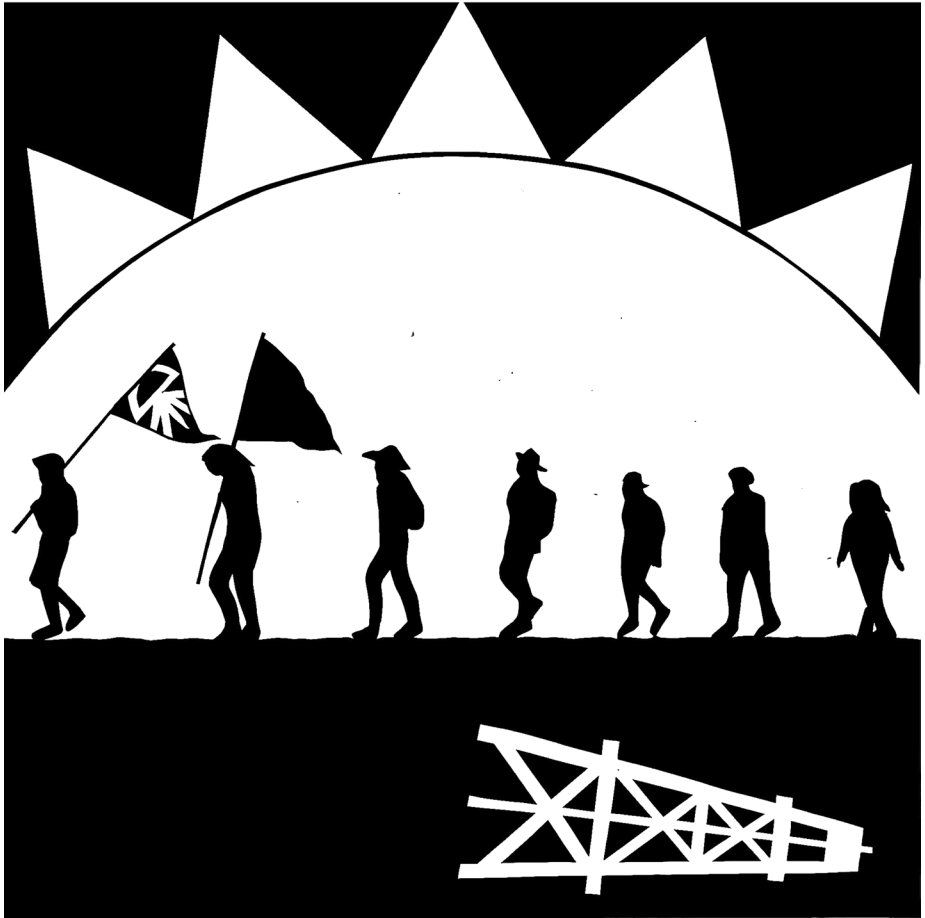




JOINUS





Having hope and maintaining hope is a chore. And that's something we should be honest about. Right, it's work. It is not easy to be hopeful all the time. That's the beautiful part about having people around you who are encouraging and who are constantly reminding you that you are built for this moment, that you are meant for this moment, that you're right for this moment.

—Tarana Burke, in conversation
with Ai-jen Poo

You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.

—from the *Pirkei Avot*

I don't feel that I have the right to consider giving up hope . . . I appreciate Mariame Kaba's idea that hope is a discipline. It's a choice—it can't be a matter of fluctuating affect, whatever viral news story or TikTok gave you hope in people or took it away. In general, I try to expect nothing and hope that everything is possible. I want the courage to need very little and demand a lot.

—Jia Tolentino





Difficult Is Not the Same as Impossible

Rebecca Solnit

It is late. We are deep in an emergency. But it is not too late, because the emergency is not over. The outcome is not decided. We¹ are deciding it now. The longer we wait to act, the more limited the options, but scientists tell us there are good options and great urgency to embrace them while we can. An emergency is when a stable situation destabilizes, when the house catches fire or the dam breaks or institution implodes, when the failure or sudden change or crisis calls for urgent response. It's when it becomes clear that the way things were is not how they're going to be.

