

LOVE IN A F*CKED UP WORLD PODCAST
EP05 MARIAME KABA

Dean: I'm Dean Spade. Welcome to episode five of Love in a F*cked Up World, the podcast, where we talk about how to build and sustain strong connections with each other because our resistance movements are made of our relationships and are only as strong as they are.

I wanted to say thank you to everybody who has been supporting the podcast. I really appreciate everyone who's listening, subscribing, and sharing episodes with friends. If you've been finding the podcast useful, I'd love to hear from you. You can find links to contact me in the show notes, or you can leave messages at Apple Podcasts or Spotify.

I'm excited to share this new episode with you because it features a conversation with someone whose work and organizing have been hugely influential to me and to our movements.

Mariame Kaba is an abolitionist and anti-violence organizer, writer and thinker, in addition to being founder of multiple organizations, including Project NIA and Interrupting Criminalization. And if you haven't gone onto the Interrupting Criminalization website and looked at all the incredible resources there, I encourage you to do that right now.

She's also the author of several books, including *We Do This 'Til We Free Us, No More Police* with Andrea Ritchie, and *Let This Radicalize You* with Kelly Hayes. Great books, really useful. She's also a curator, archivist, and zine maker, and a person who has developed and expanded ideas around abolition, transformative justice, and building accountable communities.

It would be impossible to name all of the projects that Mariame is involved in that have benefited me personally in my work, and our communities.

Mariame, I'm so happy to have you on the podcast. Thank you so much for joining us.

Mariame: Thanks for having me on the podcast. I'm curious and I'm interested.

Dean: Yeah. Well, obviously your work is incredibly influential to everything I do and especially to this book *Love In A Fucked Up World*, because you have just done so much work about how we relate to each other and our movements, and in general, and how we repair together.

Just, I mean, all of your whole body of work is so useful and I'm

really excited to dig in and I especially was looking back at Let This Radicalize You, the book that you and Kelly Hayes published in 2013, I'm sorry, 2023 – wow, wild time! – just recently – that's such a wonderful, very pragmatic, useful guide for people, you know, wanting to enter political resistance work or already in it and you know, hitting up against difficult obstacles.

And so I have a bunch of questions. Some of them are inspired from that book. And the first one I wanted to ask you is, in Let This Radicalize You, you and Kelly Hayes write about the problem of how people in our movements put others up on pedestals and it causes a lot of, you know, drama, honestly. And I'm curious to talk to you more about this, about what this tells us about how we internalize and act out harmful ideas about authority and expertise, and also about patterns of reactivity that we all carry that make us project on people we see as authoritative. Both positive projections about how wonderful they are, and then like extreme disappointment when we find out they're not perfect, and like wanting to take them down or cancel them. And I'm especially thinking about like a lot of groups, people will have conflict in the group and instead of wanting to work on taking care of that themselves by speaking directly to others about what's happening, they end up wanting an outside facilitator, almost like an authority figure who can determine who's right. So maybe sometimes the fantasy.

And I know that you get asked about that role a lot or maybe you're asked to help people find those, you know, I think that's one of the areas we see this. So, yeah. I'm curious more broadly how you see this kind of putting people on pedestals operating, and what do you think helps with this?

Mariame: Yeah, that was a really important part of the book for Kelly and I because we do believe that pedestal-izing and putting organizers up on pedestals actually is harmful to movement building and to our ability to be able to create the strong containers for action that are needed more than ever. So for my perspective, I think about it particularly as related to the fact that human beings are human and that this means that we're all flawed, right? Just fundamentally that we're all flawed. And that really at our best, what we're always actively striving, I think as human beings – if we're conscious and we're reflective and we wanna be accountable to others – is we're always actively trying to shrink the gaps between our values and our actions. But we're always going to make mistakes.

And that's a certainty, actually. There are very few things that are like certain in the world, in my opinion. One of them is that human beings are flawed and that we're gonna make mistakes. And when we pedestal other people, often we unhuman them. We kind of are dehumanizing them. And that leads to, in my opinion, oftentimes our expectations aren't right sized.

So when we feel disappointed in somebody, we lash out. We are maybe sometimes extra upset, right? Because it's like, 'you disappointed me personally'. It's not just that you were disappointing. But that I somehow was in a parasocial relationship with you and you have fucked up and I am furious about it, right? Because I had idealized you in some sort of way, again, unhuman-ing you. When in fact the person did nothing but make a mistake, or in many, many cases, disagree with you. Like you may believe in a particular aspect of a thing that that person may or may not even be an "expert" at, but just commenting on, and you hear something that doesn't comport with your politics, and then that person becomes an evil person. Then what do we do to evil people? We punish evil people. We ostracize evil people. We want to dispose of evil people. We want to get them out of here.

So that's one angle of it. The other angle of it is that oftentimes it just makes it easier for our movements to be taken apart because you take away that person who's been pedestal-ized or you lie about them, or you create myths about them. And then the whole movement is in shambles because everybody was looking to that person to do the things that each of us can actually do ourselves. But we delegated to someone that we pedestal-ized to take on that leadership.

And I think importantly for me these days is that a lot of people actually don't want to be in leadership. We may think that we could do it better than quote unquote leaders, but we don't see ourselves being in that position. And in part it's because we see how leaders are treated. Okay? And those same exact ways where people can't be people who are fallible, where folks can't just have hurt your feelings where, you know, because there's something that feels really important to you that doesn't feel important to them.

Like just the normal reaction of being a human being in relation with other people, which is compounded and mediated through these structures like social media and other things that are about distancing you actually from other people, not bringing folks closer to you. You know? So there was so much in that chapter because, you know, we talked to longtime organizers, we talked to Ruthie Gilmore, we talked to Barbara Ransby, we talked to Paige May, and we talked to Harsha [Walia] and other people who were bringing up other points. Like when they come for you, and the issue around surveillance, how to be able to be in a space, for example, as Barbara brings up, you want criticism and affirmation for people who are in leadership, right? I love this quote by Carl Sagan that I keep in mind all the time, and he had said something like, "...let us temper our criticism with kindness. None of us comes fully equipped". And I hold on to that on a regular because it's so true, right? You have to be able to do both. You have to be able to critique and affirm, it's not just one or the other.

And I think the last two things I wanna bring up around this are that Paige brings up in the book, in her interview, around kind of being grounded and being accountable to people you're actually in community with versus what is happening right now, which is people seek accountability from people they have no relationship with. You can't hold people who you have no relationship with accountable. I know this is the point, which is a breaking point between me and a lot of people, including people I love a lot, is that folks keep using that language. And I'm like, but it's not possible. People will either have to take responsibility and choose accountability, but you can't make them accountable. You can punish them, because that's something that's passive. They can just either accept or reject the punishment, but like you can't make someone accountable. And so there's a confusion that I've seen where it's like people are like, 'you have to take responsibility!'. And it's like, am I accountable - or taking responsibility - for what? And to whom? So I'm accountable to the wide internet for something you're disagreeing with me about? Like, does that make sense to you? You know, like, is that really, is that what we're doing here? What are we doing here, right?

