

Preface

We were inspired to write this book because of the incredible social justice activism we independently witnessed on Twitter beginning in 2011. As avid users of the platform and diversely trained scholars of media, we watched and participated in many of the hashtags and stories that came to shape global, national, and local politics. We began to specifically study race and gender work on Twitter in 2014, with Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles studying #MyNYPD and #Ferguson while Moya Bailey investigated #GirlsLikeUs. Our interests, the interdisciplinary theory and methods we offered one another, and serendipity brought us together. We quickly realized we could best study hashtags, identity politics, networks, and social change by working together and with the input of the hashtag creators themselves.

Five years ago, when we began this journey, we could only imagine what we would learn through this collaborative project. It has been an incredible experience to write about a medium so dynamic and in a raucous political environment, as more and more people in the United States turned to Twitter with new versions of old demands for race and gender equality. In the course of our writing this book, Twitter character counts expanded,

media policy changed, Donald J. Trump was elected president of the United States and adopted the platform as his own, hashtag politics became increasingly influential offline, the debate over social media's role in democracy raged, and a plethora of new hashtags were born. In the pages that follow, we offer a record of how hashtags have become central to racial justice and gender justice efforts, what stories hashtags tell, and why we should listen.