

Book Club Kit

Discussion Guide

Rehearsals for Living
by Robyn Maynard
and Leanna Betasamosake Simpson

Contents

Biography	2
Review by Alia Hazineh	4
Review by Jenna M. Wilson	7
Review by Keavy McAbee	11
Interview by Shelagh Rogers	13
Discussion Questions	16
Discussion Themes	16

Biography

Robyn Maynard

Robyn Maynard is an author and scholar based in Toronto, where she holds the position of Assistant Professor of Black Feminisms in Canada at the University of Toronto-Scarborough in the Department of Historical and Cultural Studies. Her writing on borders, policing, abolition and Black feminism is taught widely in universities across Canada, the United States and Europe.

Maynard is the author of two books. *Policing Black Lives: State violence in Canada from slavery to the present* (Fernwood 2017) is a national bestseller, designated as one of the “best 100 books of 2017” by the *Hill Times*, listed in *The Walrus’s* “best books of 2018,” shortlisted for an Atlantic Book Award, the Concordia University First Book Prize and the Mavis Gallant Prize for Non-fiction, and the winner of the 2017 Errol Sharpe Book Prize. In 2018 the book was published in French with *Mémoire d’encrier*, titled *NoirEs sous surveillance. Esclavage, répression et violence d’État au Canada* and won the 2019 Prix de libraires in the category of “essais.” *Rehearsals for Living* (Knopt/Haymarket, 2022) co-authored with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, is a *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, and CBC National Bestseller, was shortlisted for a Governor General’s Award for literary non-fiction, a finalist for the Heritage Toronto Book Award and designated one of CBC’s “best Canadian non-fiction books of 2022” and the “best 100 books of 2022” by the *Hill Times*. Other awards include “2018 Author of the Year” from Montreal’s Black History Month and the Writers’ Trust Dayne Ogilvie Prize for LGBTQI* Emerging Writers.

Additional writing appears in *Washington Post*, *World Policy Journal*, the *Toronto Star*, *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Canadian Woman Studies*, *Critical Ethnic Studies Journal*, *Scholar & Feminist Journal* and numerous book anthologies.

Maynard contributed to the research and writing for the Defund the Police website and recently authored two toolkits: “Building the World We Want: A Roadmap to police-free futures in Canada” and “What is Prison Abolition in Canada?” With Pascale Diverlus, she co-hosted Building the World We Want, an abolitionist learning lab.

Source: **Author Website**

www.robynmaynard.com/about

Robyn Maynard

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is a renowned Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg musician, writer and academic, who has been widely recognized as one of the most compelling Indigenous voices of her generation. Her work breaks open the boundaries between story and song—bringing audiences into a rich and layered world of sound, light, and sovereign creativity.

Working for two decades as an independent scholar using Nishnaabeg intellectual practices, Leanne has lectured and taught extensively at universities across Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Europe and has over twenty years experience with Indigenous land based education. She holds a PhD from the University of Manitoba and is a member of Alderville First Nation.

Leanne is the author of eight books, including *A Short History of the Blockade* and the novel *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* which was short listed for the Governor General’s Literary Award for fiction and the Dublin Literary Prize. Her collaboration with Robyn Maynard, *Rehearsals for Living* is a National Best Seller and was short listed for the Governor General’s Literary Award for non-fiction. Leanne is also a musician. Her latest release *Theory of Ice* was named to the Polaris Prize short list, and she is the 2021 winner of the Prism Prize’s Willie Dunn Award. Leanne’s new work, *Theory of Water* was short-listed for the Hilary Weston Writers’ Trust Prize for non-fiction.

Source: **Author Website**

www.leannesimpson.ca/about

Review by Alia Hazineh

Rehearsals for Living Review

November 2022

Last summer, I was wandering the Atlantic coastlines barefoot with my friend Megan. Our toes grazed the ocean's frigid waters as we walked the shoreline. It was late July, and the ocean was unnervingly icy: 12 degrees Celsius, the coldest July ocean in nearly a decade. A jet stream has been deflected, causing extreme heat somewhere else, and unusual cold here. Climatologists call these instances—where weather systems get stuck in place for extended periods of time— atmospheric blockings. As the globe continues to warm, these events will accelerate the premature death of the planet's most vulnerable communities. I experience a sort of paralysis. Perhaps you've felt something similar when confronting the magnitude and violence of climate catastrophe. How do we carry on when we are knowingly ending the world? *Rehearsals for Living*, Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's newest book, doesn't accept the nature and terms of a question like this. It refuses to see this world ending as uniquely contemporary, ecological, or as collectively caused. Instead, it confronts the multiple crises of our times on entirely different terms.

