

FINAL REPORT

MEDIA AS A SOCIAL TOOL

**A conference for makers, users and brokers
of media for social justice, democratic participation and
civil society**

Sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation

**Center for Social Media
American University
June 18-19, 2002**

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Media as a Social Tool: Makers, Brokers, Users

June 18-19, 2002, Center for Social Media, American University

Sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation

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FINAL REPORT

By Pat Aufderheide, Director

Center for Social Media, American University

OVERVIEW

The Media as a Social Tool conference asserted both the existence of many vital projects that use media for the public good, and identified stresses and challenges.

There are today a wide variety of strategies to make or use film, video and streamed media for social justice, democratic participation and civil society in the U.S. These strategies typically incorporate new media and new technologies, creating hybrid products and processes. Furthermore, the work and the processes that create it are part of a living culture of public life and civil society.

But people who commit themselves to such efforts work at the edges of media and communications systems driven by profit mandates, which require entirely different priorities. They are often working in dispersed and isolated ways, with scavenged resources, and without public recognition. There is a need for a conceptual context for such work, for publicized and established evaluation practices, for networking with potential partners, and for documentation of strategies and projects.

The Center for Social Media focuses on film, video and web streaming as it is used for social engagement goals, and intends to track, analyze and showcase creative and innovative strategies within such work. It seeks to identify a wide range of activities as participating, in various ways, in the project of fostering public life and culture in a democracy. Areas in which it can contribute to the expanding knowledge network in this field of activity are in

research and **teaching** that documents, analyzes and publicizes projects and strategies;

preservation, and especially archiving that preserves the history of projects and that collects media products created within them;

convening stakeholders for events that share and extend knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

This was a conference to assess the environment for film, video and web streaming produced, programmed or used for social justice, democratic participation and civil society (using the umbrella term “social media”), and to orient the future of the Center for Social Media at American University. Conferees (see attached list of attendees) included

leading social action makers, TV programmers, museum programmers, scholars, outreach organizers, and community and human rights media activists, primarily from the U.S. It was a group of overlapping contacts. Everyone found someone new to meet, and most people knew several people already. People in the group variously believed that representatives of other fields of endeavor also belonged within the ambit of concern: labor media uses; indymedia and other Internet-based, grassroots and journalism projects besides those in the room; commercial television; and cable access. As well, people looked forward to expanding international contacts.

The group shared dedication and a passion for film, video and web streaming in the service of equity, democracy and social justice. It was also highly entrepreneurial. The group also shared a high level of frustration about the terms of doing work. Lack of resources is a perpetual complaint, and so is a very real irritation with one's own constituency, providers, funders or clients. But the frustration also derives from a lack of accepted categories, concepts, and legitimizing frameworks for creative strategies that participants use in making and using media for social justice and democratic engagement.

For conferees, this was an opportunity to explore not only what other people were doing, but to see their work within different contexts. When asked to identify expectations, participants included a desire to understand themselves as part of a community or network with some common goals; to find models to borrow and employ; to explore the significance of the work they do and admire being done. As several people noted, there are few safe discussion environments for social activists in media and for media programmers of socially engaged work, since this kind of work is poorly recognized in the academy, and each project suffers from the pressures of survival in a ruthlessly entrepreneurial environment (competition for grants, risky business propositions, competition for service contracts).

The conferees addressed three general questions:

- 1) What are identifying characteristics of the production and use environment for film and video produced for social justice and democratic action?
- 2) What are the major challenges and opportunities in making and using such materials, and what research questions ensue?
- 3) What can a center focusing on this kind of work do usefully?

A consistent theme throughout all discussions was that of **legitimation**. Conferees were frustrated by lack of evaluation mechanisms and documentation that could demonstrate effectiveness persuasively, especially to funders. They found it an enormous struggle to get journalistic or academic recognition for their work.

Another consistent and related theme was **lack of context** or coherence to the different projects being discussed under the general rubric of "social media." One participant described the field of activity as "a thousand cats," referring to a range of projects each of which had narrow focus and an ad hoc set of partnerships. Some sharp points of difference came between makers and programmers of discrete, professional media (for public television, museums or nonprofit clients, for instance) and those involved with

grassroots and web-based expression. Makers stressed the importance of skill and expertise, while interactive distributed networking entrepreneurs stressed the importance of building partnerships and connections. Gatekeepers often found themselves overwhelmed by the quantity of production they must now evaluate. By contrast, burgeoning opportunity to produce was exhilarating to people involved in youth media or distributed networking.

A third consistent theme was the **need for documentation, record-keeping and storytelling**. Participants alluded frequently to the lack of a historical record and to the lack of evaluation. They frequently returned to the problem of needing a story told about their work, just as they saw themselves as storytellers of stories often unheard. They see storytelling as an important social act, the transforming of personal experience into public record and part of history.

QUESTION ONE

What are identifying characteristics of the production and use environment for film and video produced for social justice, democratic participation and civil society?

The group concluded that the term “social media” cannot describe a field of production, but rather a wide range of strategies, each with a micro-context. The group identified many different specific arenas or environments as important for social strategies using film, video and webstreaming. These included theatrical and commercial TV distribution, museums, media centers, libraries, public TV, cable access TV, community and low power radio, universities, schools and afterschool programs, Internet-based interactive projects, grassroots and community screenings, organizing for unions and community action, court and other legal processes, academic documentation and public health and education projects by NGOs. The diversity of sites hints at the dispersed, ad hoc and improvised nature of this kind of work, and it may also suggest that such work is often imbedded in larger social projects. It also demonstrates a marked emphasis on explicitly public sites such as schools, museums, libraries, public access cable, public TV and nonprofit organizations, as well as an open internet that has hosted many public virtual arenas.

This discussion was launched with a critique of the term “social media.” Some were specifically concerned that the term could diminish the importance of the artist in creating films, and others were concerned that projects might carry an ideological overtone. At the same time, participants did not find another term to use, and they demonstrated shared goals and experiences that testify to a community of practice.

From a production viewpoint, this kind of work is emphatically not a “field” in the sense that “independent film and video”—associated with freelance production within the ambit of institutions such as public TV, media centers and universities and represented by publications and organizations—or “African-American film”—a production arena reflecting the consequences of a racialized organization of American society and also one with its own service and showcase organizations and publications—are. It may not need

to be, either, since the range of activities represented within the conference alone—with many more indicated outside it—go beyond production and demonstrate the wealth of strategies and processes that use media for social justice and democratic engagement.