1. The word “we” is both problematic and necessary, so at the outset I want to acknowledge that not everyone is part of any version of “we.” This book was put together with young people and newcomers to the climate movement in mind, with an expectation that most readers would be in the US and Global North. Even there, the differences matter—between Indigenous and settler, rich and poor, people who have lost homes and lives to the climate crisis and those who think of it as largely in the future. But there's also the “we” that is all humanity, all who are impacted, and all beings alive now and yet to come. So, take this “we” with a grain of salt and allow some latitude for the necessity and inadequacy of the categories that make up language.





4 Not Too Late

Some days it can feel like you're the house that caught fire, but you might also turn out to be the firefighter or the water. You might even be the other interpretation that comes along to say some structures should be burned to the ground because they were prisons or miseries. An emergency can involve terrible loss or it can bring about magnificent transformation, and, while it's unfolding, the outcome can be impossible to foresee. Or it can depend on what you and we do.

The word itself comes from *emerge*, to exit, to leave behind, separate yourself from, so an emergency is when you exit from the familiar and the stable. We are now doing that on a planetary scale, exiting the stability and reliability of the delicately tuned systems of seasons, weather, relations between species, even the shape of the world for the past ten thousand years, as oceans draw new coastlines, lakes dry up, glaciers melt, and natural and human communities shift and migrate. It is an exodus into the unknown, and our task is to make a home there for ourselves and for the nature from which we were never separate.

We are deep in an emergency, and we need as many people as possible to do what they can to work toward the best-case scenarios and ward off the worst. Involvement depends on having a sense of personal power—the capacity to make an impact. Inseparable from that sense is the hope that it matters that you do it. Many in desperate circumstances have believed that it matters even when they didn't believe they could win (and sometimes they won anyway, or they inspired someone else to win). A lot of stories in circulation endeavor to strip you of hope and power, to tell you it doesn't matter or it's too late or there's nothing you can do or we never win. *Not Too Late* is a project to try to return hope and power through both facts and perspectives.

Twenty years ago, I began to speak directly about hope and to what impeded it for so many people: "I say all this to you because





hope is not like a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. I say this because hope is an ax you break down doors with in an emergency.” I wrote during a surge of neoliberal attacks on indigenous people, nature, small farmers, and labor, during the so-called Global War on Terror of the oil-fueled, climate-denying Bush administration that killed more than half a million and demonized billions. People pushed back, there were victories, and they mattered.

There was virtually no climate movement to speak of, though there were campaigns against the coal and oil industry and their environmental destruction and human rights violations, and Indigenous people had never stopped striving to care for land, water, and nature. The world is now both better and worse than we imagined twenty years ago. The parts that are better are better largely because of grassroots campaigns, popular movements, and Indigenous uprisings by people who believed it was worth trying to act on their beliefs and commitments.

These are connected to the way that new ideas about justice, equality, kindness, about interdependence as the first lesson nature teaches us, appeared on distant horizons like clouds and then soaked into the soil of the collective imagination like spring rain. (Many of the new ideas were really old, discarded, discredited ideas that came back because we wanted or needed them or were more able to hear the people who had never forgotten them.) The parts that are worse—in many, perhaps most cases, they’re worse due to good people doing nothing, or rather not enough of them trying.

Hope is not optimism. Optimism assumes the best, and assumes its inevitability, which leads to passivity, as do the pessimism and cynicism that assume the worst. Hope, like love, means taking risks and being vulnerable to the effects of loss. It means recognizing the uncertainty of the future and making a commitment to try to participate in shaping it. It means facing difficulties and accepting





uncertainty. To hope is to recognize that you can protect some of what you love even while grieving what you cannot—and to know that we must act without knowing the outcome of those actions.

