

Reading & Discussion Guide

Let This Radicalize You

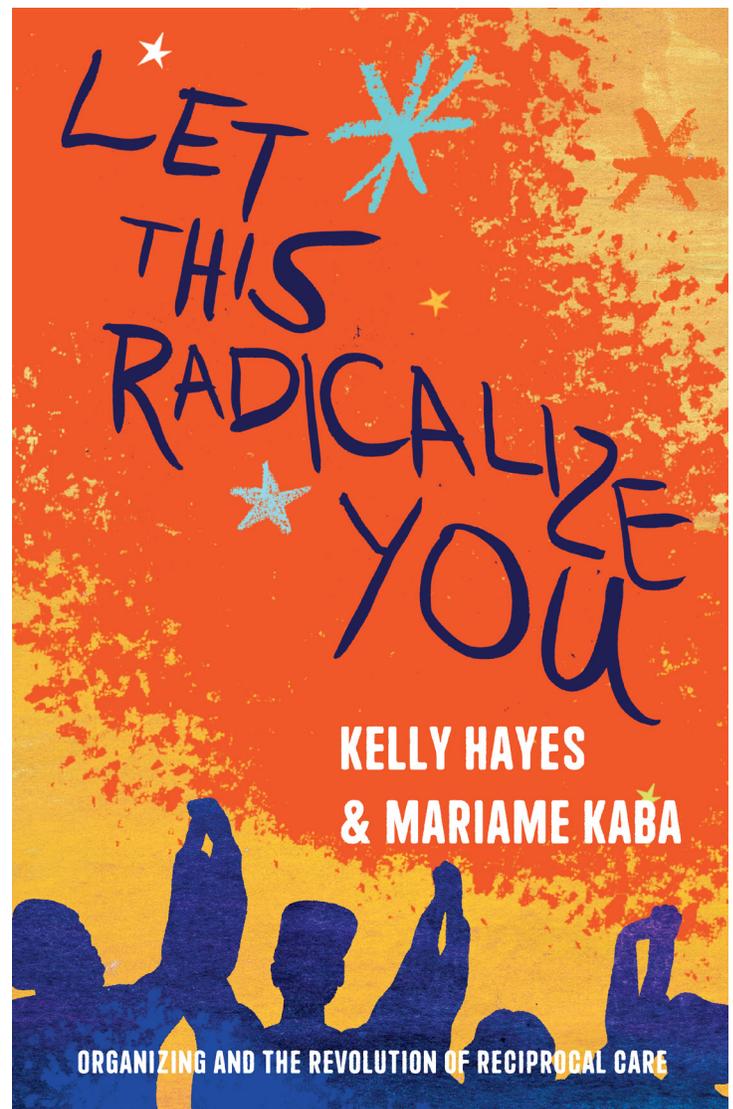
Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care

by Kelly Hayes & Mariame Kaba

What fuels and sustains activism and organizing when it feels like our worlds are collapsing? *Let This Radicalize You* is a practical and imaginative resource for activists and organizers building power in an era of destabilization and catastrophe.

Longtime organizers and movement educators Mariame Kaba and Kelly Hayes examine some of the political lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the convergence of mass protest and mass formations of mutual aid, and consider what this confluence of power can teach us about a future that will require mass acts of care, rescue and defense, in the face of both state violence and environmental disaster.

The book is intended to aid and empower activists and organizers as they attempt to map their own journeys through the work of justice-making. It includes insights from a spectrum of experienced organizers, including Sharon Lungo, Carlos Saavedra, Ejeris Dixon, Barbara Ransby, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore about some of the difficult and joyous lessons they have learned in their work.



Reading & Discussion Guide for *Let This Radicalize You* by Kelly Hayes & Mariame Kaba

Foreword: Radicalization Is Vital | Maya Schenwar

1. Consider the roots that grow underneath the world we live in. What do you visualize when you think of these roots? How can the roots of systemic harms be grasped and pulled out? What new roots could be planted in their place?

“Becoming radical isn’t an impulsive dalliance. It’s a leap toward allowing yourself to believe in the possibility of our collective survival—and to believe that even if we don’t make it, we are all still worth fighting for, to the last breath.” - Maya Schenwar

Introduction: Remaking the World | Kelly Hayes

2. Why have movement stories and histories been hidden and withheld from us? How can storytelling function as a fight for the future? What movement stories are important to you? How can you support the survival of these histories?