There was a widely shared body of knowledge and contacts in the room, demonstrating a community of practice. There were also both competing interests and clashing viewpoints on the framework for understanding common goals.

Shared Assumptions

Among the shared assumptions was a broad understanding that such work is part of a project of addressing inequality in some way. It expands opportunities for those whose voices go unheard or are slighted in mainstream media, that it counters injustice in some way, and that it effectively challenges the status quo. In discussing the goals of such work, opinion varied between wanting to expand the margin of dissent to wanting to expand the space of public debate and action.

Second, there was a shared belief that this kind of activity is systematically starved for resources, that it depends on opportunistic creativity in seizing upon new technologies and other resources, and that it takes new forms depending on such opportunities. Participants found words such as “flexible,” “inventive,” “improvised,” and “structurally weak” to describe this characteristic.

Third, people shared an assumption that such work has some kind of social effect or impact, whether or not it can be measured. Using words such as “transformative,” “trigger” and “impact,” participants demonstrated an understanding of such media work as significant to the extent it can change society in some way (including the unexpected!).

Finally, people understood this work as essentially marked by collaboration, partnership, and relationship building. Communications networks are seen as essential to knowledge networks, which are seen as essential to social networks outside the hierarchical power structures of the status quo.

Differences

Differences surfaced in various areas. For some participants, media work for social action opposes mainstream media. For others, their work expands or inhabits existing public spaces and practices (such as in museums and schools, or on public TV), perhaps bolstering a weakened sphere of public activity but one that nonetheless exists. For others, it is a tool of community development, among disempowered communities (young people, migrant workers, ethnic minorities) for whom public expression spurs both awareness of community strength and action. For still others, it is important to embrace corporate strategies and clients, to build successful businesses that promote interactivity and education.

Participants also had a range of assumptions about the relationship of socially-engaged media work with profit-making strategies. While participants generally welcomed the use of effective strategies from the corporate world in a nonprofit environment, some stressed more the need for public subsidy to support media work that expands public debate and action. Also, some were more sanguine than others about the power of new technologies to lower interaction costs, create new revenue streams, and nurture civic culture.

For some participants, the core of the project is production of aesthetic informational products, such as a film or a TV series, and for many of them, a story is the central ingredient. For others, it is the development of open-ended processes of interaction and the consequent transformation of products themselves into processes (or “open documents”). For some, media is an instrument of a specific goal, for instance promotion of a particular human rights cause. For distributed networkers, information transfer and use can be as essential as storytelling.

The question of professionalism divided participants as well. For some, new production processes bring with them a threat of deprofessionalization; for others, this opening up brings primarily the promise of expanded participation. Skilled and established programming and production professionals also tended to portray the universe of possibilities as more circumscribed than those working in network environments, for whom the experience and possibilities of unexpected synergies and collaborations fueled enthusiasm. Professionalism was often intertwined with aesthetic concerns, with a concern to understand socially-engaged expression as art, not only as instrumental communication.

The group raised the question of political perspective and social values in defining the field of endeavor: is work by the NRA as legitimate an example of social action media as that produced by a handgun control group? Are pro-life and pro-choice video productions equally interesting? This remained an open question throughout the conference, and cut across concerns about commercialism and public activities within a commercial framework. However, participants also strongly identified as a characteristic of this work that it was concerned with social justice and equity in some way, at the least by creating access for underheard voices or expanding the range of perspectives on public issues. There may be honest disagreements within a diverse population about how fairness is either expressed or achieved, and they were also evident within the room. But the commonly shared assumption of social justice as a goal marks this kind of work as challenging the status quo from below.

QUESTION TWO

What are the major challenges and opportunities in making and using such materials, and what research questions ensue from these challenges?

Both before and during the conference, conferees identified challenges and opportunities. Individually, participants identified problems that ranged from resources to disconnects with potential audiences to the weaknesses of today’s public TV to lack of institutional history and authoritative evaluation to endemic racism (see interim report for details).

In small and large group discussions at the conference, these individual problems recurred. Participants invoked a need, for instance, to:

- Have a better sense of what is going on outside one's own project, especially internationally.
- Have documentation of projects, events, outreach efforts.
- Be able to access institutional histories and refer young people to resources that show them what has been done in the past.
- Learn how others are responding to new technological, policy and business challenges.
- Have an "early warning system" for policy dangers threatening this kind of work.
- Preserve and archive work.
- Educate funders about the power and usefulness of media.
- Have a safe place to discuss failures as well as successes.
- Develop and assess models for using media both to communicate issues and to trigger social action.
- Develop and disseminate models for evaluating the success of projects.

Some of these needs address roles that service organizations to independent filmmakers, funders, public TV or other networks do or can provide. Others point to a role for the Center.

Research issues that arose from these concerns include:

- What categories are being created and boundaries currently being drawn around different kinds of strategies to make and use film, video and web-based moving image for social justice and democratic engagement?
- How can we measure impact? What are evaluation procedures that demonstrate not only activity but effectiveness?
- What kinds of analytical work have been done on the aesthetics and formal strategies of this kind of work?
- What kinds of historical work have been done and are being undertaken on strategies to use media for social action? (Youth media was singled out as an example of a field whose history deserves closer analysis.)
- What kinds of relevant analytical work have been and are being done on evaluation and on individual and social effects of media produced specifically for social action?
- What kinds of media-related projects for social justice and democratic engagement are being done internationally and how do those activities intersect with or provide models for work being done within the U.S.?
- What socially-engaged media work is being preserved, in what formats, and what work needs to be preserved?
- How do film and media curricula teach about this kind of film and video work?
- What policy directions affect the efforts to make and use media for social justice?
- What information networks and resources now exist to inform and promote knowledge networks among media activists?

QUESTION THREE

What can a center focusing on this kind of work do usefully?

The Center's academic location, participants agreed, positions it well to conduct research that deepens understanding of this kind of work, to amplify awareness, and to document and preserve. It should not, various participants emphasized, attempt to play roles that service organizations can and do play. The ideas generated by the group created a wide range of options for the Center in the future. They featured most prominently the roles of research, preservation and convening.