And I just think the last point is for the person who's pedestal-ed, let's give a little thought to them. And to like what kind of mental health, stress, all the things that come with being the person who's been pedestal-ized when you know you're just a fallible human being. Like we give no grace there, and we just lift people up so they can be shot down literally and figuratively. And so we just wanted to bring that up because in organizing you're in a community of others. At its best you're accountable to other people who can pull on you and be like, why are you going forward with this? This ain't it. We didn't agree to that.

That's at its best, that's what you're doing. You're not just an individual out there. You can do that as an activist, just be an individual, go out and just start talking and doing whatever the hell you want yourself. But if you're organizing, you have another group of folks who are part of that with you. You know, they're holding that down alongside.

So those are some of the things that I think we were really trying to put out there around this. And we also don't want people to negate their own power.

Dean: Yeah, I appreciate this. You know, 'cause that idea of projection I think is really helpful to me because I see this as a cycle that happens. People have it with other individuals and with groups. Like, I met you and you're the answer.

Mariame: Yes.

Dean: And I'm gonna put all, I'm gonna put all the expectations on you

that are really high and see only the best stuff. And even kind of like bump it up in my imagination a bit.

Mariame: Mm-hmm.

Dean: I'm finally gonna feel welcome. Or I have never had friends who believe this too, or who were like me, or this lover is gonna make me feel like I was never loved by my family. Or this group is gonna be the place where I belong. Then inevitably there's a cycle to that, you know? Then, then there's the other side: oh my god, there was one moment of difference.

Mariame: Yes.

Dean: Or disappointment, and now you're evil.

Mariame: Yes.

Dean: And you are so bad. And it's equally blown up big because it's so painful and it reaffirms every wound I ever had about not belonging or not being loved or not being seen. And I think we all do this, like it's that cycle, which in the book I call the romance cycle, but I think you could call it anything - call it the cycle of a rising and falling star or whatever. That cycle like, it's really good to just know it's a big cultural thing and it doesn't belong to me. So when I'm having it, when I'm like, oh my god, I just met Mariame and Mariame has all the answers, my friend can say to me, 'yeah, probably also human', so while I'm going, while I'm experiencing even the positive part, I can try to temper it a bit. And certainly if I'm experiencing the negative part and targeting someone and being vengeful and campaigning.

Also this kind of like slight critical distance from it, you know, could just give me a little pause if I'm like 'oh, I met someone, I think I'm gonna move cross country to join their group'. You know, like if I, if I'm going bananas about it. And I think that most of us don't have that. And I think sometimes when we realize it's a big cultural pattern, it's not just us: I don't just make bad decisions about people, or I don't just have bad judgment about groups, or everybody isn't just out to get me and eventually it turns bad. If I can let go of it being just me, it can be helpful to be like 'oh no, this is just projections and they're really normal and human and I don't have to act on them all'.

Mariame: I agree. And also I think there's something here too that I've been thinking a lot about, Dean, in the last, particularly for me during this COVID period, the pandemic period, is the acceleration of something that I've seen from before that I'm calling the concierge-ification of society. It's the kind of, you know, during the pandemic, the DoorDash, Uber Eats way of getting stuff delivered to you

immediately on spec.

Like, "we want this, we want this, now!" That, you know "I am paying you and you are gonna give me this thing and you're gonna give it to me right now and you're gonna give it to me the perfect way, and you're gonna do that". Like that that has become an ethos that has infused our relationships with others, not just the people we pay to do stuff, but rather that we're outsourcing almost everything, including our thoughts, our ability, our ideas, whatever, to others who have to produce for us these perfectly packaged ways that can fit into the slots and not be messy, and not be contradictory, and not be something we just don't like.

So we can return everything. We order it and it comes and we don't like it. We can just get rid of it. And that's the end of the story. This, to me, has infected every aspect of our relations, and I think I'm probably, I'm assuming it's also bleeding into people's intimate relationships with other people too.

Dean: It's total disempowerment. And I've actually heard the experience we all have with our devices described this way because they even anticipate your needs. You don't have to do any direct feedback or negotiation, like it's like this smooth, individualized experience and it makes it really hard to be resilient when things are not as smooth.

This projection conversation too makes me think about the flip side like you were talking about: can we have a little more grace around people put in leadership? I also think knowing this cycle is useful for people who are suddenly getting a lot of critique. Like if we're getting a lot of critique 'cause we put something out there and people are responding to us, can I see that as, instead of being so fragile, can I see that people think I'm important. Even though I'm probably not getting paid for this, I don't think I'm important, I wasn't raised to think I was important, whatever, all our own internal stuff, can I see people's kind of freak out on me...

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: ...as just like, wow. They just actually think that what you say about that matters. And that's all that means. Even though they're coming at you with a bunch of really intense words or like, I feel like, 'cause the disempowerment is on all sides. Like everyone becomes incredibly fragile.

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: With this, with the, what you're describing. The other thing I say about the concierge... I love that... concierge-ification -

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: Wow. That one of the, one of the things I've been thinking about too, that I actually wanted to talk to you about is I feel like the dominant sensation in today's society is avoidance.

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: It's like, I don't wanna talk to anyone on the phone. I don't wanna do anything. And it's, there's a part of that that's really rebellious. Like, we live in a horrible coercive society. It's like, work or die, go to school and get good grades or die, like no one's gonna take care of you. There's no support. Like people feel avoidant because they're being forced to do so much that they don't wanna do. But then it applies to everything – it bleeds in, it's like just the way of being. So it's like 'I don't wanna go to work'. And then also, 'I just joined this mutual aid group, but I don't wanna do the tasks I signed up for' and 'I don't wanna talk to anybody in my neighborhood' and 'I don't wanna... my friends invited me to a party, but I don't wanna go to a party'.

Like there's a feeling of just like, no. Everything sounds too hard. And I think that is that combination of what you're describing, these like highly individualized consumer experiences as the only way to feel empowered. Simultaneous with like, not a lot of practice at just like the bumpiness of like, oh, I'm in a group of people, it's, it was awkward one time, or I felt left out one time, or everyone was older than me or younger than me or – You know what I mean? Just like all the things that happen when we just try stuff with people. We're out of practice with, I think the opposite of avoidance is like on purpose, like being like, 'oh, I want that. I'm gonna go, I'm gonna take the risk. I'm gonna do something uncomfortable'. You know? We're out of practice with that one, I think.

Mariame: I think that's absolutely true.

I do wanna return to something you mentioned about the flip side of the pedestal-ization being like when you are the person who's on, being targeted with the criticisms and everything. I've obviously been there on multiple levels, at multiple periods in time and something that I have found different, right, is when that's happening and you're in relationship with people, it's just different.

You can be like, 'Hey, let's talk about this'. 'Hey, can I offer you some context for this?' 'Hey, I am hearing what you're saying and this is how it's landing for me', you can do that. When you're in that mode of people just going and going and going, and it's a social media pile on, there's just no space for that.

