Let This Radicalize You Notes

Introduction

- The book *Let This Radicalize You* by Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba is an important one.
    - It's about what it takes to make a movement, issues you'll often run into, and how to get other people onboard.
    - I can't recommend this book enough – it's very well written and the authors have done a lot of good work.
- I strongly recommend reading the book yourself or listening to an audiobook.
    - The ideas and lessons are emphasized through stories about other movements as well as some of the authors' own movements.
- I will not summarize those stories here
    - I cannot do that without diminishing their impact. Instead, these notes are summaries of the big ideas in the main chapters. These are important ideas, and I don't want time-poverty to prevent people from being exposed to them.
    - As such, some Chapter notes will be noticeably shorter than others. If a chapter is especially heavy, I will make note of it.
- I'm crushing 200+ pages into 10 pages. I'm bound to miss something – if you have read this book and think I have missed something important, please let me know.

Chapter 1 Notes

Key takeaway: Build, don't break

- Movements obsessed with being morally perfect end up standing for nothing
    - Think of every online leftist movement ever and mainstream democrats
    - These people rarely ever make anything – all they can do is critique
    - Moving to action and giving people the opportunity to *do* something is way more impactful
- "Facts enough aren't enough to mobilize people into action"
    - If they were, I'd have everything I want – the climate crisis would be over, trans people would receive healthcare, and Americans wouldn't be total jackasses about immigrants. Capitalism as a concept would be completely dismantled. People might get the COVID vaccine.
    - There isn't really any set of facts that'll trigger entire movements by themselves
    - "Fear alone doesn't usually hold people's attention"
        - When you suddenly make people afraid, they just choose not to engage – it's not really the emotion you wanna go for when you want to incite action.
    - Stories are what people build their worldviews around – it's never the facts themselves.
        - As an Activist, you need to learn how to be a storyteller.
        - Utilize emotions besides fear – joy, outrage, anger, love, nostalgia, admiration, excitement, disgust. All of these make people *want* to do something, rather than having someone else take care of it for them.
- Existing institutions aren't laws of nature.
    - Don't just accept existing systems/institutions – if they cause violence or harm, try and make something to replace it.
    - "Capitalism requires an ever-broadening disposable class of people in order to maintain itself".
        - This is why people often accept minorities and the impoverished as "acceptable" fodder – they cannot conceive of a world where their success doesn't require unnecessary and injust suffering

- o Instead of accepting the violence of a well-established system (e.g., the Police), figure out what could replace it.
  - o Once you realize that all of these barriers/institutions aren't gifts of god, you can do essentially anything and invent whatever you want.
- Along with stories, utilize a sense of community
  - o Goes along with the points made in the "Facts aren't enough to mobilize people into action" thing.
  - o Make anchors that help people remember their "values and commitments"
    - Make people share the same history, compassion, and purpose.
    - Those anchors can be songs, pieces of art, education – literally anything that grounds people in purpose.

Chapter 2 Notes

Key Takeaway: Build communities.

- Systems of oppression often utilize "organized abandonment" – that is, societal expectations and established systems discourage people from connecting with minorities and other "acceptable" victims of capitalism.
  - o Prison's an example – costly visits, limited phone calls, and the way that prisoners are demonized in the media make it difficult for people to stay connected.
  - o Refusing to abandon people in your community, celebrating everything, and connecting with people as deeply and as much as possible is how you combat this.
- Most people aren't responsible for the injustice and violence in the world – so don't give up on the people.
- "If you show up for people, they show up for you"
  - o This is the idea at the heart of sustainable movements – it makes people more resilient in the face of tough times

- o Build up relationships and connect with people. Help them out where you can. Even doing something as simple as reaching out to someone can mean the world and inspire them to do some good
- o Note that you need to listen to people. You can't lecture people or assume that you know what's best for them – that's not how community building works.
    - ▪ Instead, ask people what they want. Ask what would make something interesting
    - ▪ Ask people what skills they have and figure out what roles you can create rather than looking for people to fill your pre-established roles
- o Heroes don't make up social movements – people interdependent on each other and community builders are what make this work

Chapter 3 Notes

- • This chapter is very story-heavy
    - o As such, I won't provide many notes here – they largely reinforce ideas mentioned in Chapter 2
    - o I recommend reading/listening to this section yourself

Chapter 4 Notes

Key Takeaway: Learn. Never stop learning.