Over and over again, the world has been changed by people who, at the outset, seemed far too puny to pit themselves against the most powerful institutions of their time. After centuries of genocide, Indigenous people in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have reclaimed culture, rights, language, and land and become key leaders for a changing world. Such power from below has overthrown colonial regimes worldwide and, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ended slavery in the British Empire and the United States; Czech artists, dreamers, the Solidarity Union in Poland, churches in East Germany, and other resisters ultimately toppled half a dozen regimes in 1989; grassroots organizing has begun to change centuries of homophobia and misogyny; and the environmentalists and scientists who began to build new movements in the 1960s had to contend with a lack of even the language and concepts we now have as equipment to protect the natural world.

To hope is to accept despair as an emotion but not as an analysis. To recognize that what is unlikely is possible, just as what is likely is not inevitable. To understand that difficult is not the same as impossible. To plan and to accept that the unexpected often disrupts plans—for the better and for the worse. To know the powerful have their weaknesses, and we who are supposed to be weak have great power together, power to change the world, have done so before and will again. To know that the future will be what we make of it in the present. To know that joy can appear in the midst of crisis, and that a crisis is a crossroads.

Meteorologist and climate journalist Eric Holthaus writes, “In a climate emergency, courage is not just a choice. It’s strategic. It’s a survival strategy.” Perhaps hope is the courage to persevere when





winning looks hard; perhaps it's not hope but faith that sustains people when success looks almost inconceivable. It's in this sense that the playwright Václav Havel, who was a catalyst for revolution and regime change in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s, speaks of it: "Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something is worth doing no matter how it turns out."

A few facts: though we are still overshooting the goals to keep global warming to 1.5°C (2.7°F), in the past two decades, climate actions and energy transitions have shifted our trajectory downward dramatically. Had there been no climate action, we might be hurtling toward 4°C or more of warming, far deeper in climate catastrophe than we are now, and far less equipped to limit it.

The movement—a shorthand for thousands of coalitions and groups and alliances, campaigns and uprisings and efforts—has done remarkable things, as my friend Renato Constantino tells in his chapter about how people from the most climate vulnerable nations shifted the agreed-upon global limit to temperature rise from 2°C to 1.5°C in 2015, through passion, brilliance, tenacity. So the movement has done a lot. Not enough yet, but a lot.

The climate movement has gone from small and polite to huge, fierce, and brilliantly strategic over the last fifteen years. It is global, and it has many victories behind it, some as tangible as a pipeline defeated, some as intangible as public awareness and wider commitment (we collected a list of them for this book; it begins on page 92). Often the changes are visible only to those who follow the policy enough to see the shift in energy sources or building codes or cutting finance for fossil-fuel projects. Sometimes victory leaves nothing to see, the trees that weren't cut down or the drilling permits that weren't issued. We need more. But we also need to recognize the victories and achievements directly behind us as well





as those further in the past, because they tell us we have won, we can win, and thereby equip us to keep trying.

Climate activists have blockaded roads, pipeline paths, and fracking sites, gone on—as climate campaigner Nikayla Jefferson tells us in her chapter—hunger strikes, tree sits, marches, long walks, rallies, FridaysForFuture weekly protests; have orchestrated divestment campaigns, petitions, phone-ins, die-ins, sit-ins, educational campaigns; blockaded harbors with kayaks; hung banners from bridges; doused nude figures in fake oil in London’s Tate Modern museum while it was taking money from BP; painted murals in the street; staged mock trials; shut down thousands of coal plants and prevented others from being built; stopped fossil-fuel leases and pipelines; blockaded oil trains; interrupted board meetings; organized shareholders; raised money; and, more important, raised consciousness.

Speaking of consciousness, the main job is not to convince climate deniers and the indifferent (and there are a lot fewer in either of those categories than there were a decade ago). It’s to engage and inspire those who care but who don’t see that they can and should have an active role in this movement, who don’t see that what we do matters—that it’s not too late, and we are making epic decisions now. Understanding that the consequences of activism are often indirect or slow to appear or require an informed overview—but matter nevertheless—is part of the equipment we need to see our own power and possibility.