And so you end up having to be in a position where you just don't

respond. Right? Which festers the situation more because people come into the void and they just wanna bring in their own things from 19 years ago, or lie or do any number of things. And so you're in a position where you have to not respond, even if you're in a position where you're like, Hey, this person has a good point.

You know, Stacey X, who I don't know at all, made a good point, right? But are you gonna then go on Twitter or on Facebook and post that Stacy X had a good point about some – like it, it doesn't make sense. It goes back to the scale issue of like, where are we engaging in these kinds of conversations? Where are we engaging in the potential for relationship building so that we could actually receive feedback from people we actually care something about, you know? [Or people who] we feel care something about us?

The best question I was asked many years ago when I was feeling really upset at something that had occurred and I felt misunderstood and just, I don't know, felt just like these people were unfair. A friend of mine was like, Mariame, who are these folks to you? Who are they to you? And more importantly, who are you to them? Are these people you want to be understood by? Why? What is it, like, are you all gonna potentially be able to do shit together in the future that will be good? Like are you ever gonna meet these people? Like what is really going on here? It was so clarifying that it has become my mantra.

You know, you mentioned at the end of the book that you have a mantra about healing being a staircase. And I have many mantras and one of them is, "who are you to them and who are they to you?" As a way of orienting myself and right-sizing my reactions to things. It has been super helpful to me.

I also think, thank god, you know, I didn't get on real social media or anything until I was like in my late thirties. So I already had these years of pretty much having navigated and knowing myself and kind of understanding where I'm coming from and understanding what my triggers are and you know, like all of that was already in hand, so I didn't have to learn that along the way. It made a huge difference to make it possible for me to be in those kinds of, uh, you know, situations and be able to have some wisdom about it.

Dean: Yeah, I mean, that makes a huge difference. When I was doing research for this book (and the kind of sequel to it that comes afterwards, that's more about like work and activist relationships), I read all this research about how digital life has impacted, you know, the sort of generations that have really grown up in it.

And one thing that research talked about was that by the time they're in middle school, almost everybody's had something blow up online about them. And those moments, even if only 10 people saw it, even if it's only in the context of your elementary school or your middle

school or high school or whatever, it feels huge.

I feel like what's happening is that even the micro-est micro-celebrity...

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: ...is you get all the downsides.

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: So you don't get paid, you don't get like a deal with a corporation to pay your bills. You just-

Mariame: No one knows who you are, really.

Dean: - get all the pile on. So now you get the pile on, and then for a lot of people, this is one of the reasons I think so many people in our society identify as burned out. It's exhausting. You feel powerless. I think a lot of times people don't even know how many people have seen it, but they, they learned a lesson about keeping their heads down. I think a lot of people are like afraid to take up space or say what they really believe. Because the punishment is so high and there's not necessarily the reward. And so that's one of the reasons, too.

I think years ago you published instructions for what to do if you're being canceled, or how to support someone being canceled or something like that. You published something about this, and I remember just one of the things you said was, don't pile on. But it, something you said - and then I have to look back at the words - it made me think, oh, if I see that happening to someone even a little bit, I should reach out and let them know, like, I care about them. I appreciate what they're doing. I can, you know, we can give support to people we see this happening to, instead of what people often do is like back off from them. Like, oh, I'm afraid to be associated with the person who's being targeted, even if I don't think it's fair.

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: So I feel like that's like, it's another moment for solidarity practice, potentially.

Mariame: It is, absolutely. So yeah, and that was just a Facebook post many years ago because it's just, it's tempting. Well, it's also tempting to jump in on the pile-on with your own grudges and your own stuff that the person probably doesn't even know you have a grudge with them about, but it's the opportunity. People just, it's a normal thing. I feel like it's like the version - I just saw Gladiator II, and it's like the version of the Colosseum where you just go and

there's blood on the ground and everybody is like looking and wanting to be part of the action and this is their time and they wanna be relevant for the moment.

So they're gonna jump in too with their 2 cents, which often is just a lie or something they've told themselves and built up to some level of like, this is now also an infraction. They were mean to me and I, walking down the street, they didn't even look at me. And that becomes this whole, you know, it's about our own relevance and our own smallness in the world. A need to feel recognized, part of, belong, be part of things. Sometimes we take that and we kind of turn that around in like really corrosive ways. I see this a lot online because of the anonymity that it provides, um, folks to be able to do that. But yeah.

Dean: That thing you said about kind of, who are they to me?

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: Who am I to them? Like I spend a lot of time counseling people who've just done something, like they've just facilitated a session or like on Zoom and there was some weird stuff in the chat. Or they've just, they've just put themselves out there in some way and they're getting some kind of negative pushback. Of just being like, yeah, we don't know that person. We don't know what they meant by it. We don't know why they said it. Maybe they show up to things and just say weird things to everybody. Maybe they've got a grudge about this one topic, we don't know. And then just kinda like, who do you know? I find that helpful to be like, who do I trust to tell me if my work is off base?

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: Can I check in with them, or actually they already read it and said it was okay. And so, yeah, some people don't like it. Like people having reactions just means they saw your thing, you know?

Mariame: Really true. It's really true. But you know what Dean, the point that you just made, we can't elide, which is that a lot of people don't have those people. They just, part of your book is also speaking to just an incredible lack, whether it's perceived or reality, of people having people to turn to, beyond one or two people – right? – in their lives. You know, putting everything on your romantic partner because you don't have any friends anymore, 'cause you didn't cultivate those relationships because you –

So a lot of people don't have the people in their lives where, you know, Ella Baker would ask, you know, who are your people? A lot of people can't answer that. And I think that has a lot to do with the structural ways that society now is functioning, but it has also to do with the fact that we don't practice being in relationship with each other in concrete conscious ways.

And so when we're in a moment where we need people, we just can't find them. And I have to say I am very blessed and lucky both in my family and my comrades and my friends, that they will tell me what they have to say, whether I want to hear it or not. If they feel that I was in the wrong on something or if they feel like I... they notice something and they're like, 'you could have done this better'. You know, maybe you could have considered this. And that is priceless. That is the currency of my life. Not wealth 'cause I don't have it. But like the wealth in those relationships of folks who will tell me, 'what the hell, what are you doing?'

Dean: That's also a skillset set. You showed up in those relationships in some way that allowed both people to agree it was safe -

Mariame: Yes.

Dean: - to give you feedback. So that's something I think we can all look at for ourselves. Do I give people signals that, um, it's okay to give me feedback and I won't blow up at them. You know, I think, but yeah, the thing you're talking about, about, I mean, I have just been shocked in recent years by how many of my students tell me they don't have any friends and part of it is that they move from somewhere to come to school and they stay friends online with the people from home. That didn't exist for us as Gen Xers. When we went away from home we had to make new, live friendships 'cause you could only do like the payphone or the letter. And so I think a lot of my students don't make - and even though they are people who I think could potentially easily make friends, they don't have obvious obstacles to it - it doesn't happen. And I mean, I know you say this to people too, but I just so strongly want people to know, like the way to figure out how to have more people is to join groups. Like go where people are meeting about literally anything. Like -

Mariame: Yes!