Written in epistolary form, *Rehearsals for Living* strikes an unfamiliar balance between dystopic and utopic, while remaining distinctly non-fiction. Maynard and Simpson do not conceal the stakes of their correspondence: "I am writing to you a letter at the end of (this) world", Maynard begins (p.15). The apocalypse is upon us, they concur; however, unlike climate catastrophe books like David Wallace-Wells' *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019), Maynard and Simpson refuse to accept collective blame for food shortages, refugee emergencies, climate wars, and economic devastation. Referencing Sylvia Wynter, Maynard describes this posture as a refusal to be circumscribed within the bounds of the "referent we" that activists often use to obscure the real architects of climate catastrophe. Refusing to reside in dread, Maynard and Simpson focus instead on the vitality and resilience of their respective Black and Indigenous traditions, rejecting the dominant Western narrative that depoliticizes the racialized violence of climate catastrophe by bracketing it from long histories of settler colonialism, anti-blackness, and racial capitalism. Writing to each other from the front lines of resistance, they commune, finding the courage to accept the ending of (this) world—and attend to life *otherwise* and beyond the murderous order of racial capitalism.

This posture is not to be confused with uncomplicated—or naïve—idealism. Maynard and Simpson sharply situate the geopolitical crisis of racial capitalism within intimate proximity to quotidian Canadian life. On a walking tour of Toronto, Maynard maps out the headquarters of resource extraction companies where, not far from her house in Yorkville, executives are drawing up plans for human and ecological destruction. Simpson recounts the multiple endemics that have repeatedly displaced Indigenous communities, including her own, and Covid-19 is no exception. Centuries of environmental

racism and systemic neglect have left many Indigenous communities with precarious access to doctors, and with many immunocompromised members. During a national lockdown that pandered superficially to indiscriminate collective safety, Indigenous communities pleaded for the government to freeze mining, damming, and pipeline projects that placed hundreds of potential Covid carrying workers near their homes. In their accounts, Maynard and Simpson are direct and unwavering; Canada's historical and contemporary existence as a nation-state depends on the displacement and exploitation of Black and Indigenous people. This is the state of the world that white supremacy builds, they repeat throughout these accounts; *we are not in this together*.

The book is uncompromising in its critique of the Canadian state, and the violent white supremacist systems that sustain it. However, what sets the book apart isn't these critiques alone, but rather what encircles and flows between them. Throughout their 12 letters, Simpson and Maynard mix song, story, citations, analysis, collaboration, and reflection to join Black and Indigenous histories and futures. Their exchanges thus do more than expose the violence of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and climate catastrophe; they grapple with the logics that underpin this violence and gesture towards radical alternatives. Put differently, their accounts of world ending are always simultaneously gestures towards worldbuilding. They speak of deep relationality, land outside of private property, the radical necessity of rest, and the emergent possibilities of learning from the land. Reading through their exchanges, their writing makes apparent that the vulnerable positioning of Black and Indigenous communities is no accident; this climate catastrophe was caused by the slave plantation, the settler town, the reservation, and their afterlives. It is only through the undoing of these structures that life on earth will ever be rendered *livable*. So, they call upon us to embrace artist and activist Dionne Brand's commitment to *changing the air*. Which is to say, they commit to changing everything—all the structures and conditions that have created the crisis in the first place.