- • It's important to understand where/what/how the roots of your oppression are.
    - o Simply identifying the oppression itself will not let you uproot it.
- • Reading/Learning are very important for giving your movements any sort of direction – plus, they can help unify your community
    - o It doesn't have to be 200+ page books – those are intimidating, and you'll have a harder time getting people to read those. Plus, the current state we're in really limits the amount of time/energy you have, so those huge books can seem like an even bigger ask.
        - ▪ Zines are interesting – they're easier to distribute if you're under scrutiny and they're way less intimidating thanks to their length and handcrafted nature.

- Books, museum exhibits, lectures, podcasts – all of these are also great ways to learn.
- Looking into banned books is also worthwhile.
  - Look into the context of load-bearing quotes – figure out where it was said, what was happening in the world, what the actual purpose of the quote was, etc.
  - "Extractive" reading is what some academia encourages – looking through a text and plucking out the facts – but subtext and context are where you'll find the actual meat.

- Research is time consuming, but worthwhile
  - Be as annoying as possible – don't give up until you get answers
  - Archival and assembling resources are important activities in an age where a corporation can snap and have all their works disappear.

- Learn how to use newer technologies as well as older ones
  - In the digital age, again, corporations can take their tech away from you very easily
  - Be especially wary of social media

Chapter 5 Notes

Key Takeaway: Patterns will only doom humanity if you let them.

- Pay no mind to "political hobbyists" – people who assume that reading the news and debating/critiquing every modern political movement count as political engagement
  - Anyone who tries is bound to mess up, which will draw criticism from these "political hobbyists"
  - "As Barbara Ransby says of some vocal political hobbyists, 'You're not making any mistakes because you're not doing anything."

- If violence is a cycle, don't respond with cynicism – try and break the cycle
  - When a system or an institution repeatedly causes injustices, you shouldn't dismiss people's anger/outrage just because it isn't anything new. Instead, take advantage of that outrage – use it to incite action

- ▪ Responding with cynicism only stifles action and makes people give up before anything meaningful gets started.
- "Emphasize the connections between struggles, instead of making totalizing comparisons"
  - o There isn't much value in "ranking atrocities" – if multiple communities are hurt, it doesn't do much good to figure out which community was hurt more
  - o Connecting the way those communities were hurt and using that to form stronger bonds similar to what was mentioned in Chapter 2 is way more productive
    - ▪ The upside to doing this over trying to compare the severity of each group's injury is you get more unified communities instead of ones divided against each other, spending more time fighting themselves

Chapter 6 Notes

Key Takeaway: The state and ruling class get to define "violence", which will be used against you.

- This chapter is very story-heavy
  - o As such, I won't provide many notes here – they largely reinforce ideas mentioned in in previous chapters
  - o I recommend reading/listening to this section yourself
- When big movements gain traction, the state will attempt to "normalize" the movement and adapt a version that is less extreme and more about "reformation" than actual change
  - o These are often just empty PR moves to prevent actual change
  - o A similar tactic states will use is to reward "heroes" of movements instead of fixing the actual systemic issues that those "heroes" are trying to fix.
- The state can use its control over the definition of "violence" to demonize protesters and maintain the actual violence used to maintain its systems

- o It's easy for people to criticize "bad" protesters for being disruptive and breaking stuff (even though that's the whole point of a protest), while they ignore the real violence caused by police brutality and our prison systems
- o It's much harder to garner support if everyone believes that standing up to violence is inherently violent
    - The state also utilizes this to assign blame to people standing up for their rights
- **Antiprotest bills are used to discourage "violent" protests and encourage vigilante "justice" to be enacted on protesters**
    - o Even if a law doesn't get passed, it still communicates to onlookers that you *should* be allowed to hurt protesters
    - o "Laws that supposedly target 'terrorists' will always be used to target activists"
    - o These laws also get away with using vague language to make it so that *any* involvement in a protest makes you a criminal terrorist
    - o Thanks to these laws, prisons can effectively move people around at will, depriving marginalized communities of manpower and resources

Chapter 7

Key Takeaway: Overcentralizing important individuals will only work to harm your movement