“As organizers, we are builders in an era of collapse. Our work is set against all probability—and it is in that space of cherished improbability where our art will be made, where our joy will be found, and where our ingenuity will fashion ways of living and caring for each other, even as the ground shifts beneath our feet. Life will be a scramble, but we will not scramble alone. Together, we will fight for this world, to keep it.” – Kelly Hayes

Introduction: We Can Only Survive Together | Mariame Kaba

3. What are some of the differences between organizing and activism? What are some of the skills that are necessary for organizing? How would like to build your own skills? How can you build courage and resilience? How can you push yourself toward action?

“We can only survive together. This book is your invitation to act in the best way that you know and to survive together.” – Mariame Kaba

Chapter 1: Beyond Alarm, toward Action

4. Why did Kelly join the reparations campaign for torture survivors in Chicago even while skeptical that the demands would be successful? What did she learn by taking action? Where can you find support when you have doubts about organizing and its potential to transform the world?
5. How can storytelling help us cultivate imagination and inspiration? How can stories be an antidote to fear? What stories and relationships have helped you experience a sense of communal care? How can getting involved in mutual aid projects in your community help you feel anchored and connected?

“It is the grandest illusion ever created: in a world where corporations and world governments are poised to annihilate most life on Earth, we are made to believe that other disempowered people are the greatest danger we face.”

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Chapter 2: Refusing to Abandon

6. What is “organized abandonment”? What does it mean to refuse to abandon others? How did Monica Cosby experience solidarity and opposition to abandonment while she was incarcerated? Who are the people that you refuse to abandon? Who refuses to abandon you?
7. Why is relationship building important? How can you practice not giving up on humanity? Why is it important to “organize opportunities for discovery, exploration, and the pursuit of justice”?

“For me, relationship building is as much of a politic as my commitment to abolition is, or my commitment to anticapitalism. Some people see building relationships as a chore, but I actually feel like you’ve got to believe in it. You have to believe that it matters.” – Ejeris Dixon

8. How do acts of assistance and rescue demonstrate interdependence at work? What communities you are a part of? How do you prioritize caring for those communities? How can you develop social skills in order to help others survive?

Chapter 3: Care Is Fundamental

9. How did mutual aid centers in Puerto Rico operate as sites of solidarity and survival? How can this type of activation continue outside of crisis and disaster? Why are histories of mutual aid often erased? Did you witness this erasure during the global pandemic? How can you build your imagination in order to support a counterculture of care?

“Care-driven organizing compels us to ask, What would it take to provide for people’s needs and address the root causes of a problem? How do we care for each other as crises unfold? At what cost are we willing to offer shelter and protection to people who are under attack?”

10. How did the state fail to protect people during uprisings in 2020? Did you experience this firsthand? How did the Chicago Freedom School resist the state in order to protect young people? What organizations and people can you count on as a part of a wide landscape of resources?

Chapter 4: Think Like a Geographer

11. Why must we have an understanding of how systems function in order to dismantle them? Why is it important to think about freedom and liberation as a place that we make? How did Halle Quezada and her neighbors impact the place they lived in Chicago?

“It occurred to me, I don’t know, twenty, twenty-five years ago, to realize that freedom is a place. That it’s not like a destination, it’s the place that we make.” – Ruth Wilson Gilmore

12. What does it mean to rehearse knowledge rather than recite it? How can reading, zine-making, and studying with co-strugglers help to advance your work? How can zine-making and sharing advance organizing with people inside? How can this help us reclaim energy and time that has been stolen from us?

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"We urge organizers to spend more time with books and other modes of learning to claim an inheritance of knowledge your oppressors hope you never discover, embrace, or build from—the stories, wisdom, hope, and imaginings of organizers who came before us."

13. How can technology reveal broader systemic injustices? Why is it important to practice working in physical spaces with others while also learning to use online tools? What practices can help you create a "sustained capacity for organized political action"? How do you balance your time building skills online and on the ground?