Dean: - the 12 step meeting, a faith meeting, the project that they're putting on, the school dance, they're putting on the food fair, whatever, the Food Not Bombs in your community, the anarchist social center, the like, whatever the radical bookstore, like... And also the other thing I've been thinking a lot about - 'cause I think there's a whole new set of people very upset and scared - a lot of people don't have a single friend who's more radical than them. They're always the most radical in the room. And so they feel a lot of alienation and they also are being actually dragged in the wrong direction by the people they're talking to.

And so I think the other thing is like, if you feel like you're the most radical person in every conversation you're having about ideas that matter, you gotta go find people who will help you develop and

grow new solidarities. Right? You can't be satisfied that you're the most radical person in the room. That's not actually, you're not fully supported then, no one really has your back enough and you're not getting to grow.

Mariame: That is so, so real. And I, um, yes, yes to all of that. Yes to all of that.

Dean: Okay. Well, I wanna talk a little, you know, this book is a lot about sex, romance, dating, friendship, and how they overlap with organizing. And often like we end up in a lot of conflict in our movement organizations and in our lives. Like you were just referring to, like, we end up isolated in romantic relationships and not developing friendships enough. And I think of you as someone who's like appropriately skeptical and sober about romance, which I really hope this book helps people be. And yeah, I just wondered if we could talk about that a little bit.

Like how you think about, about that. What you notice people seem to be getting out of some of the sometimes imbalanced pursuit of sex and romance at the expense of friendship or comradeship or other relationships. I'm just curious like how you see it operating in our movement ecosystem. Like what you – what balances you would like to shift if you could.

Mariame: Mm-hmm. Um, I. First of all, when I was much younger, I guess the spaces that I traveled in often tried to make our sexual and intimate relationships very political, like the patina of political over those particular relationships. And by that I mean so, you know, casual sex and you know, non-monogamy were statements, right?

They were statements against the way that – you know, I grew up in the midst, I mean came of age in the midst of AIDS in New York City, right? Like, it was a political act to be like, no, I'm actually going to still have sex with people even though everybody around me is scared and whatever. I'm still gonna react in this kind of way. Something about being young and having this feeling of like being brave in some way and not being shut down. Yeah. I think there was, there's a lot there and I haven't really unpacked it. I have never talked about this publicly.

So I think a lot about this stuff, 'cause I think a lot about my friends who died and what was going on all around us and how that may have impacted some of us growing up and what that made us think about sex and relationships and life and all of that.

Um, but there was this kind of like, you know, I'm non-monogamous. It's a statement against the heteronormative, horrifying, staid, conservative values of one-person marriage, the way things are gonna be. And as I was navigating my way through that, both with the

cultural scripts that existed for me as a black young woman who was raised by return migrants, parents from West Africa and Muslim. And what all of that ended up kind of like all the expectations of my gender roles, all my expectations of like I was gonna need to be married, like I was going to college so that I could immediately then go into being married.

Like that was the kind of trajectory that had been set for me. And then for me to be like, no, actually I don't wanna get married. I don't think I ever want to get married. Like was just like World War III explosion within the whole entire, not just my family, but like the large family, our culture, our space, all the things that that ended up doing and being really impacted everything around how I think about relationships and sex and intimacy and partnership and all this other kind of stuff. But I think in a way that was really self-consciously, like I am not interested in marriage. I saw in many instances the way that marriage did not benefit women in my culture and in my community.

I saw so much of their own desires and hopes just stopped, you know, in order to be able to be some man's wife and the expectation then of motherhood and all those other kinds of things. So I have had a fraught relationship with the ideas of you have to get married, you have to, in order to have a family in terms of children, you must be married to your partner.

Um, you know, monogamy is the way forward. You're a slut, if you have relations with somebody, if you had sex with people before you're married to them. And so, you know, you gotta hide all that. Like you can't talk about all that. Like all of that is conditioned to me. So add that to a culture – and you talk about this in terms of romance culture – add to that, that I'm living in the US where I'm literally watching Hallmark Channel movies regularly. I'm reading romance novels when I'm like 14, I'm reading Judy Bloom books, I'm reading like all the things that I'm getting, like the conflicting information about all of this shit and trying to make sense of it in the world.

So then add in from a young age, I'm part of movement spaces with people who are much older than me, violating all sorts of boundaries. Of consent of, you know, should you really be dating a 20-year-old when you're 15, like 25-year-old? What does that really mean in these kinds of spaces that 'you're old for your age'?

You know, like all of this stuff. Just trying to make sense of it for myself. So I just have a lot of, um, empathy. I have a lot of humility for how difficult it is to navigate all this stuff just on your own, but then add in the fact that you have to bring other people into the mix and then add in the fact that we're doing this in high stress environments where we're trying to fight forces that are literally trying to kill us.

That's all so much stuff. And yet this book that you've written is probably the first book out here that's really talking about this stuff in an unvarnished way within movement cultures. I don't think I've ever seen a book – and again, I'm, let me not lie and say I'm big on self-help books. I'm not. So the kind of self-help books I've read over my time have always been around conflict and conflict transformation, because that's been my, like, the thing I've always gravitated towards.

And then when I was younger I would read a lot of books by SARK, I don't know if people like, like because of the beautiful like colors and the big letters. And it was all about creativity and I was all trying to be all creative, you know, like all this other kind of stuff. But I never read like relationship books because I always thought it was ridiculous.

Dean: Yeah.

Mariame: I was like, who's gonna, how are you gonna tell me about relationships? Given the cultural context I just explained that I come from, which is reflected in none of that stuff. I'm living through the hell zone of frigging AIDS! Like, I'm like, what do you have to say to me about love and romance that I'm gonna read and that I'm gonna be interested in?

And that no one that looked like me or that came from the places that I came from was writing anything about that in the 1980s and 1990s. So I did not have, I did not come up on self-help at all, and I hated Oprah. So that was another thing that – I really did. You'll go and ask people who've known me for any number of years: I have been on an Oprah rant since before people were ranting on Oprah, like way before, you know, I hated her and I thought she was so insidious on so many levels. But anyway, but Oprah takes, like that whole scene made me think of her.

Dean: Yeah.

Mariame: Self-help made me think of Oprah and I was absolutely repulsed by it, so I did not have anything to do with it whatsoever. But I've seen in our movements us not be able to bring our full selves often to the table. Generally, we are only allowed in some ways to bring certain parts of ourselves to movement space. But the messy part of like, everybody who's sleeping together, people who aren't telling other people they're sleeping together and they come into like very unethical things.

They show up in movement spaces and it's like, you mean you're dating these three people at the same time and none of the other people in the group know? This is gonna be a problem. You know? Um, like things

like that where we can't be like open and honest about things because we may think we're gonna be judged or kicked out of the group when the group has certain values statements about all of that, you know? Um, so yeah. So I think it's a, I don't know if I made any sense.

