



HOW DO WE CULTIVATE HOPE FOR ALL WE CAN SAVE?

“Sustaining Activism in the Long Run with Hope Chigudu, G, Rebecca Solnit and Rhetta Morgan” Transcript

At the Not Too Late project that Thelma Young-Lutunatabua and I co-founded, we like to say we respect despair as an emotion but not an analysis. You already know the scientists and energy systems engineers and climate strategists give us some margins of possibility in their appraisals of the situation. They tell us it is urgent but too late to choose the best path and steer away from the worst. Everything depends on us doing so.

But still there is this grief, this fear, this sense of loss, this fury and frustration. I get it, I feel them, too. But lately, some of the wisest among us have begun to speak more directly to these feelings. adrienne maree brown makes the crucial point that we feel these things because we love – we love justice, we love the earth, the oceans and the cycles of seasons, and migrating birds, or one particular place we know as a friend or refuge. We love the young who deserve a future, we love the future as the grounds for our own hope. Recognizing the underlying love is recognizing your own moral core and its strength.

I think we sometimes believe these feelings will break us. One of the dismal realities of the positivity culture around us is that it tells us to believe that these are signs of illness or failure or grounds for shame – that we’re supposed to be happy all the time, like we’re supposed to live someplace where it was never night and always sunny. There is no such place on earth and no such place in the human psyche. There is sorrow that will not break you but there denial that will flatten you out and make you a stranger to your own inner world and those of others. The insistence on endless cheer and false happiness is ultimately an insistence on shallowness. These other emotions open up your own depths to you, and love grows in the depths, the way plants grow in the night.

Mariame Kaba [an American activist, organizer, and educator] tells us that Hope is a discipline. Not hope as optimism that insists that everything is fine and nothing is required of us. That’s only the flip side of pessimism and despair, which likewise, require nothing of us and buffer us from uncertainty, which somehow we dread and try to avoid by the most extravagant and ridiculous means. But uncertainty is unavoidable, if we’re honest. The future is also a night in which we cannot see far. We can only navigate it by looking to the past where we can count our victories and measure change and see how power grows and imagination shifts.