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Embracing more sustainable farming practices and other cultural shifts will lead to meaningful change.



BOOKS *et al.*

CLIMATE

Confronting challenges together

Community, collaboration, and collective action are key to moving the climate needle

By **Miriam R. Aczel**

In *What If We Get It Right?*, marine biologist Ayana Elizabeth Johnson outlines an optimistic, actionable approach to addressing climate change, highlighting the importance of community, cultural shifts, and systemic change. The book integrates interviews and essays from a diverse group of experts, reinforcing the idea that meaningful change is possible if we harness our individual strengths and collaborate across disciplines.

In the book's first interview, "Earth Is the Best Planet," climate scientist Kate Marvel emphasizes that although Earth is facing major climate challenges, humans still have the power to choose their future. Marvel highlights that climate change is not a binary issue—it is not about either complete disaster or total salvation but rather about making informed choices to mitigate and adapt to the changes.

"Replenish and Re-Green" explores ecosystem restoration, emphasizing the importance of nature-based solutions, such as restoring natural cycles and adopting regenerative agricultural practices. Here, farmer Leah Penniman highlights the need

to restore Indigenous and Black land ownership and adopt regenerative farming for climate justice and equity, while environmental scholar Brian Donahue promotes revitalizing rural America through sustainable agriculture, envisioning thriving rural areas led by young people committed to ecological practices.

In the book's third section, "If We Build It...," Johnson addresses urban planning; infrastructure, art, and technology; and community-driven design that is resilient and equitable. Landscape architect Kate Orff and design justice pioneer Bryan C. Lee advocate for integrating nature and community resilience into urban spaces through collaborative, community-driven design that challenges the status quo. Meanwhile, architect Paola Antonelli highlights design's role in addressing global challenges and urges collaboration and accountability, and tech executive Mustafa Suleyman discusses the potential of artificial

intelligence (AI) to solve complex issues such as climate change, emphasizing the need for regulation and diverse perspectives to harness AI responsibly.

"Follow the Money" examines the financial aspects of climate change, emphasizing the importance of divestment from fossil fuels, corporate responsibility, and the role of government in scaling clean technologies. Here, K. Corley Kenna—head of the communication and policy team at the outdoor

retailer Patagonia—presents 10 things every corporation can do, 5 things governments can do, and 4 actions individuals can take to address climate change. ("Be skeptical. Don't fall for greenwashing. Demand specificity and transparency," she advises, for example.)

In "Culture Is the Context," filmmaker Adam McKay and film executive Franklin Leonard advocate for more compelling and relatable climate storytelling in Hollywood, stressing the need for innovative narratives that inspire action. "Film and television are both mirrors and windows," argues Leonard. "They tell us the way the world is, but are also instructive about what's possible and what could be, and can serve as inspiration."

In part six, "Changing the Rules," environmental scholar Kelly Sims Gallagher highlights the challenges of global climate agreements such as the Paris Accord, stressing the need for better data tracking, transparency, and support for developing countries. Here, Johnson underscores the importance of documenting ideas, collaboration, persistence, and tenacity in achieving meaningful change.

In "Community Foremost," Johnson advocates for community-driven, equitable solutions to address both the climate crisis and systemic racial inequalities, while Massachusetts State Representative Samantha Montaño stresses the need for community-based strategies in disaster preparedness, advocating for better funding and addressing systemic issues such as social inequality. Here too, Indigenous climate advocate Jade Begay emphasizes the importance of Indigenous power, self-determination, and the Land Back movement in achieving climate justice and creating sustainable, regenerative futures.

Part eight, "Transformation," envisions the future of coastal communities and introduces a "Climate Oath" for collective climate action. Here, aquaculture professional Bren Smith advocates for regenerative ocean farming, which absorbs carbon, boosts biodiversity, and supports sustainable communities, stressing the importance of community collaboration and social justice in this emerging industry.

In the book's closing pages, the "Climate Oath" calls for a shift from individualism to community-focused solutions, prioritizing sustainable living and creativity. Here, Johnson encourages people to find joy in their work toward climate solutions, to collaborate, and to embrace both action and imagination in building a better future. ■



What If We Get it Right? Visions of Climate Futures
Ayana Elizabeth Johnson
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