

# A Review of Naomi Klein’s *No is Not Enough: Resisting the New Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need* and *The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico Takes on the Disaster Capitalists*

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In the deadly California wildfires of 2018, where many lost their homes and 82 people lost their lives, the Kardashians’ mansion emerged unscathed, thanks to private firefighters paid to protect their property. As more and stronger climate change-fueled wildfires, cyclones and hurricanes wreak destruction around the world, we are witnessing the rise of eco-apartheid, where the elite can jet away to private islands or underground survivalist bunkers while the majority suffer the impacts to homes, lives and livelihoods.

And it’s no coincidence that as more and more people are on the move globally, forced from their homes by climate change-induced catastrophes and/or neoliberal economic policies – often implemented drastically in the immediate wake of some disaster – that gut the social safety net and undermine local community resilience, we are also witnessing the rise of white supremacy, anti-immigration sentiment and racialized mass shootings.

Naomi Klein’s recent books, *No is Not Enough: Resisting the New Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need* and *The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico takes on the Disaster Capitalists* provide – in clear accessible language – an analysis crucial to understanding the times we live in, with a critical perspective rarely covered by mainstream media. These books are crucial reading for anyone seeking to explain how we arrived at this particular societal juncture, and how we might respond in order to ensure a more liveable, just future.

Written shortly after the election of US President Trump, *No is Not Enough* summarizes and draws upon the research of Klein’s three previous books, *No Logo*, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, and *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. In this book, Klein touches on the factors leading to the election of Trump, how the people he is surrounding himself with are cultivating and orchestrating shock doctrine deregulation tactics, how these policies constitute intergenerational theft in the context of a rapidly changing climate, and where to find hope and a pathway to a more resilient future.

Trump built an empire by becoming what Klein describes as a ‘hollow brand’ – the business model of owning as little as possible with few employees on payroll, producing images as opposed to actual things, and taking production offshore where multinational companies could distance themselves from the appalling health and safety standards of contractors. And then as an electoral candidate, in a move Klein calls ‘quite a con,’ Trump figured out how to tap into, and profit from, the rage and despair in the very manufacturing communities that had been abandoned by companies like his. Klein writes about his presidency as being produced as a blood-sport reality TV show, where everything is approached as a spectacle, reality is edited to fit a desired narrative, there are winners and there are losers, and in fact people are dying (e.g. civilian airstrikes in Iraq and Syria).

Remarkably, Klein finds hope in the longing to belong that created the conditions for the rise of Trump and other corporate brands. In the context of declining community institutions, these brands seek to meet the unmet desire of

us all to be a part of something larger than ourselves. Her hope is that if we can rebuild our communities in such a way that we can find meaning in them, we will be less likely to engage in mindless consumerism. The side benefit being not only a sense of belonging and an increased ability to withstand the ravages of extreme weather events, but also – if we are quick about it - the chance to maintain life support systems.

Klein writes about her experience of taking her young son snorkelling in the still-abundant parts of the Great Barrier Reef, before traveling (without him) with a film crew to witness the cataclysmic bleaching of coral due to warming water temperatures that has killed almost a quarter of the reef.

Understanding that species are dying all around us, and the forces at play for why we haven't addressed this crisis thus far, help us choose our next steps carefully.

Klein's books need to be considered in the context of the latest climate science.<sup>112</sup> It may not be too late to keep climate pollution below levels deemed catastrophic for the lives of kids already born today. However it *is* too late to achieve this without a rapid, radical transition away from burning fossil fuels.

In *No is Not Enough*, Klein outlines how the years when we could have undertaken a more gentle transition were lost due to the efforts of the oil industry; for example, ExxonMobil funded climate denial for decades after their own scientists first alerted them to the impact that burning fossil fuels would have on the climate. And then Trump appointed a former ExxonMobil CEO as secretary of state.

An overall take-away from Klein's books is that we are at a juncture of two competing futures, one the dream of wealthy disaster capitalists and the other grounded in resilient communities generating their own food and energy who are able to survive upcoming extreme weather events.

These competing futures are described in stark contrast in her latest book, *The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico takes on the Disaster Capitalists*, written after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico where the population was already suffering from the impacts of a financial meltdown and the US colonial imposition of an outside control board.

Her shortest book to date, *The Battle for Paradise* tangibly illustrates the choice facing us. For readers wanting a quick and easy introduction to Klein's ideas, based in theoretical analysis but told in anecdotes and stories about Puerto Rico, this is the book to start with.