- **If you put an organizer/leader on a pedestal, the idealization will make it very easy to knock out their entire movement if you find something wrong with them**
    - o Nobody has perfect politics – everyone makes mistakes, so you will ultimately bring down every movement if all you have are fans
    - o On the flipside, idealizing someone can end up causing you to ignore some of their wrongdoing, which can lead to questionable strategy
    - o "Ordinary, flawed, everyday sorts of human beings frequently manage to make extraordinary contributions to social change"

- By arguing that movements are created by a few great people, you risk making potential members feel inadequate and thus stop them from acting on the change they want to see
- Overcentralizing those leaders also risks their own safety
    - The increased fame also comes with over-scrutinization
    - There's also an increased risk of being doxed and specifically targeted by people intentionally trying to sabotage your movement
    - Those leaders may also let the fame "get to their head" and end up ignoring some valid criticism in favor of listening to "fans"
- Individual people managing to find success in an unjust system isn't necessarily a victory – sometimes, it's a compromise that unfair institutions offer to prevent actual changes from happening
- Relying on communities and groups to make decisions instead of individuals will make your movement more stable
    - It can take pressure from individuals and make it easier to say "no" if are accountable to an entire group of people
    - A non-hierarchical system makes it easier for your movement to survive – no singular person being taken down can bring down the whole thing
        - If you're in a "leadership" position, giving yourself a label like "spokesperson" can be helpful – it's less about control, and it allows you to easily hand off that role to someone else
    - Be aware that you're being watched – again, if your movement overcentralizes on a couple of people, then it's all too easy for the state to gather data on those two people are wreck everything

Chapter 8 Notes

- This chapter is very story-heavy
    - As such, I won't provide many notes here – they largely reinforce ideas mentioned in previous chapters.
    - I recommend reading/listening to this section yourself.
- "Let this radicalize you rather than lead you to despair"
    - Use grief from the violence and injustice of this crumbling world to spring people into action rather than letting it dull you into inaction

- o States often try and use suppressed grief to stop people from making connections with each other – fight against that as much as you can.
- Practice hope and reject indifference.

Chapter 9 Notes

Key Takeaway: People are flawed and you'll have to rely on them.

- Given how previous chapters have argued the importance of community, it should come as no surprise that you need to rely on people you don't see eye to eye with
  - o To be clear, a group where everyone is pretty much in agreement is useful for your mental health, but bigger movements have lots of people – and you'll need to work with all of them
  - o Patience is important – even if someone initially appears and sounds like a conservative racist, hear them out, at least a little. Let them tell their story. Then try and slowly change their minds using the previously mentioned storytelling strategies
    - ▪ Reactive responses that admonish people for using conservative language or perpetuating racist stereotypes can be justified, but it scares off potentially valuable people
    - ▪ Therapy and support systems really help here – knowing that you'll have the chance to let everything out later can make it easier to be patient in the moment
    - ▪ Sometimes, it's not worth engaging in debate or worth changing someone's mind on one issue when you're way worried about another. Pick and choose your battles.
- Listen to people – be committed to hearing them out and understanding their stories so you can work with them
  - o Outside of the above community-building benefits, practicing good listening can also help with empathy and other walks of life
- Holding people "accountable" for relatively trivial things (such as language) only works to shoot your movement in the foot
  - o Paying too much attention to the words/labels themselves leads to a culture of "performativeness".

- It also leads to a culture where people are afraid to mess up and say the "wrong" thing, which can end up scaring off potentially helpful people.

Chapter 10

- Burnout is something that you should avoid for several reasons – it weakens your own health, it hurts the movement, and is antithetical to most human rights ideologies
  - This is part of why community building and connections are so important – not only does it give you someone to lean on when things are tough and you might be close to burnout, but it also means that you can step out for a while without everything falling apart
    - Leaning on others also improves reliability – think about training other people to do the things that you do
  - Treating people as disposable isn't really something you want in your movement
- Bigger events and huge, monumental changes are cool, but not something you should aim for regularly
  - Helping smaller groups of people is just as important, maybe more.
  - Regularly going for big-energy events will just lead to burnout and frustration.
- Enjoy life and "respect your seasons"
  - Seize bursts of energy and act when motivation and projects are in full swing, but when energy's down, take time for yourself.
  - When a project runs its course, it's okay to let it go. You still hold onto all the lessons and memories and now you've got time for other projects.