their horses (Johnson 527). I have great empathy for the officers, however, officers are trained to meet each situation based upon consideration of the level of threat. I believe that how the officers reacted was entirely beyond the pale. I also believe that the student should’ve only been arrested; if he resisted with violence, then the next protocol should have been followed. Rules are put in place for obvious reasons.

In conclusion, Johnson produced a powerful analysis of the countless effects of videotaping officers while they interact with the public. Through his interviews with former law enforcement & current law enforcement, during the time; he managed to provide us a much clearer picture of both sides of the argument. My answer to the primary question of the selection is: I don’t believe that incidents of cops caught on tape by citizens should be viewed in a negative light. Yes, we hear a great deal about video recordings aiding the citizens’ credibility more than it does the officers’; but if an officer is performing their duties as the rules and regulations state, then the video may be a life saver! On the other hand, if an officer is conducting his or her job in an unprofessional or abusive manner; then they should be very worried!

## Works Cited

* Johnson, Kevin. “ For Cops, Citizen Videos Bring Increased Scrutiny. Are Incidents Caught on. Tape Hindering Officers ?” Strategies for Successful Writing: A Rhetoric, Research. Guide, Reader, and Handbook , edited by James Reinking and Robert von der. Osten, 11 th edition, Pearson, 2018, pp. 524-526.