In the field of documentary, voice, rather than point of view, is the prevailing metaphor for a filmmaker’s unique perspective, signaling the documentary genre’s emphasis on spoken words, as well as its enduring social mission of “giving voice.” My talk will unpack the humanitarian resonances of this metaphor, in conversation with recent scholarship on race, sound, and listening. I will discuss how documentary’s vocal conventions can normalize as well as undermine the complex hierarchies of race, gender, and other axes of difference implicated in the practices of giving voice and bearing witness.

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