Ultimately, *Rehearsals for Living* shows the potential and necessity of Black and Indigenous solidarity and worldbuilding. Without shying away from the spaces where their histories diverge, Maynard and Simpson articulate how land-based politics and abolitionist organizing must play inseparable roles in any meaningful liberation movement. The power of this co-resistance is at its most convincing when their exchanges deviate from dense analysis towards tender reflection: critical analysis reveals its own indebtedness to intimacy. They confide with vulnerability and love. They delight in the words of their shared intellectual influences: the likes of Audre Lorde, Naomi Klein, and Fred Moten. They meditate on the reciprocity of parenthood, on how they are learning from their children and dreaming up better worlds alongside them. We learn of the first time they read each other, of the admiration they hold for one another. "Sometimes I think your letters are the only good thing in the world", Simpson tells Maynard (p.178). They confide and find refuge in their shared fatigue and in their shared rage. They discover they both turn to Star Trek when they can't fall asleep. These fleeting details feel like subtle gifts, to be coveted and contemplated. These moments reveal the ways Maynard and Simpson's own relationship—itsself a Black Indigenous communion—makes their lives more livable, and ultimately more joyous.

Ross Gay, the eminent poet of joy, writes of tenderness in unfamiliar places. Speaking from his perspective as a Black man in America, Gay's joy never stands in far proximity to despair. In his poem, "Loitering" (2019), Gay works to expose the term's pragmatic violence—loitering authorizes the criminalization of racialized bodies perceived in temporary unproductive movement—while insisting on loitering's joyous potential as non-productive delight. Evocatively, he contends that joy is misunderstood if we take it to be something easy; rather, joy is that which we must attend to, and cultivate, in the midst of unimaginable difficulty. Like Gay's writing, *Rehearsals for Living* reminds me of the exertion and resilience joy requires. When I read carefully, I find the presence of joy sprinkled all over the work's pages. Far from the depression that frequently encompasses cultural ideas around radical organizing, joy is audible in the many voices of Black and Indigenous activists, organizers, scholars, and artists whose words and ideas aggregate this book. It is joy that sustains the radical practices of communities engaged ceaselessly in justice work, despite every imaginable reason to despair. It is joy that will change the air and open the portal toward a relational abolitionist land ethic of resistance. For joy might encourage something beyond all-encompassing despair when faced with icy toes from mid-summer waters.

References from review above

Gay, R. (2019). Loitering. In *id. The Book of Delights* (pp87-88). Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books

Wallace-Wells, D. (2019). *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*. New York: Tim Duggan Books

Source: **Antipode Online**

Book Review: A Hazineh on R Maynard and L B Simpson

Hazineh, A. (2022). A Hazineh on R Maynard and L B Simpson [Review of the book *Rehearsals for Living*, by Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson]. *Antipode Online*.

https://antipodeonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Book-review_A-Hazineh-on-R-Maynard-and-L-B-Simpson.pdf

Review by Jenna M. Wilson

The World Beyond This One: On Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's "Rehearsals for Living"

February 25, 2023

REHEARSALS FOR LIVING (2022) is a theoretical work that documents the overlapping crises of climate disaster, state violence, and a global pandemic, all of which snowballed into what some might call apocalyptic conditions in 2020. Consistent with Black and Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies, the book is structured as an ongoing exchange of letters between Black radical feminist Robyn Maynard and Nishnaabeg feminist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, written to one another during the lockdown of 2020.

Throughout *Rehearsals for Living*, Maynard and Simpson insist that the apocalypse is not new, nor universal. Instead, they argue that their respective communities of Black and Indigenous people have suffered and survived through “an array of world-endings” because their lives and the lives of their communities were abandoned by the state long ago. Maynard and Simpson encourage their readers to understand how world-ending is thus also an opening for the emergence of a new world — one built on collectivity, care, self-determination, and a celebration of all life that is rooted in our relationships to land. Built on a beautifully communal practice, Maynard and Simpson contribute to the radical tradition of police and prison abolition and decolonization while connecting these liberatory frameworks to struggles against racial capitalism, environmental degradation, and border restriction. Foregrounding the interconnectivity of struggles, Maynard and Simpson’s book is a critical resource for organizers and scholars across movements: they show that liberation is not created in silos but in radical and collective coalitions that recognize that our emancipation is bound to one another’s, and is bound, as Maynard states, to “the end of (this) world.”