Thanks to the divestment movement, often mocked at its inception, more than \$40 trillion has been divested from fossil fuels. Public opinion has shifted dramatically, thanks to the global wake-up call of activists—and also to the increasing frequency and intensity of disasters. The majority of people do care.² They want to see better policies.

2. I write this on a day when I’ve just come across an article in the journal





They are willing and even anxious to see change. This popular will is also something the climate movement has built.

We have undergone an astonishing energy revolution rarely described as such, or rather we are in the early stages of such a revolution when it comes to both design and implementation. Over the past two decades, breakthroughs in technology have made renewables a genuine alternative to fossil fuel for electricity generation, one that is rapidly spreading across the world. This means that we can leave the age of fossil fuel behind. The cost of solar dropped 90 percent between 2010 and 2020, and wind is not far behind. Solar has been dubbed “the cheapest energy in history” by the International Energy Agency, which pivoted a few years ago to recognize the urgency of the energy transition and the rapid decline of fossil-fuel extraction. Every week I read about innovations and experiments in battery materials and design that mean this part of the new system is also changing, rapidly, for the better.

In 2022, investments in renewables outstripped investments in conventional energy for the first time. It is inevitable that the future will be powered largely by renewables, but the ruthlessly destructive fossil-fuel companies and their allies seek to delay the transition as long as possible for the sake of short-term profit. They can be defeated and, as Antonia Juhasz relates in her chapter in this book, have already been weakened and are struggling against their own pending demise.

Frameworks matter, too, and many of them are traps. Capitalism encourages us to imagine ourselves as consumers rather than

Nature Communications that states, “Americans underestimate the prevalence of support for major climate change mitigation policies and climate concern. While 66 to 80 percent of Americans support these policies, Americans estimate the prevalence to only be between 37 to 43 percent.” We are the majority.





citizens; authorities like us to believe we have no power. These perspectives leave us few options but to modulate our consumption—to change nothing but ourselves and merely implore the powerful to heed our wishes. They privatize our public spirits. We need to remember our own heroic nature, our capacity for courage, compassion, and action, to remember those who came before us who took action against the odds and sometimes won. Even when they didn't, they inspired others at the time or long after to live by principle rather than by merely what is possible. Often, they changed what is possible, in part by refusing to accept what were supposed to be the limits.

People often talk about the future as if it already exists. There are parameters of what's possible, likely, and all but inevitable, and scientists have done a good job of telling us the probable consequences of what we do in the present, in terms of natural systems. But they hedge their bets because they know the future is what we make it in the present, that we're still deciding (within those parameters), because it doesn't exist yet. A lot of it is being decided now. This book is to help you recognize where the possibilities lie and what your role in them can be. We hope it reenergizes you if you're already engaged or brings you onboard if you're not. There is nothing more important in this time.





Nothing Is Inevitable

Thelma Young Lutunatabua

Climate rage smelled like pine. We were cleaning the after-cyclone refuse, and scattered branches and bits of our roof were everywhere. Often, the vestiges that don't survive a storm are the aliens and imposters—those brought to Fiji by colonizers or other outsiders. The pine trees do not have the generations of inherited knowledge that tells them how to bend with the wind and not break.

My body was still finding its breaths after the days of preparation, the hours of crouching, covering puddles, and praying that the roof remained. While outside, we heard on the radio that there was another possible storm on the way, that it could hit in the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours. Internet signal was down, so we depended on updates from a single battery-powered device. Being unable to access my usual cyclone tracking apps or even Twitter, I felt even more powerless. The vulnerability brought fear, then it brought anger.

Back-to-back Category 3 to 4 cyclones is not something that happened by chance. The intense heat wave I'm sitting in while writing this, which is making millions also seek cool shelter, is not some random occurrence.

In 2014, Évelyne Dhéliat, a French meteorologist, shared a





simulated weather forecast for what we could expect in 2050, with parts of France experiencing temperatures around 40°C (104°F). Her predictions have come true early. The mock 2050 forecast presented the exact temperatures for this weekend in June 2022.