In research:

- Curriculum development, including:
 - survey: Find and make available as models creative teaching approaches that promote student understanding of history and of available models for production and use.
 - Course development and course materials development.
- Research projects, local or joint: Develop research projects that address research concerns above.
- Fellowships: encourage quality research both by nurturing researchers and inviting successful leaders of strategic initiatives to be in-residence
- Publications: Create a book series or journal (although caution was expressed about cost and effort), or web-based resources, which can contribute to the need for institutional histories, models, and evaluation strategies.

In preservation:

- Archive: Create an enduring record of projects, outreach activities, models.
- Collections: Create a collection of socially-engaged media work.

In convening:

- Showcase or expo: Some also wanted an opportunity to see and discuss current work that can serve as models—a kind of expo or showcase, perhaps like the Advocacy Video Conference of 1993, but with an emphasis on innovative and technologically hybrid strategies.
- Meeting of distributed networkers who work with streamed media and web-based interactive media projects.
- Media funders' institute: A regular workshop or one-day event where potential funders of media could learn about media both as an artform and as a tool of social action.
- Youth media institute: Create activities, events, workshops that can bridge the gap between professionals and young people who are not college-bound.
- Boundary-crossing events: Host events that can bring different communities together.
- Invitee-only events: "Safe space" discussions among stakeholders about directions in particular projects and in the field.

Ideas that fell more into the functions of a service organization, but that garnered significant interest and demonstrate a strong felt need on the part of participants, include:

- Clearinghouse services on the web: Make available links and information about projects, models, institutions, organizations, activities, information resources interesting to media activists.
- Policy early warning system: Provide a targeted information and alert system on policy debates and developments affecting them.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE GROUP

The group pledged to stay in contact with the Center, to read and comment on iterations of the final report, and to respond to further initiatives.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE CENTER

This conference both reinforced current directions at the Center and also sharpened the focus, providing an important platform for future planning. The Center will pursue several projects in the short run, including:

- Making public the final report of the conference.
- Research:
 - An analysis of the current policy and production environment for the making and use of media for social justice and democratic participation.
 - Develop partnered pilot projects in research areas signaled by participants; three areas of concern mentioned were evaluation/assessment, open document Internet strategies as a demonstration of open source television; and intellectual property issues in moving-image media.
- An institute for media funders, in collaboration with Video/Action and potentially the Council on Foundations.
- Public programs showcasing social media strategies.
- Interviews with practitioners, available on the Center's website.
- Design of a course on media and social change.

MEDIA AS A SOCIAL TOOL CONFERENCE

June, 2002

STORIES OF MEDIA FOR SOCIAL ACTION

Participants in the Media as a Social Tool conference were asked if they could tell a small story that would show why they do the work they do. Some of the anecdotes that emerged are shared here. They demonstrate the range of approaches to making and using media for social justice and democratic participation. –P.A.

Barbara Abrash, Associate Director, Center for Media, Culture and History, New York University

Steps for the Future is a 37-part video series, designed in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Southern Africa and realized through a collaboration between a Finnish television commissioning producer and a South African documentary producer/media activist. This rare example of South-North media flow has brought together European and US funders and media makers with southern African producers and HIV/AIDS activists in a project that has created an infrastructure for southern African social media production, as well as a web of local, national, and transnational connections for the circulation of social issue media. NYU will host a conference in Spring 2003 on this exemplary project.

Larry Daressa, Director, California Newsreel

Twenty years ago, there was an anti-infant formula campaign (INFACT) which made very effective use of a 28 minute film Bill Moyers happened to make for PBS called INTO THE MOUTHS OF BABES. A vigorous social action campaign existed before the media project, which was in a sense purely incidental. I also like to think that Newsreel's Southern African Media Center may have made a modest contribution to the anti-apartheid campaign again because there was a pre-existing wide-spread social movement which could put it to use.

Helen De Michiel, Filmmaker and National Director, National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture

My film **Turn Here Sweet Corn** was about a Minnesota farm family whose land was being threatened by the pressures of suburban development. The Diffleys were organic farmers, working and taking care of land that had been in the family for more than a hundred years. The financial and political pressures were complex. In the end, they lost their family property to developers. Although they still have a flourishing organic produce business, they can grow now only on rented land, farther and farther from the metropolitan Twin Cities area. When the piece was finished, I partnered with the Land Stewardship Project to present the film to farmers and landowners around the region, to trigger discussion about how to save farm land and families from suburban sprawl. The

film wasn't a traditional documentary but a many-layered story constructed to elicit an emotional response from the audience. I wove in archival material as well as Super-8 film from Minnesota landscapes that had already been paved over and were gone by the time the film was completed. In the workshops following the screenings, the Land Stewardship folks had audiences jot down their personal impressions and experiences of watching the film. From there they moved fluidly, listening to the personal stories people recalled and engaging them in public policy and community activism. They discussed the hard facts of land preservation and how to save endangered farms. Action groups were formed, and steps were taken that in several cases culminated in benchmark land trusts.

Sally Jo Fifer, Executive Director, Independent Television Service

- **Two Towns of Jasper** created a forum for Utah legislators to convene at their Statehouse to watch the film and discuss disputed hate-crimes legislation. Their meeting was later highlighted on the local evening news.
- **Poetic License** brought a youth voice to the forefront in community centers and schools throughout the country through poetry slams and spoken word performances.
- **New Cop on the Beat** provided a timely vehicle for community leaders to discuss a recent police shooting in Louisville. ITVS sent community policing expert to facilitate the discussion.
- **Digital Divide** furthered the national dialogue on this important topic. In Idaho, community training centers were set up to assist unemployed lumber jacks as a result of local dialogue.
- **La Ciudad** events drew 100's of immigrants and undocumented workers together for screenings and discussions, sometimes with public policy groups and/or their station.

Faye Ginsburg, Professor and Director, Center for Media, Culture and History, New York University

In 1997, an indigenous unit was established at the Australian Film Institute that insisted that Aboriginal media makers be given training “outside the documentary ghetto” in order to work in fictional and feature formats. This program has expanded from ten minute shorts, to half hour films, and now the first features are emerging from this project, with Ivan Sen’s extraordinary new film, *Beneath Clouds*. This project has linked talented young cultural activists from all over Australia, brought their work onto national and international stages, and helped establish the value of putting cultural of all sorts into the development of media in indigenous Australian communities.