Chapter 5: Rejecting Cynicism and Building Broader Movements

14. What are some of the differences between activists, organizers, and political hobbyists? How can you protect your time and energy from political hobbyists? How can you practice responding to ignorance with an invitation to join in the movement for collective liberation?
15. How have we been disconnected from the organizing of our ancestors? How can we gather, distribute, and honor the stories and histories of our ancestors? How can grief work, healing work, and conflict resolution support our movements?

As you strategize in the face of cynicism, ask yourself these questions:

- What is the outcome you want?
- Do your words and actions lend themselves to the creation of that outcome?
- If not, how can you change them?
- What is the impact you would like to have?
- Do you believe you are capable of making that impact?
- If so, how will you go about making it?
- What power do you possess, and how are you leveraging that power in relation to the issue at hand?

Chapter 6: "Violence" in Social Movements

16. Why are radical concepts and movements defanged and reconfigured once they become accepted in the mainstream? How did this happen with the Defund the Police movement?
17. What are some examples of state violence that are frequently justified and protected? How does the state promote language—such as "keeping the peace" and the "order of things" to justify state violence?
18. How have protests and land defender actions—in the United States and around the world—been deemed as "violence" and suppressed by the state? How is your definition of violence different from the state's definition of violence? How can you practice resisting harmful frameworks that identify people and movements as violent?

"The destruction of property is usually viewed as violent only if it disrupts profit or the maintenance of wealth. If food is destroyed because it cannot be sold while people go hungry, that is not considered violent under the norms of capitalism. If a person's belongings are tossed on a sidewalk during an eviction and consequently destroyed, that is likewise not considered violent according to the norms of this society. Those destructive acts are part of the "order of things.""

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Chapter 7: Don't Pedestal Organizers

19. How are pedestaled organizers vulnerable to harassment and overexposure? How can organizers benefit from critique and self-reflection? How have your own political stances evolved over time?
20. Why is it important to stay grounded in community? Who can help you practice what organizer Aly Wayne calls "loving correction"? How can you protect yourself with cybersecurity protocols, boundaries, and being in political communion with others?

"Political communion necessitates both connection and purpose, as well as a profound recognition of the shared humanity of those participating, whether in digital or in-person spaces."

Chapter 8: Hope and Grief Can Coexist

21. How can a loving practice of grief serve as a practice of resistance? How do you process grief? How can you make a commitment to resist the normalization of mass death? How can you practice the Indigenous wisdom of planning for the next seven generations to come?

"Hope and grief can coexist, and if we wish to transform the world, we must learn to hold and to process both simultaneously. That process will, as ever, involve reaching for community."

22. What is the practice of active hope? How can this practice support you when you feel hopeless? What could a practice space for hope in your community look like? How can vigils, memorials, poetry, and spaces for storytelling disrupt the normalization of death and harm?

"How does your community practice hope and grief in collectivity? Are such efforts planned intentionally? Has your group created any space, physical or otherwise, for people to process their hope or grief about the pandemic?"

Chapter 9: Organizing Isn't Matchmaking

23. Why must we work to find common ground in order to achieve more just outcomes? What are some of the discomforts that come from working with others across differences? How have you worked together with people that are different from you—or that you may even dislike? How can you stretch and grow in order to work with more people who believe a different world is possible?

"How much empathy can you extend to people who do not fully understand your identity or experience or who have not had the same access to liberatory ideas? How much discomfort can you navigate for what you believe is truly at stake?"

24. Why are organizers often driven to movements from a place of trauma and outrage? How can constructive engagement, deep listening, and processes for accountability and conflict resolution address some of these hurts? How can groups use poetry to build empathy and listening skills?

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Chapter 10: Avoiding Burnout and Going the Distance

25. What is harmful about burnout within movement work? Have you witnessed or experienced burnout? What helps you preserve your own health and well-being? How can you prioritize care for yourself and for others? How can you support the creation and use of care strategies and relief teams within your community?

“Is there a place that makes you feel whole or revived in some way? How often are you able to inhabit that space? If that place is inaccessible, what ritual or experience brings you closest to it? What practices or experiences help you experience a sense of renewal? Are these practices an ongoing part of your life?”

26. How can a focus on sustainability and interdependence help us achieve more balance? What can we learn about balance from our ancestors, movement elders, and natural seasons about rest and reciprocity? Consider your own organizing work. What season are you in? What does it feel like to be in this season? What support might you need?