Dean: You did.

Mariame: But it's messy and hard and not easy to manage.

Dean: Yeah. It's so hard. I also just think it's one of the areas of life where we all have just so much unexamined stuff.

Mariame: Oh, yeah.

Dean: It's like it's your personal problem. It's, which I think, you know, feminists said 'the personal is political', feminist said, let's look at the, what happens in our lives and in our sex lives and in our marriages and with our kids and say that's all political. And that's still a struggle for people.

Mariame: Yes.

Dean: They're still like, I'm personally failing. What you said that really just moves me, I don't know if you feel this way about yourself, but your words made me think of it. I feel so frequently, like my mom had, you know, a baby and gave it up for adoption before the pill existed. Like every woman in my whole history of all my ancestors never got to choose whether or not they had babies and generally whether or not they got married, you know? Um, and like it's just such, I just feel like it's such a miracle that I live in a time where I didn't have their fate.

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: And I feel such a desire for as much liberation as I can find in these areas of life, and from the toxic beliefs that have imprisoned people, but especially women -

Mariame: Mm.

Dean: - for so long,

Mariame: So interesting that you bring this up, Dean, because again, I very consciously, like I was engaged to be married. I called off my wedding. Like I made a decision about how I wanted to live my life, and then with fear in my heart, worry of disappointing so many people, including the person who I was going to marry, who I loved, you know, I just said, no, I'm not gonna do it. That's not the life I want for myself. And I took in the, what I knew was gonna be hard, like the emotional fallout, the societal fallout, the cultural fallout, and

then also the disappointment that I knew my parents would have, my family would have. To do that was very brave in retrospect. I, at the time, I did not feel it. But there's no way my life would be this life that I'm living now had I made that choice in my mid twenties. You know?

Dean: Yeah. I mean it's, and what you're saying too about all the, the books you read when you were a kid and the kind of romance culture indoctrination. People make these choices not sober. You know, like under the influence of the idea that you'll be miserable and die alone, or the only true happiness comes from parenting, or the only true happiness comes from romantic love. I mean, the '70s feminists, second wave feminists, for all, you know, some of their faults, they were like 'the family and the romance is a cage. It is a confinement'. And I think that in a lot of ways, I think one of the reasons we've lost that story is be- well, because of course all the backlash to feminism in the '80s, but especially the same sex marriage advocacy that was like, 'marriage is the most beautiful, dignified thing two people can do' that like totally just erased all the feminist analysis, all the analysis about how marriage has been a tool of anti-black racism, of border control, of economic control. And instead it became like 'marriage: it's something that you want a right to do and like it's so beautiful and it's the place where you should get all of your needs met and you should be safe and happy and romantic'.

And like that infuriates me because that '70s feminist, second wave message about those spaces of confinement is so important, especially for moments like the one you just described, where you were like able to see something that you're not supposed to see, which is like, oh, this isn't gonna work out for me.

Mariame: Yeah. And I also think the point that you make in the book about kind of like the hierarchy of relationships, that on the hierarchy of relationships, marriage, monogamous marriage is the height, the monogamous marriage that produces children is the, it's the horizon. It's the thing everyone is supposed to aspire to. And if you don't have it, what is wrong with you? What is wrong with you that you couldn't attain that thing? If you say you didn't want it, it's false consciousness. Like there's other kinds of reasons for why you are being brainwashed. And I think for this generation that's coming up in this current moment of trad wives and the kind of reinstitution again, of the very conservative gender roles and that you should have 14 children by the time you're 30.

And like all that culture that had a little window of tamping down is now coming back full stream. That has direct linkages to the Christian fascist wave that we're in this moment worldwide. And you see that happening like in this way where people who are actually, they're not included in that vision that's being sold. They don't want you to have 13 children. They want these young white women to have 13

children. You are not being considered in that. White, straight, young women like – you are not being considered in that. But you are now aspiring to that horizon, which frankly they're trying to foreclose on you, but you are desperate for that.

And that's the thing, that becomes the pinnacle. And because we're in a culture already where there's so much of a sense of deep need of belonging, with good reason 'cause human beings, we, I mean hunter gatherers who were working together in order to survive and address threats. Like that's the evolution we come from.

Folks are desperate for belonging, and this is a way to belong. It's the stamp of approval that society gives you, that you've made it, you're an adult now. You are now a member of society in good standing. The rest of these riffraffs are not. You do not want to be these sad people who don't have husbands and don't have children.

It's very hard, I think, for people to make sense of that when they desperately long for belonging and when people are very lonely because they've not been able to cultivate all the other kinds of relationships that you could have that would bring fulfillment to your life, and give you a sense of peace and belonging without necessarily the accoutrements of all of these other kinds of institutional things that people offered us as like a salve for, just a need for wanting to belong to other people and with other people. So, yeah.

Dean: Yeah. And you're describing kind of that far right, extreme fantasy that keeps women, you know, maximally confined into those family roles and men as providers and all of that horrible, you know, like really having women be the property of men, all of that. And you'd think the far political edge away from that, right, would be radical sex positive, queer and trans people who are like gender is a fiction, and everybody should have the kinds of sex they want, not any that they don't, and abortion on demand and, you know, all of this stuff. And I think what's been painful in my lifetime, in my role in those movements is watching that get foreclosed with a new domesticated fantasy where it's like, gay people are supposed to like watch, you know, shows about decorating your house, which I would consider decorating your cage in this situation, and like have this cult of domesticity and wanna get engaged.

And like, I mean, it's made a ton of money for gay divorce lawyers, but like, other than that, I don't think it's reduced anybody's suffering. And, and so it's like, you know, I think capitalism and white supremacy, like the heteropatriarchy, they have to constantly capture the people who are kind of edging over.

And in the period, I think especially of the '60s and '70s, there was a lot of pushback. There was a change in sexual culture and people started to be like, we don't have to get married to live together. And

a lot of people, you know, came out as queer and like a lot of feminist sexual politics happened.

And there's been such a rush to recapture those rebellions. And that is heartbreaking to me. And the place it gets us is, it makes you want what they want you to want. It makes you desire their image of the, um, you know, the Barbie Playhouse and it's like, that that should be your life. And maybe it's like a slightly different one. It's a multicultural one or gay one or whatever, like those kind of nonsense things.

This book to me is about asking people to be like, do you want what you want, or do you want what you've been told to want? And what would it be like to have a radical desire in your community where we want different things together? Like we want everybody to have liberation, which would be like seeing each other more clearly, not through these projections and being choiceful and getting to care about the impact of our sexual behavior on others and make decisions that feel ethical in ways that we all constantly are coming up with and revisiting together.

And what does it mean to imagine that we all owe each other care instead of just for somebody who's related to you through this legal or family way, and like these kinds of other dreams. And that part of that is having to do some scrubbing in there, 'cause that stuff is in our minds and it's, we're not bad for that, but it, it really like runs us a lot of the time. And from what I see.