Sam Gregory, Program Coordinator, WITNESS

MDRI:

In many of Mexico’s psychiatric facilities, children were shackled to their beds without rehabilitative care. In most cases, once they were committed, patients had little chance of being released.

WITNESS partner, Mental Disability Rights International (MDRI) was formed to fight widespread human rights abuses in psychiatric institutions and mental retardation facilities around the world. As part of their efforts, MDRI shot footage of the gross neglect and inhumane treatment of the psychiatric patients using their WITNESS camera.

MDRI sent its footage to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, prompting this important organization to make note of Mexico's record on human rights abuses in psychiatric facilities in its annual report.

Thanks to WITNESS' extensive network and experience working with the media, MDRI's campaign was ultimately reported on ABC's 20/20, CNN and Telemundo. In response to growing public outrage prompted by this television coverage, the Mexican government appointed an MDRI Board member to serve on a four-person panel charged with making official recommendations for reforming psychiatric institutions.

To maintain pressure on the Mexican government, MDRI and WITNESS edited the original footage into *Forgotten People*, a short video narrated by Susan Sarandon and broadcast globally online as one of our "WITNESS Rights Alerts." The video includes appeals to viewers to contact the Mexican government with demands that it fulfill its pledge to increase community-based living for its mentally ill and retarded citizens.

And the MDRI video could have far-reaching effects for the ill or mentally retarded in other countries. It has been incorporated into a training video for U.S. State Department officials about reporting on abuses of people with psychiatric illness or mental retardation, and was featured prominently at the World Health Organization's annual event in 2001.

Thanks to the efforts of WITNESS and (MDRI), the Mexican government has promised to reform the treatment of mentally ill and mentally retarded patients in Mexico's psychiatric facilities. The most abusive facilities featured in the video materials have since been closed, and the patients placed in community housing.

NAKAMATA:

Last year WITNESS initiated a pilot capacity-building project in the Philippines. A long-standing WITNESS partner, Joey Lozano, was chosen as the first local coordinator for WITNESS projects. In this role, Lozano is responsible for initial screening of applicant organizations, as well as equipping and training two local groups in the first year with WITNESS cameras and training materials. He began this project by selecting and supporting the work of NAKAMATA, a consortium of Philippine organizations that promote the rights of indigenous peoples.

NAKAMATA partners have historically been brutally attacked for exercising their legal rights to file ancestral land claims, which are protected under the 1997 "The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act" enacted by the Philippine Congress. Influential settlers who violently

evicted lumads (indigenous tribe people in Mindanao) in the past, have now resorted to increased violence to keep the law from taking effect.

In August 2001, WITNESS and Lozano provided NAKAMATA with a digital video camera. The video camera was accepted in a traditional ceremony at sunrise by Datu (chief) Makapukauw who said: "this camera means that someone in this world cares about us, about our struggle. Seeing this camera here today means that we are not alone." Lozano spent two weeks teaching camera and video advocacy techniques to NAKAMATA activists.

Then a period of terror began for NAKAMATA. Its activists were targeted in a string of events over a 3-month period. A NAKAMATA chieftain was stabbed to death, other lumads were ambushed and shot to death, their homes were riddled with bullets, and an entire NAKAMATA village - 14 homes – was razed to the ground.

Lozano and NAKAMATA used the WITNESS camera to film the site of the attacks, the last words of one of the murdered men, and the bloody crime scene moments after the attacks. It was the only visual evidence of what had happened.

Initially, the police were unwilling to take measures to protect the lives of NAKAMATA members, and refused to conduct a thorough investigation. With the emergency support to keep Joey and NAKAMATA going during this very demoralizing and critical period, WITNESS and its supporters were able to pursue an unrelenting advocacy campaign, amassing a groundswell of pressure through petitions, the Internet and media attention including an article in the influential Philippine Daily Inquirer.

By November 2001, our efforts had forced an inquiry by National Bureau of Investigation and a TV segment on the NAKAMATA situation, using the WITNESS camera's on-the-spot footage, by the "Probe Team" – equivalent to CBS's 60 Minutes in the U.S.

Footage of the incidents is being used as evidence in the ongoing murder investigation. Lozano also edited it into an 11-minute video to support advocacy for indigenous rights in the Philippines. In mid-January, Joey Lozano and NAKAMATA developed a Rights Alert video, 'Rule of the Gun in Sugar land' with this footage, documenting the attacks. The video on our website is accompanied by an "ACT NOW" section to support NAKAMATA by urging accountability and continued investigation into attacks upon them.

As of May 2002, the pressure had resulted in a successful investigation by the National Bureau of Investigation that resulted in charges being made in the murders.

Cara Mertes, Executive Director, POV

Every film has a story like this, but for example, P.O.V. aired 'Take It From Me' in 2001. Filmmaker Emily Abt's first film, it profiles four women

and their families as they struggle to move from welfare to being self-supporting. With major press coverage, the national broadcast generated so much interest that the filmmaker had to add something to her web site for those inquiring how to help the women. In addition, it has been used by policy-makers for educating their constituencies about the lived experience of welfare.

In winter, 2001, P.O.V. broadcast 'Promises', another first film which was nominated for an Academy Award, and we organized over 60 events nationwide with our co-presenting partners ITVS and TRI, local stations and national partners like Elderhostel and the National Council on Churches. The 'Talking Back' arena of the web site is still very active, and remarkably, the film has been making its theatrical tour of the country post-broadcast. We created a facilitation guide and special timeline provided insights from both the Palestinian and Israeli perspectives.

Perhaps the largest example recently was our January 2000 broadcast of "Regret to Inform", Barbara Sonneborn's Academy-Award nominated film about her experience as a Vietnam War widow. The broadcast formed a piece of a larger project advocating for world wide peace. The filmmakers organized a tour of the 'war widows' who traveled internationally, and we were able to incorporate our pre-broadcast events into their schedule. This film went on to form the spine of an international organization promoting peace.

