

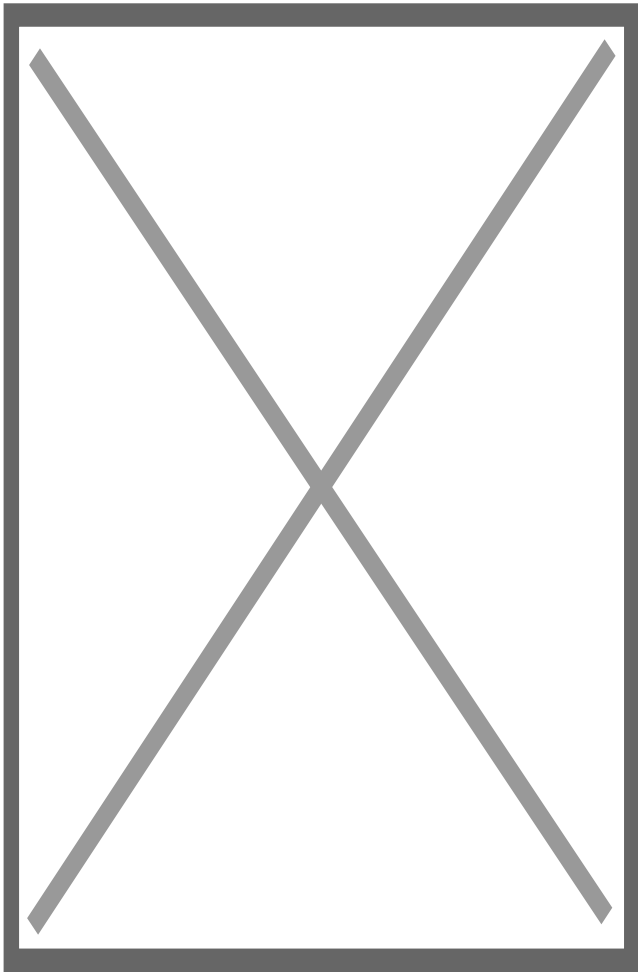
What does solidarity require?

Leah Hunt-Hendrix and Astra Taylor offer a dizzying tour of the concept across geography and history.

by [Jesse Zink](#) in the [March 2026](#) issue

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In Review



Solidarity

The Past, Present, and Future of a World-Changing Idea

By Leah Hunt-Hendrix and Astra Taylor

Pantheon

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“Solidarity forever” goes the refrain on an old union song. But for many decades solidarity has been out of fashion, cast aside as a relic of the past. Leah Hunt-Hendrix and Astra Taylor want to change that. At a critical moment of transition in human culture, they argue that reclaiming solidarity is the only path to a just and sustainable society. Hunt-Hendrix and Taylor met during the Occupy Wall Street movement, and since then both have worked in progressive organizing. Taylor is founder of the Debt Collective, a debtors’ union that made plausible the idea of student debt cancellation. Hunt-Hendrix wrote a doctoral dissertation on solidarity at Princeton, parts of which appear in this book.

For Hunt-Hendrix and Taylor, solidarity is an antidote to market-based solutions that have dominated in our neoliberal era, resulting in deepened social inequities, economic insecurity, and ecological instability. Solidarity, by contrast, begins with a “recognition of our inherent interconnectedness” and is “an ethos and spur to action rooted in the acknowledgement that our lives are intertwined.” Solidarity requires intentional cultivation—it will not spring into being on its own accord—and is expressed most clearly in action. It is not simply a thought or a feeling but something that people do. Nor, however, is solidarity necessarily positive. The authors distinguish between “transformative solidarity”—their preferred approach—and “reactionary solidarity” that seeks to consolidate an exclusivist group identity to maintain the status quo.

With this definitional grounding, the book is a dizzying tour across geography and history, much of it neglected or forgotten. For instance, the authors retell the story of the National Welfare Rights Organization, a union of sorts composed of welfare recipients who banded together in the 1960s and 1970s to press the government for better treatment. They also recount the story of the Community Action Program of the War on Poverty, where future Black Panthers Bobby Seale and Huey Newton got their government-funded start in community organizing. These examples and others underpin their argument that instead of a welfare state, activists should aspire to a “solidarity state” that works for participation, repair, and a genuine pluralism.

In a chapter on the ways well-meaning philanthropists can undermine solidarity, the authors take aim at the effective altruism movement beloved in Silicon Valley; they show the importance of understanding the root causes of societal injustices and journeying alongside activists committed to undoing them. Across all of their chapters, Hunt-Hendrix and Taylor are commendably clear-eyed on the hard and patient work that solidarity requires.

Throughout, I found myself reaching for parallels between the authors’ vision of solidarity and New Testament visions of Christian community. When they describe solidarity as “untidy, particular, interested, engaged,” I thought: just like the church! In a chapter on solidarity and the sacred, they argue that the call to solidarity is “an invitation to define new values and to consecrate our aspirations and convictions through collective action.” As a Christian minister, I appreciate their argument for shared rituals to ground communities of solidarity. While the authors focus their attention on broadly “spiritual” practices, Christians who are willing to think dialogically can learn much from this book about what the church is called to be.

There are four critical areas that I wanted Hunt-Hendrix and Taylor to explore more deeply. First, in their view, the basic obstacle to solidarity is the tactics of a rich elite who are intent on subverting broad-based societal unity. This may be true, but it’s insufficient. The authors do not address what seems a more fundamental obstacle, namely, that generations of neoliberalism have formed us as individuals who are inclined to seek our own good. In its very nature, neoliberalism undercuts the necessary preconditions for solidarity. Building those preconditions must come first.

Second, and relatedly, is the question of anthropology. The authors point out how neoliberalism depends on a vision of the human person as competitive, self-seeking, and rational. Their vision of solidarity depends on the vision of a human person as able to cooperate and form relationships of mutuality with others. They note this

profound division, but they do not delve into the fundamental question of who we are as created beings.

Third, I wanted a fuller development of their vision of society. Their depiction of social change emphasizes networks, like Occupy or the Debt Collective, as well as unions and government-funded organizations like the Community Action Program. But there is almost no discussion of other civil society organizations like service organizations, business guilds, or churches. History tells us that organizations like this can be powerful proponents of solidarity (as well as impediments to it). How, if at all, such organizations figure in Hunt-Hendrix and Taylor's vision is largely unaddressed.

Finally, I read this book in Quebec, where it often seems like *solidarité* is in every second sentence we hear from our politicians and community leaders. The term is used in reference to tax policy, bicycle lanes, food banks, and so much else. While this book begins in 19th-century France, after the first chapter its focus is almost entirely on the United States and the English-speaking world. Just north of the border lies a whole world of discourse waiting to be explored—if only we could build some cross-border and cross-linguistic solidarity to share the ideas.