Mariame: I think that's absolutely right. I think that's absolutely right. Yeah. So I feel so many different things about this and I'm appreciative of getting to chat with you about it. And I just think that it's a struggle to try to figure out how to do all these things, how to be all these things, how to live in this like increasingly hard world that we're facing. Um, and also try to make sense of all of this stuff. It's really rough.

Dean: And when times are hard sometimes we really do fall back on fantasies. You know, the fantasy of home ownership I think has a really wild role in the current world, and the fantasy of the perfect romantic date. Like, I want to be safe and have things be easy. And they're not. And I'm not. And so then I go to like, think the hard worn story. This is how you'll be happy. This is how you won't be alone, you know?

I wanna ask you a little bit about hope. There's a lot about hope in Let This Radicalize You, and constantly people are quoting you saying that "hope is a discipline", which is such a useful redirect for a lot of people. And I think it's been really helpful. I've been thinking, especially since the election, you know, keep people, seeing people talk about hopelessness. And I've been wondering if there's a layer

that's about like letting go of faith and hope in some things, that's actually appropriate letting go even though it's painful, and instead cultivating hope and faith where we haven't been encouraged to.

And like for me, in the most simple way, I'd say it's about like people being confronted with letting go of hope and faith in liberal delusions about state reform or being rescued from all the crises by elites, like elected officials or big nonprofits or corporate media or billionaires. And instead cultivating hope in, um, and faith in collective action and in the goodness of other people and ourselves, which is so hard because we've been told that we're all, you know, selfish and greedy and whatever.

And I, I wonder if you would reflect on this, like what are, or should people lose hope in, or what are, or should people be cultivating hope and faith in and like, how do you do that? How do you cultivate hope and faith in different things than you've been taught to?

Mariame: Hmm. This is always hard, Dean, for me, because, um, kind of in the same way that I think, like I first of all don't talk about faith or my faith publicly ever. Like, I, I think last year was the first year a comrade and friend wanted me to talk about being Muslim and my faith in Islam for a new magazine that they were starting, that was for Muslims. And they wanted me to talk about Islam and abolition and like how my religion informs abolition, whatever. And so I agreed to do it, trepidatiously for lots of reasons.

So that's, you know, that's a question of faith. But over the years what I've noticed is how furious some people get when I talk about hope from my perspective. And in a way it makes me even more interested in talking about hope, um, because people have very strong feelings about both concepts, about the concepts of hope and faith. And it's either that these are seen as essential to life and living, _or_ that they are seen as delusions or at worst impediments to getting to the horizon that we want to get towards and get closer to. And to me that's just a lot of binary thinking, right? Like the concept that you either have hope or you don't. Hope is some sort of disposition that you possess. You know that you have faith or you don't.

And I feel like I apply the same approach to every concept as I do to every concept, which is I think people should take what they need and leave the rest. Like if hope and faith are pernicious, from your perspective and vantage point, then leave them aside. And if they're useful, then keep them and use them as you see fit. Right? I wanna state, for me, hope is firmly planted in the secular for me, and it's very much rooted in action. It is not something I feel like I possess, it's something I do. I try to explain this to people sometimes, and I feel like it's not getting through in that way, and it's okay.

Like for me, there are things worth trying, and working towards. And for me, hope is a commitment to continuing to fight and to struggle. At its bottom that's what it is for me. That's what it does for me. And that I think that engaging in collective action is actually a manifestation of hope. I do. You know, it's not having hope itself that pushes me to collective action.

I'm not sure if that makes sense to anyone else but to me, right? Oftentimes I feel extremely frustrated. I feel angry, I feel sad, and I still do hope.

Dean: Yeah.

Mariame: You know? And I feel like we can cultivate it no matter how we're feeling. You can cultivate hope while you're grieving, while you're despondent, because I think hope makes room for itself besides every emotion, since it's not an emotion to me.

So anyway, so all that to say that probably what I would like people to let go of is not hope or faith. What I would like people to let go of is certainty. That's what I would like to see people move away from: certainty. I think for me, doing hope means that I constantly see possibility, constantly see possibility for transformation, for change, in people, in systems in the world.

I think for me, hope and possibility and uncertainty pair well together, right? It means that we have things to do still, and so that's why I believe in a practice of hope. A lot of people are like, "eh, Mariame Kaba said help is a discipline, I don't like that, whatever". Do you! I don't give a fuck. Do I really care? I don't care. Alright, I mean, I say this with deep love for everybody. I do not care. If it doesn't work for you, you don't have to abide by it. You don't have to talk about it. You never have to think about me. It's all great. You know?

I also think, I don't understand, it's really... it's problematic to me often that like, why so many people feel like that hope somehow seduces people into unreality. You know? That it's like doing hope that's fucking everything up. And my thing is, but does hopelessness bring you closer to reality? Why would that be the case? That there's something for some people that hope rings false to them. Right? And so whatever is the opposite of hope would be the thing that rings more true. But that's also it's own fiction.

Dean: Yeah.

Mariame: Like it's, it's what you need to get through. What I said at the beginning, which is the only way out is through, when we were talking prior to this. Like I think you should use what makes sense to you to get you to the next stage and the next stage and the next

stage. Which is to keep fighting, to keep trying no matter what. You know, it's, everybody's been quoting Mike Davis, 'fight with hope, fight without hope. It doesn't matter. Fight.' I agree with him. Like use what is to your benefit, and do that.

So last thing I'll say on this is the point about certainty. I'm worried on multiple levels that we're never gonna be able to let go of certainty because I've been doing a lot of like research and reading both for the book, Let This Radicalize You, and before this about brain science. And I've learned over time that because like habits and recognizable patterns are how the brain... our brains have evolved to be uncertainty averse. Okay? And this is important for me for people to think about because when things become less controllable and less in our control, we experience this kind of strong sense of threat.

And what that means is when you are a human being and you experience threat, what happens to you? You start, your brain immediately goes to the kind of predictable response of fight, freeze, or flight. And once that happens, that shuts everything down, everything down. But it also does other things which people don't know about, which is that when you're experiencing a strong set, like, state of threat, you act, it leads to people decreasing their motivation. Decreasing their ability to focus, decreasing the desire and cooperative ability, cooperative behavior. When you're in a state of threat, you don't wanna be going out to the group and working with some other people on stuff. You trying to figure out how you're gonna survive. And you often looking at these other people as though they're your threats, right?

So this is the conundrum, I feel like. So when I tell people 'let go of certainty', I am not being, how do you call it? naive, here. I know that our brains don't do well in uncertainty and we will do almost anything in our power to try to find predictable ways, predictable habits, ways of being that are not uncertain. Right?

And I think that if we could though, let go of some of the certainty, I think it would open up so much more space for us to try other things. It would get us maybe further along from letting go of some of the authoritative... all the things we talked about, all the way, like it would give us space to do those things more, but it's actually antithetical to the way our brains work right now in terms of human evolution. That's, that's my thought.