Julia Pimsleur, Filmmaker and executive director, MediaRights.org

In 1995 I produced a short fiction film, Bintou in Paris, about a Malian couple who emigrate to France and their conflict over whether to perform female genital mutilation on their daughter. This was my first experience with making a film explicitly to achieve social change (the goal was to attempt to decrease the number of FGMs carried out on girl children). The director and I set out to make a documentary about the subject, but discovered that our audience (African parents, primarily those living in France, and a secondary audience in Africa) were somewhat turned off by the nonfiction format from their experience with African television, which produces a lot of this kind of programming since it is cheaper than fiction. Fiction, on the other hand, has a certain cachet. So we changed our plans and made a 15 minute glossy fiction film with African actors, shot on 35mm, with donated music by renown world music singer Angelique Kidjo. We called it Bintou in Paris instead of a titles like "Do not cut your daughter" which was common for the existing films on this subject. We teamed up with a nonprofit called the CAMS (committee to end sexual mutilation, loosely translated), a group of lawyers working to end FGM in France. They provided about half the funding, another 1/4 came in donated film equipment from my film school and another 1/4 I fundraised. The finished product was a captivating short film with a message that was not heavy handed, which we premiered at a Parisian movie theater and used as a fundraiser for our outreach campaign. Working with the CAMS, we did a national outreach

campaign and got over 200 copies of the film into maternity wards, immigration centers, community centers, etc. The film was shown on French television, African television and several European stations. It also won the French Human Rights Award. Two of the best outcomes were that African women fighting FGM in France began using the film to raise awareness in their communities. And we were invited to show the film at the African Regional Conference to prepare for the 1995 World Conference on Women in Peking. At this gathering of over 5,000 women from the African continent we gave away 50 free videos to women fighting FGM in their villages all over Africa. We were also honored by the African coalition to end FGM. About a year after our film was made, an African immigrant was convicted of murder when her daughter died from complications resulting from a botched FGM and the issue hit mainstream media, in France and in the US (where a woman from Nigeria sought political asylum after fleeing FGM in her country). The film rode this wave and was used at many conferences and international gatherings of activists. Because it is in French it was also very effective with francophone Africa.

What stands out for me about this experience is three principles: 1) we defined the purpose of the film from the outset and let the audience dictate the form 2) we partnered with a nonprofit in order to ensure accuracy and grassroots distribution 3) our film reinforced an existing movement (did not try to create a movement, only clarified and reinforced issues already being addressed by activists).

Producing this film and overseeing its grassroots outreach is what launched my interest in social media. Working with the CAMS I had to invent the outreach strategy; I assumed that in the U.S., there were infrastructures in place to do this kind of work. When I returned to NY in '97 I was surprised to learn that there was no such thing here (this later led indirectly to my creating MediaRights.org). I have based my social media campaigns on the Bintou experience, always trying to stick to those 3 essential rules (let the audience dictate the form and to some degree, the content; team up with NGOs; make media that supports existing movements).

Briefly, I will also mention my first film I produced at Big Mouth Productions, "Innocent Until Proven Guilty". This film was about an African American public defender and his work in the criminal justice system with black youth. Applying the 3 principles:

1) we were trying to reach the general public, to help people see how young African American men are getting trapped in a revolving door of crime and incarceration due in part to lack of education and access to resources. We wanted to put a human face on the "1 in 3" statistics. Therefore, we opted to make a feature length doc that could be shown on television and used educationally. We attempted to work with PBS but they didn't take the film, and it wound up on HBO Signature. In terms of the audience dictating the content, we did take into consideration what was important politically to communicate to our audiences. So for example when we learned from a member of our Advisory Council from the Youth Law Center that African American women were actually the fastest growing segment of the prison population, we decided to include a young girl character in the film who we had been on the fence about including.

2) we formed an Advisory Council with representatives from the Fortune Society for ex-offenders, the Youth Law Center and the National Center on the Death Penalty, getting us “buy in” from those organizations at the same time.

3) We surveyed our potential grassroots audiences and made sure they were interested in screening the film. We got very positive responses from public defender and legal aid centers all over the country, as well as youth mentorship programs and at risk youth programs. By having approached them early in the process (before the film was finished) we were able to reach them, when the film was complete. They already knew about it and were more receptive to ordering a copy or co-presenting a screening.

The grassroots outreach campaign for this film entailed reaching out to public defender offices, legal aid centers, youth mentorship programs and at risk youth programs. We set up screenings in approx six cities where we invited local organizations to participate. We also sold over 100 tapes at reduced cost to these kinds of organizations. The film was also shown in high schools.

Larry Kirkman, Dean, School of Communication, American University

Benton Foundation’s Connectforkids.org is a public service advertising campaign, which has received over \$250 million in donated media -- television, radio, print, outdoor, and online. Launched in 1997, connectforkids.org reinvented "fulfillment" for public service campaigns, creating a world of knowledge and action on behalf of children, with a weekly news service, coverage of 35 topic areas, and discussion boards. Connectforkids has used focus groups, useability studies, online surveys, cookies, and email follow-up to measure its use and impact. Connectforkids demonstrated the power of the Web as a complement to public television documentaries by providing information and links to action on foster care for the PBS special, Take This Heart. In connectforkids.org, users migrate from the personal to the political and from volunteering to voting; they often come for narrow interests and are surprised and "empowered," they say, by how much they can learn, and what others like them are doing.

Rhea Mokund, Associate Director, Listen/Up

Appalshop’s “Because of OxyContin” was produced by four high school students during Appalshop’s 13th annual summer program. It documents the poignant stories of people from mountain communities of Southwest Virginia and Eastern Kentucky whose lives have been devastated by the misuse of the prescription painkiller. With the arrival of OxyContin in the past several years, community violence, domestic violence and overdose deaths have risen dramatically. Sensationalized media portrayals of the hillbilly heroin have risen correspondingly. The young people were motivated to make this piece as a warning to other young people to stay away from the drug and as a tool for portraying the real people behind the images that were developing from outside interpretations of the community affected by this drug.

After production, AMI staff and youth actively distributed the tape. In addition to screenings across the country-the Museum of Television and Radio’s DocuJam Film Festival, the DeadCenter Film Festival, the New York National High School Film

Festival, and others- the tape was sent to 60 high schools and community colleges in Eastern Kentucky and Southwest Virginia along with contextualizing information about the drug and its rise in this area of the country. The tape was also screened at a conference of youth social service providers which was sponsored by the Governor of Virginia's Office. The local congressman Harold Rogers was contacted. With his support and that of two Virginia legislators, the tape and a tool kit were distributed to the entire House and Senate in Washington. Following this project, every member of the Kentucky legislature also received copies of the tape.