There is a ticking clock of terror that grips so many who learn about the horrifying direction we are rushing toward. The Italian physicist Carlo Rovelli, in his book *The Order of Time*, notes that the standardization of our clocks is a modern occurrence, that traditionally time was conceived by “counting the ways in which things change.” It’s no wonder, then, given how swiftly the planet is shifting, that this generation is heavy with anxiety with the understanding that we are running out of days to halt the climate crisis.

If it were just a battle with time, it would be somehow easier. It’s also a deep uphill confrontation with entrenched powers that have had the luxury of domination for too long. Like many others, I have joined in mass marches in New York; Washington, DC; Bonn; and elsewhere, demanding that politicians act. For decades, activists have sent petitions, held demonstrations, and faced arrest or worse. The facts have been presented and people’s desires made known, yet those in power refuse to acknowledge what’s truly at stake. Or they may make sweeping public statements about the gravity of the situation, but their actions speak otherwise. The latest form of climate denial is no longer refuting climate change’s existence but merely recommending a slower track of action or offering ceaseless prayers to promisors of carbon sequestration. They hope that technology will prevent them from having to face the consequences of their actions.

In 2019, heads of state from across the Pacific gathered in Tuvalu, one of the low-lying atoll nations most at risk from rising sea levels. Funafuti, the capital, is not more than four hundred meters at its widest point, and its highest point is just a few meters above sea level. The welcome ceremony included Tuvaluan children sitting





in a moat of water to symbolize the impending waters. The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) meeting included Scott Morrison, Australia's prime minister, the same politician notorious for bringing a lump of coal to Australia's parliament and telling people not to be afraid. At the forum, leaders from across the Pacific implored Australia to make stronger commitments. Negotiations for the final draft of the joint communiqué were described as "fierce" and almost collapsed twice. Morrison and his delegation refused to acknowledge the role that coal was playing in furthering the erasure of island nations.

Enele Sopoaga, the former prime minister of Tuvalu, noted forcefully and tragically, "I thought, perhaps too ambitiously, that hosting the fiftieth PIF in Tuvalu, my country, which is perhaps the most threatened atoll nation due to impacts of climate change, would secure genuine sympathy and loyal understanding on our Tuvalu plea calling for urgent and complete response to climate change. Sadly, making money took precedence over saving lives in [small island developing states]."³ Heads of state, people in power, were there face to face with Morrison, imploring Australia to care that their nations might disappear soon—and he flat out refused. Instead, he chose to perpetuate the ongoing imbalance of emissions that has led to the current injustice, with those who did the least to create the crisis bearing the worst burden.

It can be horrifically painful to know that we have the answers, to know that to halt the worst of the crisis we have to keep fossil fuels in the ground, while those in power pass permits and grant leases and make greater offers to the companies that gladly perpetuate disasters.

I wish this were just a battle against time.

For many years, there was the pervasive belief that if we could just show people that climate change was real and happening now

3. Kate Lyons, "Former Tuvalu PM Says He Was 'Stunned' by Scott Morrison's Behaviour at Pacific Islands Forum," *Guardian.com*, October 23, 2019.





that it would shape minds. Hence the early fascination with polar bears. But in the past just seven to ten years, we've seen a massive shift. Now, there is no doubt that climate change is real, and billions are having their lives and bodies upended because of it. In 2015, my Egyptian colleague Sarah Rifaat told me, "It's scary to think that when it becomes so extreme, and everyone feels it, will it mean it's too late?" As more and more peoples face the consequence of the climate crisis, I've thought of Sarah's question often. We need new tactics to inspire people and mobilize them to join the struggle. We need to give people better ways to get involved in the work—beyond just online sign ups, occasional marches, and more. We need better channels to put power back in people's hands. And then there's the second part of Sarah's question—is it too late?

There is no doubt that we have an immensely difficult journey ahead. It's not just an uphill climb, it is a ragged, steep mountain face we are trying to hoist billions of people up. Up to the clearing where fresh air dominates and hope permeates. While staring up at the path we must traverse, we can easily become overwhelmed and even immobilized by darkness.

