

Events such as the Civil Rights Movement in America would not have occurred if the African-American population didn't believe change was obtainable, that their struggles and martyrdom would eventually lead to the emancipation of their people. Had the Palestinians been pessimistic then we wouldn't have had movements such as the First Intifada whereupon hundreds of thousands of ordinary civilians participated in acts of civil disobedience demanding that the illegal occupation of their homeland be lifted. Any movement, any demand for justice, any feeling of outrage comes from the belief that what is happening is not acceptable and can be changed. To be pessimistic is to be willfully ignorant of our fundamental and inherent need for justice. When activist and essayist James Baldwin was asked about his position regarding pessimism during the 1950s, the height of the Civil Rights Movement, he replied with "[I] can't be a pessimist because I'm alive. To be a pessimist means that you have agreed that human life is an academic matter, so I'm forced to be an optimist. I'm forced to believe that we can survive whatever we must survive."

Despite all of what I said I still cannot call myself an optimist, perhaps a "cautious optimist" is a more accurate description. I realize that sometimes, regardless of our best efforts, evil prevails such as in the Palestinian example mentioned earlier. The First Intifada carried on for over five years and resulted in the killing of over 1,600 Palestinians, 57,000 to 120,000 people arrested, and 2,532 had their houses razed to the ground. Despite all this immense effort and struggle, the Palestinians have less land than they ever had and the occupation carries on into 51 years. Also, with Trump claiming to pull out of the Paris Climate Accords by 2020 and the continuing degradation of our planet, it's not unreasonable to feel a sense of defeat. However, things are not always as hopeless as they seem and there have been joyous and important victories for humanity throughout history. One such example is the "Water War" that occurred in the city of Cochabamba in Bolivia. In January 2000 the Bolivian government signed a water privatization contract causing a "100 percent hikes on their [the population of Cochabamba] water bills." Protesters took over the city of Cochabamba and despite the brutal attempts of the military to quell the protests, the people did not buckle. Once the government realized that "repression

has failed to derail the movement, the government retreated, canceling the water privatization contract." Examples like these prove that triumphant victory is possible for the marginalized of the world. A pessimist in that situation would have concluded it is futile to fight back against the choices of the government and would have accepted the price hike on water as an unfortunate fact of life. Keeping the complexities of the world in mind, I regard complete, excessive optimism with a degree of skepticism. I know that despite people's best efforts, they won't always succeed in their goals but that we cannot commit the disastrous error of dismissing hope altogether. I believe what's best is to have a pragmatic approach to optimism, focusing on issues that can be directly dealt with rather than believing in absolute idealism. This would help ensure that the massive efforts that go into most movements are not wasted and achieve some level of justice into people's lives, even if it's miniscule in size. To embrace pessimism is to admit defeat and accept the unacceptable.



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