Alyce Myatt, Vice President for the Midwest, Public Broadcasting Service

The "Legacy" project began as a film (Legacy, by Tod Lending). Substantial outreach materials were created targeting specific audiences – from adolescent girls, to faith-based organizations, to public policy makers. As a result, legislation is pending in congress to grant a larger housing allowance to grandparents, receiving public housing assistance, that are the primary caregivers of young children.

Mimi Pickering, Producer, Appalshop Films

In 1997, Appalshop taped three public forums organized by Kentuckians for the Commonwealth and Kentucky Youth Advocates that were held around the state of Kentucky on welfare reform issues. In the summer of that year KFTC, KYA and other groups working together as the Kentucky Welfare Reform Coalition developed a state bill designed to increase access to education for welfare recipients. At Appalshop we edited a 10 minute video from the public forum footage of a diverse group of welfare recipients talking about the importance of education in their efforts to be self-sufficient. Working with KFTC, we sent this video to print, radio and TV news outlets and personally gave state legislators copies. We played the video on a continuous loop in the State Capitol Rotunda during the General Assembly. The video helped KFTC members and the Kentucky Welfare Reform Coalition in their successful efforts to convince lawmakers to pass a bill that made it more possible for welfare recipients to receive a post-secondary education.

Ellen Schneider, executive director, Television Race Initiative and Active Voice; vice-president, American Documentary

We were hired recently by two producers to create the community engagement component for what they've called The Islam Project. The content has "public television" written all over it – but the actions these programs are catalyzing is some of the most stunning we've experienced.

One of the programs, **Muslims**, is a FRONTLINE, and looks at Muslims in Turkey, the Philippines, Nigeria, and the US. It's solid broadcast journalism. The other, **Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet**, which tells the story of Muhammad's life and the way that American Muslims live it every day, is beautiful but very traditionally constructed.

We're taking these programs to 10 sites, and asking organizations if they would be helpful tools for bridge-building between the Muslims and non-Muslims in their communities.

Know what? Everyone said yes. We're still in the planning stages of this, but already (in SF, LA, Atlanta, Boston and Cleveland) ideas are being tested, exchanged, challenged, and weighed among people (faith leaders, educators, civil rights advocates, etc) who may have deeply held feelings about each other, even if they've never worked together before. Some groups will use this process simply as a safe way to begin to break through years of fear, distrust and suspicion. Another site will use the films in the context of civil rights education – hoping to engage mixed publics around issues of detention, civil liberties and “security.” Others will take an interfaith approach – seizing these films and the materials that go with them as a long overdue opportunity to consider more formal coalitions between religious groups.

The intensity of this project (we're less than half way into it) has already surprised us. One of the lessons: “Social media”(I have mixed feelings about the label, by the way) doesn't have to look like the Sundance line-up nor sound like agit-prop. It can be beautifully shot and leisurely paced. It can be solid broadcast journalism complete with omniscient male voice over. Timing, framing and context can make it social and purposeful, not necessarily the form. (A really interesting offshoot of this and similar projects is the [creative] tension that arises when journalists realize that audiences are finding new meaning and uses in the docs. Fascinating!)

Angel Shaw, Asian Cine Vision

Through our quarterly media arts journal, “CineVue,” annual Asian American International Film Festival and its subsequent tour of selected works from the Festival, Asian CineVision continues to have the opportunities to outreach to various constituents about social and cultural issues represented in the films and videos we screen as well as through the articles, interviews and essays written in “CineVue.” Our Festival audiences are diverse and have had an attendance of roughly 9,000 people in the past two years. CineVue reaches the same amount of people. ACV is an organization committed to the inclusion of various forms of “social action media” projects in the screenings of films, workshops and special events. Over the past 24 years, our Festival audiences have expressed gratitude that they have a chance to see Asian/Asian American works that represent Asian and Asian American experiences in all societal contexts.

As a teacher, after 9.11, many of my students in a war course I was teaching were asked to analyze mainstream media coverage in relation to the media coverage of wars in Asia with the United States. They had to conduct a media study for their final projects. These projects literally brought tears to my eyes. Out of this course, I formed a small group of non-filmmakers to work with to create four short pieces addressing the construction of nationalism, patriotism, and enemies. The process has been incredible thus far.

Robin Smith

We Are Not Who You Think We Are was produced in the early 1990s. Tracy Huling, then Director of the Women in Jail and Prison Project at the NY Correctional Association, had been working intimately with incarcerated women at a maximum security facility in upstate New York, listening to their stories and chronicling patterns of violence, addiction and crime that cycle from generation to generation. Three years into her study, the women decided they wanted an opportunity to share their experiences (and insights) with an audience beyond the prison walls. Video/Action was invited in and our camera recorded intense conversations among the women – a dialogue inspired by the self-discovery they were learning as part of a pilot family violence prevention program inside the prison. The first “audience” for the short video being produced was to be their daughters. “My mother was a junkie, and now here I am,” Debra told me. “I don’t want my daughter to go through what I’ve gone through.”

The impact of this project is still being felt today. First, and most importantly, it transformed the women themselves by validating their experiences. One woman who appears in the tape for less than one minute with a wrenching story about trying to tell her teacher that her father was abusing her watched herself on tape recount what happened and exclaimed, “Now someone will believe me!”

Once the project was completed, the women (who named the video) encouraged us to distribute the program as widely as possible. Tracy Huling traveled extensively with the tape, building panel discussions and workshops at conferences around screenings. Her efforts snowballed, as other activists concerned about intergenerational violence -- many who attended the conferences -- requested copies to host their own community-based screenings. Corrections officials used the video establish Family Violence Prevention Programs based on the model profiled in our video in facilities across the country and Canada. Almost one decade later, the powerful stories shared in the video continue to offer courage to support groups and personal insights to those seeking solutions to the escalating problem of women and crime.

Jass Stewart

In January 1999, Blackside Inc., producers of the public television series *Eyes on the Prize*, premiered the six-hour documentary film series **I’ll Make Me A World: A Century of African-American Arts**. By leveraging the excitement around *I’ll Make Me A World*’s national public television broadcast, my outreach team orchestrated local outreach efforts to support and promote the work of local institutions and artists; build diverse audiences for the institutions’ artists and performers; and help them raise funds for future initiatives. While adding tremendously to the social value of Blackside’s television series, we were also able to generate significant grass-roots support for and awareness of **I’ll Make Me A World**.