Conclusion: Relationships, Reciprocity, and Struggle | Kelly Hayes

27. Read about the direct action to free Bernina in the Windy City Times: windycitytimes.com/lgbt/Activists-gather-outside-Pritzkers-home-call-for-lesbian-prisoner-Bernina-Matas-release-/74493.html. How did Kelly experience connection and political communion with others during this action? Why are relationships our best hope for building new worlds? What are some of new relationships that you would like to cultivate and grow?

“The work before us is the work of our ancestors and the work of those who will come after: to relentlessly build new worlds, even on the edge of oblivion, and live in them anyway—together. That work, which sounds epic in scope and scale, begins with human connection, human relationships, and reciprocity in struggle. It begins with care.”

Conclusion: Beyond Doom, toward Collective Action | Mariame Kaba

“I don’t have hope, I do hope. It’s an active process that I have to regularly commit to— hope not as an emotion but as a discipline. Hope for me is grounded in the reality that wondrous things happen alongside and parallel to the terrible. Every single day.”

28. What is the meaning of the Zulu concept of Ubuntu? What are some examples of how you’ve witnessed Ubuntu— what Archbishop Desmond Tutu called “me we”? How did the global pandemic impact your personal sense of Ubuntu? How can getting involved in mutual aid efforts and other collective projects grow your own sense of “me we”?

“Even if the end times are upon us, we should still plant trees. This is disciplined hope. This is hope in the doing, hope as action. How will you practice and cultivate hope today?”

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Mariame Kaba: "There are times when I feel overwhelmed about what to do, where to start. The problems seem so big and so intractable. In those times, I ask myself a set of questions that serve as guideposts and help to ground me:

1. What resources exist so I can better educate myself?
2. Who's already doing work around this injustice?
3. Do I have the capacity to offer concrete support and help to them?
4. How can I be constructive?"

Afterword: Movements Make Life | Harsha Walia

29. Harsha Walia distills the book into three takeaways: 1) organizing is the antidote to despair, 2) collective liberation necessitates collective care, and 3) we need each other. Consider how these words of wisdom could shape your actions. Who are you as an organizer today? How would you like to grow as an organizer? How can you use your skills and gifts to help transform and build a life-affirming world?

Resources

Organizations & Groups

Ayni Institute offers political education grounded in Indigenous principles of reciprocity.
ayni.institute

Center for Story Based Strategy cultivates imagination spaces where story, grassroots leadership, organizing, and democracy are interwoven strategies to build power.
storybasedstrategy.org

Centros de Apoyo Mutuo (Mutual Support Centers) are self-managed spaces around the Island of Puerto Rico, organized during the post-Maria collapse of the State.
redapoyomutuo.com

Chicago Alliance for Waterfront Safety is a group where concerned individuals throughout Chicagoland can share ideas, share resources, and work together to advocate for adequate safety measures along Chicago's lakefront.
facebook.com/groups/237844823701520

Chicago Community Bail Support is a grassroots mutual aid project with a mission to assist anyone being released from Cook County Jail, their loved ones, and the surrounding community.
opencollective.com/chicago-community-jail-support

Chicago Torture Justice Memorials aims to honor and to seek justice for the survivors of Chicago police torture, their family members and the African American communities affected by torture.
chicagotorture.org

Chicago Youth Mutual Aid is an effort born from the collaboration of five Black and Brown grassroots led organizations in Chicago serving youth and their families: **Assata's Daughters**, **Chicago Freedom School**, **Circles & Ciphers**, **Street Youth Rise Up** and the **Youth Empowerment Performance Project**. Although created as a response to COVID-19, these organizations are invested in continuing this project in the long-term.
wesayyep.com/chicago-youth-mutual-aid

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Indigenous People's Power Project is a nonviolent direct action training and support network advancing Indigenous communities' ability to exercise their inherent right to environmental justice, cultural livelihood, and self determination.

ip3action.org

Law for Black Lives is a Black-led, queer, abolition minded, multiracial, feminist and anti-capitalist movement.

law4blacklives.org

Little Village Environmental Justice Organization is non-profit organization working to achieve environmental justice in the Little Village area of Chicago.

lvejo.org

Lucy Parsons Labs is a charitable Chicago-based collaboration between data scientists, transparency activists, artists, & technologists that sheds light on the intersection of digital rights and on-the-streets issues.

