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I. Introduction

- A. The use of state wiretap laws to arrest citizen journalists who document police behavior has become something of an emerging trend.
1. October 2007 – Simon Glik is arrested near Boston Common for filming police scuffling with a man on a park bench.
 2. December 2008 – a Boston man is arrested after he filmed police using unnecessary force to break up a party.
 3. June 2011 – a woman is arrested in Rochester, NY after filming a traffic stop from her front lawn.
- B. These few examples of police arresting individuals for engaging in what has come to be known as “citizen journalism” illustrate the power of social media as a politically destabilizing and potentially revolutionary force.
1. While other panels and presenters will highlight the power of social media to cultivate social movements around national and international themes of trade, economic inequality, and democracy in the Middle East, this panel examines the power of social media to spark social movements at a local level. This panel examines the ability of social media to create protest movements designed to foster police accountability and reform.
 - a. We will do so by examining police misconduct in one particular egregious case that was all but ignored by the mainstream media until citizen journalism and social media took charge of the news-making process.
 - i. I am speaking, of course, about the death of Kelly Thomas at the hands of the Fullerton Police Department last year.
 - ii. And one of the citizen journalists responsible for the story was none other than the father of Kelly Thomas – Ron Thomas, who joins us today to share with us his insight into how social media can spark a social protest movement.
 - iii. As Ron Thomas knows better than anyone here the facts surrounding the case, we will let him tell the story himself.
 - iv. I think I speak for everyone, though, when I say that we are grateful to Ron for not only recognizing the importance of highlighting issues of police misconduct, excessive force, and inadequate social services for the homeless and the mentally ill, but also explaining today the essential role of social media in sparking local protest that effectively placing these items in the news and the political agenda.

II. Media and Public Behavior

- A. As the panel's academic, I want to spend just a few minutes presenting a theoretical understanding of the power of social media to hold power accountable. In doing so, I will pay close attention to the role of new media to hold law enforcement accountable.
1. The ability of social media to hold police accountable is partly strong, as police occupy a prominent and permanent starring role in evening news broadcasts.
- B. One of the defining features of modern society is the extent to which media *actually shape* political behavior.
1. There exists an interrelationship between media technology and social legitimacy.
 - a. Marshall McLuhan described new media as extensions of the senses and of the body.
 - i. Radio is an extension of the ears, allowing people to hear things miles away.
 - ii. Cameras are extensions of the eyes, bringing into focus that which might otherwise not have been seen.
 - iii. Recordings are extensions of the mind since they preserve a record of an event when memory might otherwise fail.
 1. Historian Daniel Boorstin has noted that it was only with the invention of recording devices that the phrase "no comment" became a common response at political figures at press inquiries.
 2. New media, then, have the ability to bring to the fore that which would otherwise remain unseen, unheard, or forgotten.
 3. For political figures, media can be destabilizing – revealing to the public that which those in power would prefer to remain hidden.
 4. It has therefore become a modern necessity for political figures to restructure their behavior to meet the needs of a mediated society.

III. Police & the News-Making Process

- A. Police are the most visible representatives of government, and they are frequently called on by reporters to comment on local events.
 - 1. Police are news gatekeepers, then, and maintain a level of control over stories related to crime and its prevention.
 - 2. Reporters are highly dependent on police for a daily supply of news filler.
 - 3. Police, then, routinely maintain hegemony on stories of crime and its prevention, esp. w/r/t police investigations, procedures, training and use of force.
- B. With the rise of new media – and in particular mobile and social media – public information is increasingly bypassing the traditional news-making process, as citizens are no longer purely passive recipients of news about officials.
 - 1. The ability of social media to bypass police renders law enforcement no longer the gatekeepers of information about – and the interpretation of – crime and justice.
 - a. Now, the police themselves can become the story.
 - b. Armed with new information about law enforcement, the public coalesce and form social movements demanding accountability on issues previously ignored by conventional media. Issues of police hiring and firing practices, police training, and policies regarding the use of force.
 - 2. The Kelly Thomas case serves as a case study of how a cell phone camera and a blog can draw the public's attention to issues largely ignored by traditional media, sparking a grassroots social protest movement (containing elements of both the political Left and Right) demanding police accountability and reform. We will now hear more about how this happened by hearing from Ron Thomas – the father of Kelly Thomas, and Gustavo Arellano, editor of the alternative publication *O.C. Weekly*. We will then open up the forum for discussion.