Dean: Yeah. I think the certainty thing is a really interesting thing to pull in. Actually when I see people debating hope or hopelessness, I think what they're actually debating is- or what the people who are arguing that we should become hopeless so that we can be more, more oriented towards action - what they're actually saying is we need to let go of liberals' false hope.

Mariame: Hmm.

Dean: So I think that, that, like the people I know who say that, who I think are smart, what they're saying is - like, I mean, I don't, I feel like it doesn't matter what you call what you feel, as long as you, you know, join with others and do things that matter to you. So I, but, so I don't have like a, a camp in it. But I think when I've heard them talk about it, they were trying to encourage people to let go of hope in institutions that are not gonna rescue us. Or in the United States itself, as like the thing that's perfectable and could be fixed, that we should further invest in its framing instead of, you know, going out there and doing stuff with our people to save each other, and support each other, and have each other's backs.

And so they were seeing like it as a radicalizing step for some people when they're like, oh, this stuff isn't gonna work out. I need to get with my people. And I think that's the same move that you could call hope, right? Where you're like, it's like putting your eggs in a new basket.

Mariame: Mm-hmm.

Dean: And when that works, it's because we do embrace a certain level of uncertainty.

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: Like, or we change what we're certain about. Like, I'm certain I care about my people, but I'm not certain what's gonna happen.

Mariame: Yes.

Dean: You know, like...

Mariame: That's right. That's right. But that embrace of the thing that's yet unseen is taking a step in the point I'm making, which is uncertainty, which people do not like and they do not like it for good reason, because our brains are wired not to like it as human beings. I know people do not like these concepts sometimes of 'brain talk', but you know what? Folks know what they're talking about and I'm gonna tell you as someone who's an abolitionist like you, when you are trying to tell people and convince them to jump over the fence to the other side of this thing, which they think is the great unknown, folks are like, 'hell no. Give me the cops any day. I know what they do. I understand what they are. They are predictable to me. They will shoot people and kill them. I know that's the case, but this thing you are offering me, which I'm not sure of, I haven't seen, I also don't trust anybody around me'. Like all those things going on make it so hard to make that sale to people. That they ought to give up on the side of the things that are current in their lives, that they can count on as they see, even though those things are killing them, as opposed to the

other side, which they're not sure about.

Dean: And people only do it in groups. I think that that's what so much of your work is about people. What, what lets us shift that is feeling like something else does have our back. And then I think people, there's also a thing that happens I think when someone hears about how like that the romance myth is a lie, or that the idea the police will keep you safe is a lie. Or that wow, like the idea that billionaires are gonna fix the ecological crisis is a lie. There also some relief. The [bodily] system is like, right, I know that's true. Fuck.

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: You know?

Mariame: Yeah.

Dean: And so that space where people both feel like a relief that the truth is being told, and then a way to not be alone in, kind of, how that does pull the rug out from under what we're used to, even if we don't like it, you know? So like I'm gonna let go of that fantasy that the cops can make me safe, or that I can find a partner and that'll make me happy and well, or whatever the story, if I bought a house, everything would be fine or whatever. Like if I'm gonna let that go, I'm gonna need something else. And that-

Mariame: I need that something else.

Dean: Yeah. You and I are both so focused on get with some other people 'cause that's actually real. It's not, it's wildly imperfect and they're gonna annoy you and you're gonna have fights and whatever, but like that's actually a real thing as opposed to this fantasy that...

Mariame: That's exactly right.

Dean: ...we want people to kind of, you know, divest from.

Mariame: It's my push constantly. It's my One Million Experiments push. I keep saying to people, and I will die on this hill, that we are not going to replace something with absolutely nothing. I don't care how much of a beautiful patina you're gonna offer that, people want to see some concrete stuff that involves other people being there. That they are not gonna be all alone on the other side, making that shit. There are a few people, right, in a minority group that'll be like, we're gonna go, we gonna go. We don't know what's on the other side. You know, we're gonna try it out. We're gonna go there. We may all die in the tundra figuring it out, but we're gonna do that.

That is 1% of the population. Okay? That is not enough for us to be able to actually have a movement of people doing this in a significant enough number so we can shift our conditions enough so that we are actually in a position where we're closer to our horizons. So I just think unless we can offer some actual tangible stuff, and again, I'm not trying to say that the tangible stuff is going to be perfect.

I'm saying I'm willing to try some things. I'm just willing to try it. I'm willing to see if folks are gonna show up for it. I'm willing to try to make that space, that container. It's not gonna be perfect. We're gonna fight. We're gonna have conflict. All those things are gonna happen. But you know what? If we stay together long enough, I believe we're gonna be able to move closer to where we are all trying to go.

That's all I can offer. I don't have certainty about jack. Okay? I am trying to figure out how these things could and could not work. If I knew for sure what the answer to everything was, why would I be here? I'd just be doing that thing and I'd be doing it over and over again regardless. Right? I'd be doing that with other people and we'd be like closer to where I wanna be.

I don't know if what I'm offering is going to work. I have no idea, but I'm willing to continue to try and that to me is the hope. That to me is hope. It's the doing of that. It's in a consistent way. I am going to die trying. That's it. That's my commitment, you know? Now other people can be all in their own whatever, and they can have semantical fights, especially in grad school, and I don't care. I don't care.

I wanna know what you're up to. I'm so interested. I'm like leaning forward on the people who are making shit every day, 'cause I'm like, tell me what you're making please and let me be part of it in some way. Even if it's just a conversation we're having over coffee. I want to hear what you're up to because we need a lot more, so that we can get a lot more people to feel more just empowered and excited and like on that road of we are transforming our conditions.

We are on that. We are on the march. We're trying to get out of this mess and we're trying to go somewhere else. We're not sure if where somewhere else we're gonna be is gonna give us all the things we need. We know it's gonna be imperfect 'cause we're imperfect, but it's gotta be better than this. Gotta be better than this.

Dean: What you're saying makes me think it would be so interesting to talk to people, those who can remember: what was the moment a given person felt enough faith in others? What's the moment? I've heard, I've gone to a workshop where somebody said like, what's the moment when you like stepped off the curb in terms of your activism? I think that's, you know, could be considered a, it's only about people who

walk in a certain way, that language. But that idea of like, when did you like go to higher risk? When did you go all in with people? Even though there was uncertainty, was there something, and I think One Million Experiments is a project that's about this.

It's like, Hey, look at all these people are doing. Does that make you feel like there are a lot of people doing this so you're not alone, and you don't have to figure it all out, but you could try one thing and like, all those kinds of feelings and it'd be fun to like interview people. The other thing you said, you just mentioned like, you know, "die trying". And I think a lot of what I've been doing the last few years is trying to talk to people with more sobriety about ecological crisis and societal collapse, and just kinda like, wow, things are in a really rough state and there's a lot of reasons to be kind of in denial.