Rehearsals for Living’s emphasis on apocalypse, crisis, and world-ending as nonuniversal and, for some communities, routine helps underline the claim that, in Simpson’s words, “there are ancient bodies of knowledge that can provide comfort, meaning and guidance through this turbulence,” if only society is able to listen. While recognizing that state-structured precarity is nothing new, the authors acknowledge the novelty of conditions that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, Maynard and Simpson focus on the redefinition of essential workers, whose classification as “essential” reveals the structural ways in which racial capitalism relies on underpaid workers. During the pandemic, essential workers, who primarily come from racialized and migrant communities, were deemed expendable, despite public praise and words of gratitude from politicians and other world leaders. As Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized communities grappled with the acute and intentional abandonment of their lives by the state during COVID-19 — and contended with the ways in which the afterlives of slavery and colonialism rendered their communities more vulnerable to the virus itself — news broke of

the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade at the hands of the police. The very public murder of multiple Black people by agents of the state, while not new, had a different resonance at this particular moment. As Maynard poignantly writes, “[O]ur usefulness does not contradict our disposability. This is what it means to exist in the afterlife of the commodity.”

As protests for racial justice swept the United States, Canada, and the rest of the world, there was an unprecedented groundswell of support for defunding and abolishing the police. This is not to say that this support was spontaneous — rather, this “summer of revolt,” as Maynard terms it, was a result of arduous organizing “built from generations of intellectual and political labour.” Indeed, both authors refuse colonial temporalities that demand movements end in either success or failure. Instead, they favor an understanding of movements as intricate, fluid, and ever-expanding — movements that are rooted in long traditions of Black and Indigenous radicalism but also extend forward to futures that are constantly coming into being through radical imagination. By suggesting that the Black Lives Matter uprisings in Ferguson in 2014 “did not end [...] but saw the creation and expansion of root systems that would be ready for the next act,” the authors help readers reflect on what seeds are being planted in this current moment. What do the mobilizations of today give rise to in the future? As Maynard and Simpson play with temporalities, they contribute to an important conversation that connects science and speculative fiction to real-life world-building. Imagination is critical. Maintaining white supremacy, racial capitalism, and the nation-state requires a suppression of the imagination. Movements like abolition and #LandBack uncage collective imaginations, and, as the authors argue, shift the possibilities that we can imagine for the future.

Rather than succumbing to the divisions that white supremacy and colonialism attempt to sow between their communities, Simpson and Maynard understand that investing in and deepening their relationship with one another, and the relationships between their respective communities and movements, “opens up endless possibilities for dismantling the white supremacist, colonial and capitalist present.” The practice of pitting marginalized communities against one another has long been used as a tactic of revolutionary suppression. Maynard and Simpson insist that liberation is a collective and communal project, which underscores the significance of this book as a collection of letters. Rather than understanding relationship-building and dialogue as tangential to theory (the definition of which has often been dictated by Western epistemologies), Maynard and Simpson, building on the legacy of Black and Indigenous feminist epistemologies, show that their letters *are* the theory. Historically, Black and Indigenous feminist ways of knowing were systematically barred from primarily white, male institutions like academia — and their work was excluded from the category “theory.” In response, Black and Indigenous thinkers have historically turned to “nontraditional” ways of theorizing — creating theories that are critical to their lives and the collective survival of their communities through books, music, conversations, and dialogue. Maynard and Simpson’s letter exchange is a celebration of Black and Indigenous epistemologies, an acknowledgment of knowledge generated in movement spaces, and an insistence that theorizing is best created in dialogue.

In the spirit of radical epistemologies, Maynard and Simpson’s work is also profoundly accessible and deeply indebted to their respective communities, commitments, and movements. Centering their specific geographic, historical, and political positionalities, the authors rebuke the (heavily critiqued) Western insistence on objectivity and detachment from one’s research in favor of situated knowledges (to use Donna Haraway’s term). Rather than embracing expertise, permanence, and universalism, Simpson writes that their book embraces “openness, intimacy, care and humility,” sharing that the book should be thought of as “a chronicle of our thinking in a particular moment” and is “messy [...] incomplete [...] gentle.” Not only is *Rehearsals for Living* meant to represent one historically specific piece of an ongoing conversation; it is also partially a practice of care, which — while offering readers a wealth of knowledge on the historical roots of the contemporary moment — aims to heal. As Maynard states,

I’m hoping, mostly, in writing you, that maybe this grounding, together, will help remind me, remind us, that we and ours have been building livable worlds all along, despite and against forces aligned to steal our light, and that we will continue to do so no matter what comes our way.

