

A VIEW FROM THE STREETS

I ride a bike because I need to keep moving. I shoot video to celebrate the people I find moving. I started riding Critical Mass because I viewed it as a random, roving party that I could attend whenever I fancied.

In August 2004, it all changed. The New York City Police Department started to arrest anyone who rode on Critical Mass, along with any nearby people with a bike, such as the man on Second Avenue who was jailed while picking up dinner. These arrests became a consistent injustice that I just couldn't accept. And based on the outrage I saw in the faces and statements of passers-by, eyewitnesses couldn't believe what they were seeing either.

I knew the only way to reach the public with the truth about what was happening was through video. So I shot video. And soon I met others who shot video. We gave our videos to lawyers who used them to exonerate their clients. And we gave videos to mainstream press reporters to back up their stories, which otherwise might have been viewed as exaggerated.

I've learned that video can help bring the truth to the surface, and although this truth can be stranger than fiction, it just might set you free.

—Chris Ryan, punk rocker, filmmaker, bicyclist, NYC

I shoot video with the Collective because if my eyes could only tell you the vision they see from my bike it would be enough. So my camera becomes your eyes, and I can share a vision of how life could be.

—Nikita, neophyte videographer, Harlem

I shoot video for the Time's Up! Video Collective with the goal of defending New Yorkers' right to ride bicycles whenever and wherever they desire, in clusters of people as large as they like. In this pursuit, I am shooting video to improve the lives of every New Yorker, whether able-bodied enough to ride a bicycle or not.

—Sarah Phillips, artist, Brooklyn

I grew up here in the city riding my bike. I ride for fun, transportation, and more recently, for my health. In 2002, I had a heart attack. Realizing how fragile life is opened me to being more engaged with the world around me.

Cycling, my cardio exercise of choice, is very dangerous in our town. I see Critical Mass as a vehicle for raising awareness of a healthier lifestyle for everyone.

I began shooting the rides. As an artist, I find them to be a beautiful spectacle. A sea of bicycles coming up the boulevard, all ridden by different kinds of people, from messengers to parents with their kids, students and hipsters with their quirky outfits and cool bikes, to weather-worn cycling veterans. The rides show a diversity of who we are as New Yorkers. The juxtaposition of our landmarks and cityscape with our bikes and faces lends a unique visual charm that's incongruous with what we know to be the (car- and truck-filled) "mean streets" of New York.

—Peter, video designer, NYC

I ride a powder-blue Raleigh, skinny wheels, tall, upright handlebars, and 10 speeds. I found her abandoned and alone, cast off because someone stole her front tire. A little love from me and she shines so European.

The reasons I ride are many, but it really comes down to being able to truly see and feel the world around you. When you walk, you see people. When you take the subway, you see subway. When you bike, you travel just fast enough to see the world as a complete organism. You can see how the big and small pieces fit together. You can feel the sun and the rain.

I shoot video about biking because people need to be informed. They need to know what they're missing, rushing to the angst-fest that awaits at each red light. And they need to know what these cars take from me, as I tremble, so vulnerable next to them, so flesh-and-blood against their metal-and-oil.

—CA, Time's Up! volunteer, from the Bluegrass State, now living in NYC

The Time's Up! Video Collective comprises people who document cycling activity in New York and the behavior of police who harass cyclists. Formed in 1987, Time's Up! is an all-volunteer, grassroots environmental group dedicated to educating people about how their everyday choices affect their environment. (www.times-up.org)