

Shaping Change in Uncertain Times: Reflections on Democracy, Hope, and Resilience

By: Shari Davis

The morning after the 2024 election, the first message I saw on my phone read, “We’ll stick together. That, at least, we can count on. We will shape change, as always.” Those words—simple, resolute—brought me a small measure of comfort. In them, I felt the echo of Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, a work that has seeped deeply into my bones over the years. I’ve evangelized this book for a decade now; every time I read it, I find more to share, more to cherish.

People, including my partner, have often asked why *this* book. *Parable of the Sower* is raw and unflinching; it gives us glimpses of how far we can fall, of what’s at stake when we allow inequity to spread unchecked. There’s violence, suffering, moments that shake you. But Butler does more than just show us the darkness. She shows us how people, in the face of relentless adversity, find ways to come together, to build, to remember, to envision a future - she shows us a north star in the darkness. They shape change, even when it seems impossible.

Change—this inevitable, unyielding force—is something we all must face, individually and collectively. Whether it’s in our homes, our workplaces, or the broader world, change finds us. It can be a natural disaster or the result of a presidential election. Yet, within each of these shifts lies the possibility, the choice, to shape that change rather than be consumed by it.

When I read that text message in the early hours, I thought back to another November night—2016—when I felt the earth tilt. I remember how I didn’t believe it was possible to elect someone who embodied such open disdain for justice and equality, and when it happened, my body reacted. I felt it deeply—a sinking sense of despair that morphed into a fierce determination to defend, to resist, to protect those who would face the worst of what was to come.

This year, as I watched another election unfold, this fact remains true. Now, more than ever, I feel we must ground ourselves in our communities, strengthen our connections, and organize to protect our rights and freedoms, especially for women, immigrant, and trans communities. Through organizing, political education, and collective action, we can continue to counteract divisive forces and build a multi-racial radical democracy that centers economic justice and real people’s power.

While the candidates change, what I truly believe in, is an [economic democracy](#)—one that transcends the limitations of November elections and goes beyond the hollow words of representatives who too often fail to truly represent us. I want a democracy that isn’t just about voting, but about building the infrastructure to make meaningful decisions together, to ensure that everyone has a voice, and that no one is left behind.

Real democracy is not a once-in-four-years affair. It’s the daily work of creating the spaces and systems that let us decide, together, on the issues that matter most. It’s about rejecting the

complacency that comes with saying, “I elected them to figure it out.” It’s about seeing ourselves not just as voters, but as active participants in shaping our collective future. I am reminded that real democracy is gritty and constant, forged in the hard work of organizing, of dreaming, of building. And most importantly, it’s about creating a world where no one is disposable, where everyone’s voice and well-being matters.

Today, as I sit with my own mixed emotions—disappointment, maybe even a bit of despair—I think back to the work I have seen that models this kind of democracy already. In Boston *right now*, for the first time, residents are shaping project proposals to later vote on where a portion of the city’s budget should be allocated through a municipal process called participatory budgeting. This process was only made possible after a [historic win](#) in which an overwhelming majority of residents voted to pass a ballot initiative that would alter Boston’s city charter and enable a better distribution of power back into the community. In this example, I see a democracy rooted in conversations, hard-won agreements, and acts of listening and understanding that define true participatory practices.

One of the tabs open on my browser is [Economics 4 Emancipation](#), a free popular education course about “Capitalism, Solidarity and How We Get Free”, filled with examples like the one named and more, of real democracy that can guide us forward. It’s a reminder of the many ways we can build power together, of the paths others have already begun to carve. Today, I am turning to what I learned back in 2016: we *can* shape change. Even when the path is uncertain, even when hope feels fragile, we have the power to resist, build and rebuild, to act and inspire.

If there’s a place to start today, perhaps it’s here—with the collective work of building our own vision for the future. Together, we can create spaces for real democracy. Together, we can shape change.