The purpose of the book, in other words, is to remember survival and liberation together as a practice of world-building — a practice built on a mutual acknowledgment of those that came before, who will teach us how to survive and build a better world for those who come after. Though their objective lies most importantly in their commitment to one another and the legacies of their respective communities, as a reader who is joining the authors in their journey of collective remembrance and healing, I certainly learned a lot, and my hope for a new world was nurtured along the way.

If there is one area that the authors undertheorize, it is the importance of disability justice as a framework for understanding this current moment. Though the authors exemplify the importance of accessible language and embrace the “messy,” “incomplete” nature of their work, there are few comments about how the violent structure of ableism was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, rendering disabled people — especially Black and Indigenous disabled people — even more vulnerable. As scholars such as Liat Ben-Moshe have demonstrated, disabled people are disproportionately targeted by the carceral state, and as a large portion of the book is dedicated to anti-carceral discourse, this is an intersection that is largely overlooked. Beyond an important framework for understanding the way that the carceral- and nation-state structure death, disability justice also offers suggestions for moving forward. As communities that are often left out of state-based solutions, disabled, crip, and mad communities, along with Indigenous and racialized communities (communities that are, as many have argued, certainly not mutually exclusive), are quite skilled at building ways of taking care of one another and organizing to get the resources they need to survive. This is a practice that Maynard and Simpson acknowledge as one potential strategy for combatting the structural precarity of neoliberalism, racial capitalism, and the nation-state, but it is one they do not necessarily attribute (at least in part) to disabled ways of knowing.

Despite this oversight, *Rehearsals for Living* is a critical contribution to radical scholarship that organizers, scholars, and activists pushing for decolonization, police and prison abolition, climate justice, and the end of racial capitalism could all benefit from reading. Maynard and Simpson thoroughly reframe the current moment, insisting that the present articulation of apocalyptic crisis be understood as a continuation, albeit also an exacerbation, of conditions of crisis that were intentionally structured through racial capitalism and the settler nation-state. By situating Black and Indigenous communities as “post-apocalyptic experts,” Maynard and Simpson make clear to whom we might look to help us “imagine worlds beyond our current realities” — especially if we understand that the systems, conditions, and relations that created the current crisis will not lead us out of it.

Source: **Los Angeles Review of Books**

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-world-beyond-this-one-on-robyn-maynard-and-leanne-betasamosake-simpsons-rehearsals-for-living/>

Review by Keavy McAbee

Rehearsals for Living by Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson
2025

Rehearsals for Living by Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2022) is an insightful text that inspired me to embrace the vulnerability inherent in engaging with nuanced and disparate ideas, while illuminating the generative possibilities of finding synergy in resistance work. Maynard and Simpson approach solidarity work with care, exemplifying relationality in practice for the reader.

Rehearsals for Living emerges from the time of the COVID-19 pandemic to envision a future built upon Black and Indigenous knowledges. In this book, Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson employ the long-standing resistance practice of letter writing, sharing their own perspectives as Black and Indigenous (Nishnaabeg) feminists and resistance thinkers. The authors' bond is sincere, modeling friendship and solidarity without shying away from tough conversations. Never asking one another to compromise their own positions and values, the authors demonstrate authentic and important forms of coalition building.

Three themes emerged from Maynard and Simpson's discussion of their connected histories, resistance practices, and visions for the future. Just as land is centered throughout their letters as a point of connection, Maynard and Simpson identify a common oppressor—the colonial state. While centering shared knowledges, the thesis of this book demands the destruction of oppressive structures to craft worlds that are new and built to hold Black and Indigenous futures.

With Black and Indigenous feminisms woven throughout their work, Maynard and Simpson deploy intersectional approaches and analyses of oppression. Connected histories ground this work, appearing as Maynard describes the ways in which the genocide of Indigenous Peoples, the theft of land, and the commodification and exploitation of Black labor are essential goals of colonialism. Simpson and Maynard detail their communities' histories of resistance, recognizing differences in their experiences but always offering connections when they can be made.

Maynard's and Simpson's letters illuminate their connectedness across resistance and activist movements. Simpson talks of Indigenous resistance as a form of inheritance, making it possible for generations of families to know their cultures and communities. Maynard's own history of resistance draws upon Black theorists and activists, which forms a shared connection between the authors and creates a foundation for intellectual discourse. The authors' participation in current resistance movements conveys both parallel and converging efforts to confront the impacts of policing, surveillance, dispossession, and subjugation— all tied to the colonial manifestations of racism, violence, and exploitation.