How can actually being willing to see what's going on, not lead to immobilization, to this exact thing. Like, wow, I don't know how this is gonna turn out. Like I don't know if this is gonna turn out with human extinction or what's gonna turn out, but how would I like to spend my life? I'd like to spend my life with other people and struggle.

And I often think about like the people who had like rebellions, like slave rebellions and rebellions in Haiti before the Haitian Revolution. Like all the people who tried stuff and died and it didn't, it didn't meet the goal. And also all of those rebellions are unfinished, obviously, 'cause people are still experiencing all of those harms, you know? But like that's beautiful and like, can I feel any of their courage? Because the courage is, you know, you do something, you don't know how it's gonna turn out. You know?

Mariame: I think that's so hard, Dean. I think that is so hard, and I think it's so hard for that to be somebody's motivator. I think this is why the question and conversations about hope, why people are asking constantly "is there hope?" is because it doesn't make sense. We want meaning in our lives and we want lives of purpose, right? We also don't, we also wanna eat and have fun and do jokes and do all the... but human beings crave meaning and purpose too. It's not either/or. And so oftentimes I think in social movements, we're calling on people to speak to, and fight on that terrain of meaning and purpose. Right?

And part of how people are doing that is to be able to say, there's a possibility of "not this". Not this current condition we are living in. A different condition that we could live in and that my kids could live in and that my nibbling could live in. And that is meaning. And how do we derive meaning and purpose? To doing.

We don't just initially, it's not the feeling, I don't believe, it's

not the feeling that motivates that. It's the doing that motivates how we then create meaning, and we create that ability to be able to feel like we have a purpose. So it goes back to my point about hope being in the doing is that if you don't have that, if we're not doing things together on a regular, you can't access that.

So you lack, you're like, is this all there is? You mean this is just it, i'm just gonna die? But you know what I keep telling people, especially young people in my life, I'm like, you are here now. You're here now. So the question is, what are you gonna do with the precious time you have now, here in this moment? What meaning and purpose can you derive from your life in this moment?

I don't want you to stay just in the day-to-day grind of looking right in front of you at only what is directly in your purview. I want you to look up a little bit and think about, that's why, you know, people use language and make fun of people who talk about the importance of dreams. Dreams are incredibly important to get out of the muck of the day-to-day and to consider something else, to consider an elsewhere within. This is very important.

I don't know how you, how do you survive this world if you don't have that? That's just coming from me and my, you know, like, I don't know, maybe other people have other ways of coping and maintaining, but everybody I respect who has been in it for the long run has spoken to me about meaning and purpose. Meaning and purpose. However you can get that. For some people it's their faith. For some people they call it hope. For other people it'll be hopelessness and going into whatever, whatever works for you. But what is it? How are you deriving that? That's what's gonna get us going. And to me, your book also pushes us to think about how we create meaning, how we create belonging, which is a form of meaning making, right?

So yeah, to me, I can't, I don't want to live in a world where I'm constantly one with my nose directly in front of me, where that's the only thing, I'm just like day to day to day on the grind of that. I want to look up and I want to lock arms with other people while I'm doing that.

Dean: Yeah. And get pleasure out of it. I think that part of what you're talking about too, it relates to that thing I feel where people feel avoidant of everything, including the tasks they take on voluntarily in their mutual aid group or their art project. Like everything feels avoidant and it's like we have to learn how to enjoy some of this stuff.

You know, we are alive, like you were saying, like you're actually alive right now. And so what would it take for me to enjoy this art project? Should we have more food at the meeting? Should we sing a song at the beginning of the meeting? Do we wanna all wear our

pajamas? Like what do we need to do to like, enjoy the things that are happening in our lives and not be stuck.

Mariame: That's right.

Dean: With the grind, feeling kind no matter what.

Mariame: Yes, absolutely. Right. Yep.

Dean: Thank you so much for having this conversation. It's been really, as always, fun and really, I feel like my, my brain and my heart have been expanded by your wisdom and I'm really grateful for you joining us.

Mariame: I'm so, I'm so happy to be part of this with you. I'm so really happy about this book 'cause I think it's gonna be challenging to a lot of people. Get ready for some pushback and some like anger, and I think that's good. I think that's good. We need more of folks being shaken out of complacency and having to directly confront and face, what is it about this?

Like, you know we say this at Just Practice all the time, curiosity and judgment can't coexist. If you're feeling the judgment coming up, ask a question. Ask a question. What is this really about? Why am I feeling like this? What's going on? I read some of this and I was like, really? I dunno, I'm not down with Dean on this, but I'll put it down and I'll come back and maybe in two weeks I'll be like, you know what, lemme revisit.

Dean: Thank you for struggling with it.

Mariame: But again, like we should do that with all our people and we should do that with everything we engage, and we are still comrades and friends. And we're not gonna always like absolutely agree 100% on everything and that's what makes life friggin interesting.

Dean: Yeah.

Mariame: That's what makes life interesting. And like, I hope people take the book in that spirit and, and also don't read it by yourself. Read it with some other people.

Dean: Love that. Read in a group. Absolutely. Thank you so much.

Mariame: Of course.

Dean: Thank you to Mariame Kaba for this conversation. The last time I saw Mariame in person was when we did an event together at Bluestockings in New York City in February, 2025. She handed me the most gorgeous bag of zines and beautiful things, and I was struck

again by how boundless her creativity and generosity is.

She makes so many beautiful, useful, practical, and inspiring tools for our communities and movements. May we all tune into the aliveness that Mariame Kaba models, unflinching in the face of difficult conversations and unrelenting in responding to the conditions of the world. I know that right now, Mariame is working on a book drive for Bluestockings, which is a really important radical feminist community space in the Lower East side of New York City. You can find more information in the show notes and on Mariame's social media.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of Love in a F*cked Up World. This podcast is based on my new book of the same name, which is out now from Algonquin Press. I hope you'll pick it up from an independent bookstore in your community.

You can find a full list of resources mentioned in this episode in the show notes. Whenever I introduce guests on the podcast, I try to keep their bios as succinct as possible, which is always a challenge 'cause these people have done amazing things. Today was especially hard, and you can find links to some of the many, many projects, books, zines, and other work by Mariame Kaba in the show notes as well.

Love in A F*cked Up World is hosted by me, Dean Spade. It is produced and edited by Hope Dector. Thank you to Ciro, Eugene, Derekh, Kelsey, Lindsay, Jessica, Raindrop, and everyone else who helped with this podcast. Our theme music is 'I've Been Wondering' by The Ballet. If you found the show useful or if you have ideas of things you wanna hear about, we'd love to hear from you.

You can reach us at LoveInAF0ckedUpWorld@gmail.com. The "U" in "fucked" is a zero. Or you can leave us comments on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. I have an email list where I occasionally share new projects and opportunities to get involved. If you wanna join it, write to us.

We need each other now more than ever, and I hope this podcast offers tools and ideas that can help us build and sustain strong relationships and strong movements.

I hope that you'll keep listening, subscribe, and share these episodes with people in your life.