Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression, How Search Engines Reinforce Racism,* New York University Press, 2018.

This book is about the power of algorithms in the age of neoliberalism and the ways those digital decisions reinforce oppressive social relationships and enact new modes of racial profiling, which I have termed technological redlining . By making visible the ways that capital, race, and gender are factors in creating unequal conditions, I am bringing light to various forms of technological redlining that are on the rise. The near - ubiquitous use of algorithmically driven software, both visible and invisible to everyday people, demands a closer inspection of what values are prioritized in such automated decision - making systems. Typically, the practice of redlining has been most often used in real estate and banking circles, creating and deepening inequalities by race, such that, for example, people of color are more likely to pay higher interest rates or premiums just because they are Black or Latino, especially if they live in low - income neighborhoods. On the Internet and in our everyday uses of technology, discrimination is also embedded in computer code and, increasingly, in artificial intelligence technologies that we are reliant on, by choice or not. I believe that artificial intelligence will become a major human rights issue in the twenty - first century. We are only beginning to understand the long - term consequences of these decision - making tools in both masking and deepening social inequality. This book is just the start of trying to make these consequences visible. There will be many more, by myself and others, who will try to make sense of the consequences of automated decision making through algorithms in society.

Part of the challenge of understanding algorithmic oppression is to understand that mathematical formulations to drive automated decisions are made by human beings. While we often think of terms such as “big data” and “algorithms” as being benign, neutral, or objective, they are anything but. The people who make these decisions hold all types of values, many of which openly promote racism, sexism, and false notions of meritocracy, which is well documented in studies of Silicon Valley and other tech corridors.

For example, in the midst of a federal investigation of Google’s alleged persistent wage gap, where women are systematically paid less than men in the company’s workforce, an “antidiversity” manifesto authored by James Damore went viral in August 2017, 1 supported by many Google employees, arguing that women are psychologically inferior and incapable of being as good at software engineering as men, among other patently false and sexist assertions. As this book was moving into press, many Google executives and employees were actively rebuking the assertions of this engineer, who reportedly works on Google search infrastructure. Legal cases have been filed, boycotts of Google from the political far right in the United States have been invoked, and calls for greater expressed commitments to gender and racial equity at Google and in Silicon Valley writ large are under way. What this antidiversity screed has underscored for me as I write this book is that some of the very people who are developing search algorithms and architecture are willing to promote sexist and racist attitudes openly at work and beyond, while we are supposed to believe that these same employees are developing “neutral” or “objective” decision - making tools. Human beings are developing the digital platforms we use, and as I present evidence of the recklessness and lack of regard that is often shown to women and people of color in some of the output of these systems, it will become increasingly difficult for technology companies to separate their systematic and inequitable employment practices, and the far - right ideological bents of some of their employees, from the products they make for the public.

My goal in this book is to further an exploration into some of these digital sense - making processes and how they have come to be so fundamental to the classification and organization of information and at what cost. As a result, this book is largely concerned with examining the commercial co - optation of Black identities, experiences, and communities in the largest and most powerful technology companies to date, namely, Google. I closely read a few distinct cases of algorithmic oppression for the depth of their social meaning to raise a public discussion of the broader implications of how privately managed, black - boxed information - sorting tools have become essential to many data - driven decisions. I want us to have broader public conversations about the implications of the artificial intelligentsia for people who are already systematically marginalized and oppressed. I will also provide evidence and argue, ultimately, that large technology monopolies such as Google need to be broken up and regulated, because their consolidated power and cultural influence make competition largely impossible. This monopoly in the information sector is a threat to democracy, as is currently coming to the fore as we make sense of information flows through digital media such as Google and Facebook in the wake of the 2016 United States presidential election.