For Maynard and Simpson, shared futures represent a radical reimagining of our worlds, while also representing a place of careful engagement when these visions are seemingly disparate. On the surface, shared Black and Indigenous futures are complicated by visions of nationhood; however, throughout their engagement, Maynard and Simpson put forward a relational, expansive view of nationhood, revealing their desire for a future that will see people thriving.

I was left with questions regarding the role of land and language, particularly as potential sites of tension between Black and Indigenous activists. In their letters, Maynard links dispossession of Indigenous lands with the transatlantic slave trade, while Simpson illustrates the importance of land to Indigenous Peoples and brings into conversation the topic of African Indigeneity. According to Simpson, land cannot be uncoupled from Indigeneity, including Black Indigeneity. Maynard does not directly engage with either the topic of language or the topic of land within the context of Black Indigeneity, leaving me curious about her thoughts on these topics. Despite not engaging directly with all points raised in one another's letters, the authors model a deeply relational approach in this work.

Rehearsals for Living is effective in its intention to critically engage and enact coalition-building. Maynard and Simpson utilize letter writing to place Black and Indigenous feminisms *in conversation*, quite literally. For the authors, relationality becomes an act of resistance to the colonial state. The authors exemplify profound and nuanced discussions, addressing difficult topics and points of contention. It is in these places of tension that I found myself moved to embrace the vulnerability needed to achieve a deeper and more nuanced resistance practice.

Visions of futures free from ongoing colonialism, genocide, and racist capitalism ground this essential work. Building upon Maynard and Simpson's example, I am hopeful there will be more relationships built across feminisms—relationships that do not demand compromise but that embrace multiple positions, knowledges, and values.

Source: **Native American and Indigenous Studies**

McAbee, K. (2025). [Review of the book *Rehearsals for Living* by Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson]. *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 12(2), 197-198. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/nai.2025.a971997>.

Interview by Shelagh Rogers

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Robyn Maynard envision a future shaped by freedom in Rehearsals for Living

June 17, 2022

Shelagh Rogers: Robyn, how did the title of this book come about?

Robyn Maynard: The title has so many different meanings. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who wrote the foreword for our book, describes abolition as "life in rehearsal." And that's really a way of thinking about the kind of world that we want to live in — about the kind of world that freedom could mean. And to me, that also just means, "What kind of actions do we need to take every single day?" So if every day I wake up and rehearse the kind of person I want to be, this is who I become. So in the everyday acts and work toward freedom, we are building more liberatory worlds all the time — and that's something that I think we are really focusing on.

In the everyday acts and work toward freedom, we are building more liberatory worlds all the time.-
Robyn Maynard

This book is all the small and enormous waves that we are living through in which people are trying to build more livable worlds for Black people, for Indigenous communities, and just more broadly in terms of a livable planet.

Shelagh Rogers: Leanne, why did the word "rehearsal" resonate so strongly with you?

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: I think in part because Black and Indigenous people have been engaged in world-making for so many centuries now. And when Ruth Wilson Gilmore sent out the lesson of "life in rehearsal," it struck me that it's not sort of a recipe or a series of instructions — it's a practice.

As a musician, rehearsal is what you spend most of your time in. You spend most of your time engaged in that repetition, in that space — a kind of safe space, because there isn't an audience and it isn't a performance. I like this idea of coming together and trying to make or build something with a group of people in real time, and then practicing it as a way of generating the knowledge that we all need to be engaged in these little making practices. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore says, "Practice makes different," which I really like a lot.

Shelagh Rogers: Robyn, what led you to reach out to Leanne in the first place?

Well, Leanne is somebody who I had already had a deep respect for as an intellectual, and somebody who was becoming a friend. I really needed to reach out in the sense of what it means to be coming up against so many crises, to somebody who was very much a part of freedom-making traditions and comes from a history of work and thought in Indigenous radicalism.

My own writing, scholarship, and organizing has always been in Black liberatory traditions. So it was really a way of reaching out to commune in what was a very isolating time to collectively make sense of

some of the horrors of the world around us, and to think about what it means to make freedom in a time of enormous *unfreedom* — thinking about the histories of unfreedom created by slavery and slavery's afterlife created by ongoing settler colonialism.

