Social Media and Protest Movements  

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Education scholar Henry A. Giroux (2012) writes “the literacies of the 21st century are electronic, aural and image based” (xviii). This is evident in the use of social media in the protest movements of our contemporary time. Whether it is Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, or Periscope, most 21st century activists will tell you that social media is integral to their work. For example, DeRay McKesson, a prominent activist against police brutality, credits Twitter for bringing attention to the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, Missouri. McKesson and others were reporting directly from the streets in real time during the uprisings in Ferguson.

The same occurred in Baltimore during the resistance and protests to the murder of Freddie Gray. Baltimore native and amateur photographer, Devin Allen, took to the streets of Baltimore with his camera and began taking pictures and posting them to Instagram and Twitter. *Time* magazine picked up one of his pictures for its cover and now Allen has become semi-famous and is traveling across the country and globe sharing his work.

Social media’s significance, as it relates to protest, is not without controversy. Some people charge hashtag (#) activism with being a “lazy” form of expressing outrage and/or support for an issue. However, others recognize its power to motivate people to organize around an issue and to spread information rapidly. Additionally, it can be viewed as a way for people who may not have access and mobility to take it to the streets and feel connected to a movement.

Another important outcome of social media use around protest is that it has created transnational communities. For example, during the Ferguson uprising, people in the Middle East who had experienced being sprayed with teargas during the Arab spring were sharing with protestors information on how to treat the effects of the gas.

Finally, social media posts are also sources of data. Sites like Tagboard aggregate hashtagged posts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Google+, Vine, and Flickr. Storify allows you to search, collect phrases, hashtags, etc. from across the web. Thinking about getting started? For starters check out the following hashtags:

- #handsupdonthoot
- #blakclivesmatter
- #icantbreathe
- #ericgarner
- #ferguson
- #mikebrown
- #wecantbreathe
- #shutitdown
- #freddiegray

On Twitter follow DeRay McKesson @deray, or the founders of #BlackLivesMatter Alicia Garza @aliciagarza and Opal Tometi @opalayo. I also recommend Devin Allen @byDVNLLN who is on both Twitter and Instagram.
REFERENCES


