

What If We Get It Right? — Ayana Elizabeth Johnson

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“Possibility Instead of Failure”

— Ayana Elizabeth Johnson

Climate change evokes feelings of fear and despair, but Ayana Elizabeth Johnson’s new book, *What If We Get It Right?: Visions of Climate Futures*, offers a refreshingly hopeful perspective. This engaging work explores how humanity can solve the climate crisis by focusing on solutions that already exist. Johnson’s approach, which weaves together interviews with experts across disciplines with creative works from the environmental humanities, is both accessible and inspiring. Her insights are especially critical and timely in the aftermath of November’s election, a moment when the future of the environment and social rights feels particularly uncertain. As a marine biologist, policy expert, and climate advocate, Johnson brings unparalleled expertise and passion to this inspiring project.

Johnson begins with an essential question: what does “getting it right” look like for climate change? Her answer unfolds through interviews with high profile environmentalists such as Bill McKibben, Wendell Berry, and Adam McKay, highlighting actionable solutions and innovative ideas. The book calls for a shift from doom-and-gloom narratives to a mindset of positive action and collaboration. She explores regenerative agriculture and sustainable food systems, emphasizing the need to transform how we grow and consume food to restore ecosystems and reduce emissions. Johnson also examines the role of innovative technologies, including clean energy and artificial intelligence, in mitigating climate impacts. Equity and justice are central to her vision, as she advocates for grassroots efforts and inclusive policies that prioritize marginalized communities. The power of storytelling and media is another focus, with Johnson arguing for narratives that inspire hope and drive action. Financial strategies, including divesting from fossil fuels and investing in green economies, form a cornerstone of her argument. Finally, drawing on her marine biology expertise, Johnson passionately advocates for the “Blue New Deal,” a comprehensive plan to protect and sustainably manage ocean resources.

The unusual structure of *What If We Get It Right?* is intriguing, blending diverse elements into a *mélange* of climate optimism. The book is not just a collection of interviews but a multimedia experience that incorporates artwork, poetry, and Johnson’s own curated lists of possibilities and challenges. These lists, titled “10 Possibilities” and “10 Problems,” offer actionable target areas that readers can implement.

Johnson’s writing style is another highlight. Her clear prose makes even the more scientifically complex topics understandable. By interspersing interviews with her personal reflections and

anecdotes, she adds depth and relatability to the discussion. The perspectives showcased in the book—ranging from scientists to activists, farmers, and artists—enrich the narrative and emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in tackling the climate crisis. This book is both homage to, and a product of, the environmental humanities, linking action, artwork, culture, and politics into a holistic treatise on hope.

The integration of visual and poetic elements demonstrate that climate action is not just a scientific or political challenge but also a cultural and emotional one. Johnson's focus on real-world solutions is particularly inspiring, as it shifts the conversation from overwhelming problems to practical steps individuals and communities can take. By weaving these elements together, the book becomes both a call for hope and a practical guide for action.

What If We Get It Right? engages with themes and imagery from broader areas in the environmental humanities, such as climate fiction and speculative fiction, such as solarpunk aesthetics. Johnson's work draws on the imaginative power of these genres, bridging the gap between speculative visions and actionable strategies. By incorporating solarpunk's imagery—diverse and socially just landscapes merging technology and nature into a utopian vision of sustainability—the book seeks to turn fictional aspirations into real-world practices. This connection underscores the cultural and narrative dimensions of climate action, showing how storytelling can be a catalyst for change and creative inspiration.

While the book is both comprehensive and uplifting, there are moments where it feels a bit encyclopedic, at the cost of narrative pacing. The shining moments of the book are Johnson's own insights, which occasionally get buried under the quantity of interviews. Additionally, while Johnson includes diverse voices, some perspectives—such as those of indigenous communities—could have been given even greater prominence. A greater focus on lived experience and traditional knowledge and less upon celebrity environmentalists would align more with Johnson's own vision.

In *What If We Get It Right?*, Ayana Elizabeth Johnson offers an empowering vision for the future of our planet. By showcasing actionable solutions and emphasizing the power of collective effort, she reminds us that tackling climate change is not only possible but also an opportunity to create a more just and sustainable world. This book is a must-read for anyone seeking hope and motivation in the face of the climate crisis. It challenges readers to think critically, act decisively, and join a global movement for change. Johnson's work is a timely and vital contribution to climate conversations, and it has the potential to inspire meaningful action on an individual and collective scale.