Shelagh Rogers: Leanne, you write to Robyn that it's never enough to just critique the system, a name or oppression. We have to create the alternative on the ground in real time. How important is this building of the alternative?

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: For me, I think it's the most important part, because I think we can use that critique to inform what we do. Right now, I'm in the territory of Yellowknife and with a group of 16 Indigenous women living on the land. In a sense, it's a little microcosm and a way of coming together on the land to create a different world.

And for me, I've learned that when you come together with people and you make a world, you learn a whole bunch of information — whether that world is an encampment community in an urban area, or whether it's a protest or whether it's organizing against some of the material struggles that Indigenous and Black communities face.

Knowledge-sharing generates another piece of the puzzle-building and systems of care that uplift all.-
Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

That knowledge-sharing not only uplifts me when I'm connecting intimately with community and with the land, but it also generates another piece of the puzzle-building and systems of care that uplift all.

Shelagh Rogers: In your letters, you both declare yourselves as nerds and *Star Trek* fans. And this is a serious question: What does *Star Trek* bring to your thinking in your practices?

Robyn Maynard: This is a dangerous question to ask me! [laughs] You have no idea how much *Star Trek* content didn't make it into the book based on the amount that I actually talk and think about *Star Trek* in my everyday life. For me, in the *Star Trek* world, *The Next Generation* universe is this world free from want — this world in which the divisions of race and gender are now seen as foolish; in which capitalism and the senseless destruction of the planet is seen as foolish; that people have what they need. They don't have a cash economy. It's not based on extreme wealth and poverty.

There have been so many incredible revolutions [led] by Black anti-colonial struggle across the African continent and the Caribbean, and by Indigenous land defenders, that have actually been trying to bring us to that very same utopic — but quite possible — future. And those revolutions have been assassinated and destroyed — so that we could only understand this world that we see in *Star Trek* as sci-fi when, of course, that's always been one of the possibilities for the planet that we live in today.

Shelagh Rogers: Leanne, you say the absence of hope is a beautiful catalyst — and you reference Mariame Kaba's idea of hope as a discipline or a practice. Can you talk about hope as a practice?

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: I think right now, particularly over the last three years, lots of people have lost the feeling of being hopeful. And I think when you lose that emotion, it's very difficult to organize beyond. But it's also a discipline: you get up and you do the things that you need to do to make

life better, to care for the people in your sphere —whether you're feeling happy, whether you're feeling hopeful or not. You do the work anyway.

The more you do that work together, the more it generates those bits of light that are hopeful and full of joy.- *Leanne Betasamosake Simpson*

That practice is something that has sustained Indigenous worlds for a very long time. The beautiful thing about that is that the more you do the work, and the more you do that work together, the more it generates those bits of light that are hopeful and full of joy. And I think those can be very, very sustaining.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Source: **CBC Radio – The Next Chapter**

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Robyn Maynard envision a future shaped by freedom in Rehearsals for Living

CBC Radio. (2022, June 17). Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Robyn Maynard envision a future shaped by freedom in *Rehearsals for Living*. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thenextchapter/full-episode-june-18-2022-1.6491133/leanne-betasamosake-simpson-and-robyn-maynard-envision-a-future-shaped-by-freedom-in-rehearsals-for-living-1.6491173>

Discussion Questions

1. What was your impression of the title as you connected it to the rest of the book? How did the epistolary/dialogue format of the book feel as a framework?
2. Were there any connections made between Black and Indigenous communities that surprised you?
3. Imagine the “end of the world” as we know it. What practices would you welcome ending? What alternatives can you imagine for our extractive relationship with nature and each other?
4. Respond to Betasamosake Simpson’s questions on page 94, “What does it mean to equitably share land, time, space, and the gifts of creation? What does this look like? What does it feel like?”
5. Both authors touched on stories and poetry in this book. Can you share your own beloved stories that have taught you how to live? Which story or poem in the book resonated deeply with you?
6. This book was produced and situated during the pandemic lockdown. What was your life during that time? What has changed for you since?
7. Were there any ideas or topics you wanted to respond to or to dig deeper into?

Discussion Themes

Intersectional Black and Indigenous Feminism | Indigeneity | Activism | Climate Crisis