In Nashville, for example, we worked intensely with lead partner N4Art, a small but active African-American artists association, which became the first black organization in

the city's history to book the 108-year-old Rhyman Auditorium, the original home of the Grand Ole Opry. The initiative brought in more than 1000 people to its I'll Make Me A World premiere event, garnering significant media coverage.

Blackside was very pleased with how we positioned I'll Make Me A World as a multicultural and cross-generational project and with their success in developing events that were cross-institutional and spanned weeks, and in some cases, an entire year. In Blackside's survey distributed to target and partner cities (partner cities received less oversight from our outreach team), an overwhelming majority reported that the community response to their programming was extremely positive. Our eleven target cities reported organizing 225 community events. Partner cities, 48 in all, reported 125 programs.

Anuradha Vittachi

Even where there is little connectivity, poor people are getting the information they need from the Internet, and in their own language. How is this possible?

Pakkialouchme is a young Dalit woman, aged 24 – not the sort of person one immediately thinks of as being online. Being a woman from the global south, and being a Dalit woman, should be enough to exclude one from such elite male pursuits.

In fact, each morning, she goes online at a public access point (telecentre) in the Pondicherry area of South India to collect data from a US navy satellite that measures wave heights, which predicts storms at sea. Then she voices the gist of this data in Tamil (the local language) onto an audio file on the Internet – and each afternoon, at the time the fishermen sit on the beach to check and mend their nets, her storm warnings pour out through a series of loudspeakers planted along the shore.

I asked someone at the telecentre whether Pakkialouchme's efforts had made any measurable difference to the fisher families. 'Well,' he said, mildly, 'there used to be five to ten deaths every year from drowning. But in the two years she has been doing this work, there have been no more deaths.' Many of us would be glad to say we had made that much difference in our whole lives.

Alaka Wali

An exhibition titled "Living Together" is a permanent exhibit here at the Field Museum that opened in 1997. The exhibit "de-exoticizes" culture and demonstrates that all people make culture through their everyday practices—for the first time, people from Chicago saw themselves in the Field Museum and are able to connect their experiences with those of others around the world. With this exhibit as a base, we are building partnerships and relationships with other cultural institutions in Chicago to insure that these resources are used to insure the valuation of cultural diversity.

Robert West

BLUE VINYL, one of our primary projects, screened for nine packed audiences at the Sundance 2002 Film Festival. As viewers exited the theatre, they were offered a the chance to participate in a "direct action" to influence the PVC market by signing postcards to Intimate Brands, the parent company of Victoria's Secret and Bath and Body Works. The postcards ("Greetings from Sundance! I just watched BLUE VINYL . . .") encouraged the company to use alternatives to PVC packaging – which are readily accessible. By the end of our Sundance week, and 1,500 postcards later, Intimate Brands called Greenpeace – who initiated an activist fax and email campaign to the company in early January, netting over 6,000 messages in favor of ending PVC packaging – to discuss their PVC policy. In a meeting on February 9, Intimate Brands committed to 100% future phase-out of PVC packaging.

Debra Zimmerman, Executive Director, Women Make Movies

After 9/11, Women Make Movies decided to offer all of our titles on the Middle East, Muslim women, and those on the Japanese internment during WWII, for free rental to any group wishing to use them for educational purposes. We sent an email out to our customers which then got reposted to listservs around the world. The response was phenomenal. Hundreds of individuals and representatives of cultural, educational and community organizations requested and screened titles all over North America (unfortunately we could not handle the requests from overseas). One of the best things about the initiative was that 70% of the response was from groups that previously had not used WMM films and following this initiative there has been a significant increase in usage of these titles.

MEDIA AS A SOCIAL TOOL CONFERENCE SURVEY OF PARTICIPANTS

June, 2002

Participants to the Media as a Social Tool conference were asked to describe their work, how they measure success at it, the problems they encounter in doing it, and the challenges they see at a technological and a policy level. Here is a synthetic overview of their answers. –P.A.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP:

This is a group that has in common a dedication and a **passion** for media (i.e., film, video, CD/DVD, web imaging and streaming) in the service of equity, democracy and social justice. This group is also highly **entrepreneurial**. People have started organizations, businesses, and networks, and understand positioning, strategic planning, branding. The group also shares a high level of **frustration** about the terms of doing work. Lack of resources is a perpetual complaint, and so is a very real irritation with one's own constituency, providers or clients. But the frustration also derives from a lack of accepted categories, concepts, and legitimizing frameworks for the larger project in which we all seem to feel that our work somehow fits.

RANGE OF ACTIVITIES

The fields of endeavor are extremely varied, and only sometimes intersect with each other. They fall into these general categories:

- Making media
- Programming media
- Distributing media
- Scholarship about media
- Brokering or hosting community use of media
- Serving media producers or media organizations.

TARGET AUDIENCES/USERS:

Some, the TV programmers and museum folk in particular, are serving general audiences along with any others. Some serve members of an organization. Most, however, said that they specify audiences or target users depending on the particular project. Channels included all forms of distribution, but many also noted the need to craft channels to reach particular audiences. Here are some typical targets:

- Governments/legislators
- Organizations (NGOs, nonprofits, community groups)
- Teachers
- Students
- Scholars
- Communities (of color, rural, youth, ethnic, local).

WHAT IS THE VENUE, WINDOW OR SCREEN FOR YOUR WORK?

Many members of the group endorsed the notion that socially-engaged media can and does happen within a commercial as well as a noncommercial environment, and some noted the importance of looking beyond the media markets of the U.S., where socially-engaged media production may be part of the mainstream national media.

Here are some of the specific arenas or environments identified as important for social media:

- independent film production;
- museum display;
- museum projects in the community;
- media centers;
- public TV;
- commercial TV (HBO) and new cable-satellite channels;
- cable access;
- community and low-power radio, and radio generally;
- film schools;
- classrooms generally;
- after-school programs;
- web-based expression, including participatory Internet journalism;
- grassroots organizing media;
- community forums and screenings;
- union activities;
- social marketing media;
- theatrical distribution;
- video impact/outreach projects;
- legal processes;
- public health and other public education campaigns by NGOs, governments, and international organizations;
- online activities, especially interactive websites;
- media production and use within organizations (Jass Stewart will explain this);
- documentation and ethnographic projects, often by academics;
- media such as comics, electronic games, text messaging.