lucyparsonslabs.com

National Lawyers Guild is a progressive public interest association of lawyers, law students, paralegals, jailhouse lawyers, law collective members, and other activist legal workers, in the United States.

nlg.org

No More Deaths is an advocacy group based in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona, United States, that seeks to end the series of fatalities of undocumented immigrants crossing the desert regions near the United States-Mexico border.

nomoredeaths.org

Restoring Justice for Indigenous Peoples is building a powerful movement of system-involved native peoples inside and outside institutions working to end the centuries-long imprisonment of our people, ancestors, relatives, and land.

www.indigenousjustice.org

Ruckus Society is an action catalyst with over 20 years of experience in nonviolent direct action strategy, tactical training, and movement building.

ruckus.org

Save California Salmon is dedicated to policy change and community advocacy for Northern California's salmon and fish dependent people.

californiasalmon.org

Stop Cop City is a decentralized movement in Atlanta, Georgia, United States, whose goal is to stop construction of the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center by the Atlanta Police Foundation and the City of Atlanta.

stopcop.city

Readings & Tools

"The Dignity and Hope Manifesto"

mondoweiss.net/2021/05/the-manifesto-of-dignity-and-hope

"Get in Formation: A Community Safety Toolkit" | Vision Change Win

visionchangewin.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/VCW-Safety-Toolkit-Final.pdf

"Movement Memos" Podcast

truthout.org/series/movement-memos

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“Navigating Police Use of Chemical Weapons”

Appendix A, page 238

“Rant” by Diane di Prima

home.insightbb.com/~gardner.j/rant.html

Rehearsals for Living by Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

haymarketbooks.org/books/1880-rehearsals-for-living

“Resist, My People, Resist Them” by Dareen Tatour

codepink.org/resist-my_people_resist_them

“Scenes from an Emergency Clinic in the Sonoran Desert” by Lee Sandusky

lithub.com/scenes-from-an-emergency-clinic-in-the-sonoran-desert

“The Walls of the Tank: On Palestinian Resistance” | Andreas Malm

salvage.zone/the-walls-of-the-tank-on-palestinian-resistance

“What to Do if the Police Come to Your Not-for-Profit or Organizing Space”

Appendix B: Attorney’s Note, page 244

About the Authors

Kelly Hayes is a Menominee author, organizer, movement educator, and photographer. She is also the host of Truthout’s podcast *Movement Memos*. Hayes is a cofounder of the **Lifted Voices** collective and the **Chicago Light Brigade**. Her written work is featured in numerous publications and multiple anthologies, including *Who Do You Serve, Who Do You Protect? Police Violence and Resistance in the United States* (Haymarket Books, 2016), *Education in Movement Spaces: Standing Rock to Chicago Freedom Square* (Routledge, 2020), and *The Solidarity Struggle: How People of Color Succeed and Fail at Showing Up for Each Other in the Fight for Freedom* (BGD Press, 2016). Hayes also coauthored an essay with Mariame Kaba in Kaba’s book *We Do This ‘Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* (Haymarket Books, 2021). Hayes’s movement photography is featured in the Freedom and Resistance exhibit of the DuSable Museum of African American History.

Mariame Kaba is an organizer, educator, librarian, and prison industrial complex (PIC) abolitionist who is active in movements for racial, gender, and transformative justice. Kaba is the founder and director of **Project NIA**, a grassroots abolitionist organization with a vision to end youth incarceration. Mariame co-leads the initiative **Interrupting Criminalization**, a project she co-founded with Andrea Ritchie in 2018.

Kaba is the author of the New York Times Bestseller *We Do This ‘Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* (Haymarket Books, 2021), *Missing Daddy* (Haymarket Books, 2019), *Fumbling Towards Repair: A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators* with Shira Hassan (Project NIA, 2019), *See You Soon* (Haymarket Books, 2022) and *No More Police: A Case for Abolition with Andrea Ritchie* (The New Press, 2022).

About this Guide’s Author

Rachael Zafer is an organizer, social change consultant, and the author of discussion guides for over thirty books, including *We Do This ‘Til We Free Us* by Mariame Kaba and *No More Police* by Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie. You can view all of her discussion guides at rachaelzafer.com.