Sunlight reaches only the top thousand meters in the ocean at most, yet the dark depths extend down to twenty thousand meters in many places. Ninety-seven percent of the ocean floor is in this abyssal zone no light can touch. If our planet's surface is 70 percent ocean, and if the ocean is predominantly dark, that means if someone were looking at Earth from beyond, they could perhaps register it as a mostly dark, wet, cold place. For many years, it was assumed that no life could exist without oxygen, light, or food. In 1977, in one of the most stunning scientific discoveries of the past century, scientists in the Galápagos Rift found hydrothermal vents and a whole ecosystem existing down in the depths—despite the lack of oxygen and the immense pressure. The more the deep ocean is explored, the more life-forms are





being found—species with creative ways to generate their own light and showcase the multitude of ways that life can come into being.

I think of this phenomenon often, not because it terrifies me. It comforts me. If those “inhabitable” depths can be bursting with life and light, then we shouldn’t be a planet afraid of darkness.

Nothing is inevitable, and that’s crucial to remember in this fight. It’s no surprise that so many of the tactics the climate movement is using to tackle fossil-fuel Goliaths are taken straight from playbooks used to bring down dictators. If we can get at the fossil-fuel industry’s pillars of support, the legs that prop them up, they will tumble. The Serbian activists who helped overthrow Slobodan Milošević have been spreading this methodology for years with the simple truth, “If people withdraw their support, the ruler cannot rule!”

There is immense momentum now in the climate movement, with coal, oil, and gas projects struggling to find funding or insurance backers. Climate groups have been systematically targeting the monetary pillar of the fossil-fuel industry and finding success. There are those working to remove the political power of those who are in the pocket of coal, oil, and gas. One piece of good news is that, in the May 2022 Australian elections, Scott Morrison and all his coal-loving friends lost their seats in government, largely due to waves of organized people frustrated with climate inaction.

Sitting in the crevices of the hearts of many, even after a victory, are the questions, *Will it be enough? Will my actions be enough to keep us from catastrophe?* We can track the global carbon emissions, monitor the temperature levels, keep an eye on the receding glaciers—and then use these as measuring sticks for our own behavior. However, staying in this state of berating urgency can also be dangerous. The question shouldn’t be *Will my actions be enough?* but *Will our actions be enough?* This is a communal quest in which everyone can bring their talents, visions, desires, access—and if





one person struggles, we can help each other up.

There is a gravity to the moment we are in, a horrid perpetuating whirlwind that is coming. There is no doubt we have to act fast to transition the world's energy. Billions of lives are at stake. Yet, within that space, we also need to keep room for the joy and beauty of this world to take root. We also need to ensure we remember our shared humanity and the intersectionality of all our struggles. In our efforts to protect what is being lost, how do we make sure we're appreciating what is fighting to remain? After a frustrating new law is passed, do we take a moment to bring bread to our neighbors? Do we watch the sunset after a brutal storm? Have we acted as if there were possibilities other than destruction? Have we taken steps to show that our liberation is tied to that of others?

I've seen too many activists hold the heaviness of the climate clock within them, a well-meaning martyr complex that prevents any intake of abundance. I've also seen activists push aside any injustice that wasn't directly related to limiting carbon emissions. There is a tender balance between urgency and humanity, and the truth is that keeping our brilliant selves whole and standing in solidarity with others will deliver so much more in the long run. The poet and noted ornithologist J. Drew Lanham aptly said, "Joy is the justice we give ourselves."

We cannot honestly know if our actions will be enough, but that doesn't mean we can't try. What we hope to do with this book is to provide that light in the dark. When the pressure is pounding down on you, this anthology is the bioluminescence that can be a glimmer of encouragement. If you are terrified, that could be a good thing, because it means you're paying attention. What you can't do is let it immobilize you, to pull you down to worse depths. We have to learn how to bend with the intense winds and not be so rigid we break like the pine trees.