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS:

Definitions of success include:

- Institutional:
 - Legislation initiated or enacted
 - Human rights were protected/state-corporate violence deterred
 - An organization was launched
 - Community services were created.
- Individual:
 - Behavior changed
 - Information or techniques made available to a wide public

- Public concern was awakened or reawakened
- Other creators were inspired or given confidence.
- Intra-Organizational:
 - Events occurred
 - Program broadcast
 - More, better, or different media was created
 - A community had greater cohesion and/or capacity.

People talked about success in more general terms as well, for instance as a way to introduce new vocabulary into the culture. When people described strategies for success, they repeatedly noted a specified audience, clearly-defined purpose, and a connection with existing organizations and/or movements. These strategies were common to programmers, makers, and brokers.

At the same time, some worry about reducing an artform to an instrumental tool with specified “outcomes,” and some are concerned that an emphasis on targeted audiences and users may too soon give up the challenge of participating in mainstream media.

CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS:

When members of the group identified challenges, failed endeavors and problems, here were some of the recurrent themes:

- Resources
 - Funders want a social service, not a creative work or interaction
 - Funders and makers can get into a formula that’s deadening
 - Governments erode public funding and public-oriented policies
- Filmmakers:
 - Failure to involve stakeholders/experts/grassroots from the beginning
 - Unrealistic expectations about what distributors and programmers can do to reach an audience, and about how interested people will be in their burning passion
 - Want to go on and make other films, using professional mediamaking model
 - Failure to stick with a project through distribution/outreach
- Users
 - Communities or target users may be strapped for resources, competitive with other nonprofits, entrepreneurial but overwhelmed
 - Not aware of real utility of media or potential of new technologies
 - Activists are afraid of wasting time
 - Groups have an issue, not a media, agenda
 - Everyone is overworked and has no time
 - Audiences/viewers are distracted with deluge of commercial media
 - Audiences are only interested in “their” issue
- Programmers

- Public TV's national schedule is essential for promotion
 - Some access to TV is crucial
- Institutions
 - The priorities of a museum or university may not fit well with media activists
- Legitimacy
 - Evaluation is difficult or not done; we can show we're busy but not necessarily that we're effective
 - There isn't a critical or journalistic "beat" about this material
 - There isn't institutional memory
- Ingrained bias, especially white privilege.

PUBLIC WORK AND PUBLIC DOMAIN

Most do see publicness as central to what they do, and many believe that shared experience of media is in some way public by its nature. Your notions of the public ranged from general viewership of television to networks of people concerned to make and make useful social action media.

More specifically, people variously argued that:

- Museums, universities and centers act as very important non-commercial gathering places where artists, academics, activists, community representatives can meet and engage difference as well as commune and learn
- Films share a particular story and inspire others with it
- Web expression can permit grassroots stories to surface
- Work by underrepresented groups contribute to the "national imaginary" and to awareness in audiences of themselves as a public, even though there is powerful elite resistance
- When you create ways for people to act on knowledge and ways for people to connect within new communities, you stimulate new public expressions
- When people express their own reality they get confidence in their own right to participate as a member of the public
- Media projects are part of community development
- Media can celebrate what people have in common, including victimhood, and they can also (with a lot of work) trigger the discussions across difference that would be at the heart of public problem-solving.

Among policy activists, the notion of an "information commons" has become popular, to signify a realm of communication that is not purely proprietary and that feeds cultures of public life. Does or can moving image media for social justice and democratic participation act as part of an "information commons?" There was a wide range of reaction to this question. People who run nonprofit organizations whose mandate is to create public events (museums, centers) and people who have open Internet sites acting as portals or network hubs see themselves as operating a commons area, and understandably regard such areas as very important as sites for networking, incubating, nurturing, capacity-building. The people for whom it was hardest were makers and

distributors, who worry about allowing expensively-produced work to be available to some for free, without a clear understanding of how value returns to them.

HOW MUCH COMMERCE, AND WHAT KIND?

Many participants eagerly seek marketplace solutions, without losing the mission/mandate/purpose that drive their projects. There was also a range of sometimes conflicting comments on the question of markets for social media production and use.

Some arguments included:

- Technology brings down costs and makes commercial product viable BUT
- Technology availability often convinces clients or funders to go for a high-end, early-adopter solution that excludes many potential users or audiences AND
- Technology needs to be explored specifically to develop models and budgets that can serve the needs of social action users without subsidy.
- For-profit projects can successfully defray costs of the nonprofit endeavor BUT
- For-profit projects ought to defray costs and work synergistically but they mostly don't.
- Market-based media has no need to foster any public uses, so there needs to be a more aggressive defense of public media as public media
- Public services need to be costed in some way to fairly express their value, since they aren't free, and need to offer real value
- Public projects can generate commercially valuable and commodifiable information; communities have capital that is untapped
- Whether it's for-profit or not, media work within a commercial environment, and are subject to some of the same patterns, e.g. the importance of branding.

WHAT ARE THE BUSINESS AND REGULATORY CHALLENGES TO THE WORK YOU DO?

Participants noted some continuing challenges, for instance the low priority for cultural investment in American society. They also noted these concerns:

- Reality TV sets lower expectations for docs
- Commercial TV environment increasingly ruthless, with no room for complexity
- Multitude of viewing choices
- Decline in theatrical screenings of docs
- Big get bigger and smaller are swallowed, in nonprofit and commercial world
- Lowered costs of production create unrealistic expectations among programmers and funders
- Digital explosion means much more expense to underfunded cultural institutions, to wire and staff and fill with content
- New platforms dazzle funders and producers, but baffle users
- Consolidation and aggregation on the web could wipe out smaller portals.
- Federal deregulation promotes conglomeration without any public-side subsidy in compensation.

On the other hand, optimists noted:

- Technology allows lower costs of production and also repurposing
- It's easier to interact with kids to make their own media with digital technologies
- Dumbing down of mass media may create niche opportunities and a disgust that drives people toward alternatives
- Loss of broadcasters' established relationship with community (through deregulation, conglomeration and concentration) makes nonprofit brokers even more important when they want to reach out.