In the aftermath of the hurricane, conference boardrooms in Puerto Rico teem with wealthy executives looking to buy up land for private airports and gated communities, where surfing and profits are the name of the game. This is the shock doctrine – the focus of one of Klein's earlier books – in action. Colonial economic advisors seek to privatize schools and electricity – and even to rid the land of its people – while the population is still dazed by power outages and food shortages, the infrastructure breakdown compounded by pre-hurricane austerity policies.

Meanwhile, island residents flock to places where there is solar power to charge their phones and medical devices. With port and infrastructure damaged and unable to import food, and industrial export-oriented farms flattened by the storm, it is the agro-ecological farms practicing traditional techniques whose crops survived the hurricane. Able to harvest the day after, they have been feeding as many people as they can. As a result, Puerto Ricans are awakening to the value of local food and renewable energy, especially as there are undoubtedly more big storms to come. And they are realizing that no government has their interests at heart – thus they need to be the ones to dream a vision for the island and fight for their own future.

And yet it's not easy. Klein writes about the desperation and despair comprising the state of shock being exploited in Puerto Rico, as a result of inept, corrupt relief efforts and ongoing blackouts. She highlights how this bleak struggle of daily life hinders political engagement. Klein posits that more than incompetence is at play; these may be deliberate outcomes of a calculated effort to wear people down in order to build support for privatization and a massive land grab.

Some islanders see this clearly, and are resisting. Organizers have come together and are drafting a people's platform to unite their various causes in to a common vision for a Puerto Rico with healthy communities and natural systems.

Klein doesn't end '*The Battle for Paradise*' in a place of hope, but rather with the idea that there is a battle going on, the choices are clear and the stakes are high.

Ultimately, Klein's books lay out a roadmap for how we can collectively respond to crisis in order to win a world that values people and the planet over profit.

To counter the power of hate, Klein argues that we need to tell a new history of how we ended up here – one grounded in an understanding of the intersections and influences of race, class, gender, sexuality, physical ability, immigration status and language.

She critiques incremental politics of 'inclusion' of the 'other' within an inherently unjust system, as not only insufficient from a justice perspective but also because this doesn't create conditions powerful enough to defeat the far-right forces that perpetuate fear of the 'other.' Instead, she emphasizes the importance of cooperating across movements, in recognition that no one 'issue' is more important than any other. Klein encourages an understanding of how various forms of oppression intersect and prop each other up, and how we can overcome artificial divisions including that between humans and the natural world. Within this context, Klein urges that while climate change is not more important than other crises, it does have a different relationship to time, in that short-term failure is not an option if we want to have a liveable world for future generations.

Throughout her books Klein makes clear that to do right for the planet, and for each other, nothing less than radical political and economic change is needed. The question then is how to achieve this.

As indicated by the title '*No is Not Enough*,' Klein makes the case that progressive movements have struggled to articulate a 'yes' vision compelling enough to counter the forces of fear and hate. Playing defense isn't enough, and incremental improvements don't cut it; what is needed is a big bold vision of a future that captures the imagination and inspires us to action.

One Canadian example she mentions is Delivering Community Power,<sup>113</sup> an initiative of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers that would stimulate green jobs in communities across the country. The idea is to revitalize and reimagine Canada Post with the use of electric vehicles and new services like checking in on seniors, delivering medications and groceries, providing postal banking, and offering post offices as electric vehicle charging stations and community hubs.

Since Klein's books have been published, one of the most exciting ideas to emerge that combines climate action with a deep commitment to intersectionality is found in the Green New Deal movement, which was sparked by US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and is gaining traction among young organizers across the continent. The idea is to tie the phase-out of fossil fuels to a job security guarantee, within a lens of addressing historical and current injustices. Where governments are reluctant to talk about anything other than small incremental steps to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, while supporting fossil fuel extraction at the same time, the Green New Deal articulates solutions that are at scale with the climate emergency, and vastly expands the box of what is politically possible to talk about.

As Klein wrote about her experience at Standing Rock,<sup>114</sup> Indigenous peoples in many parts of the world are leading the struggles against fossil fuel expansion – and in this they are teaching how to not just resist but also model ways to live in relationship and community with the land. This reinforces a concept not addressed in her books, that of Indigenous law. Centreing Indigenous law<sup>115</sup> in relationships and decision-making offers an approach that up-ends the worldview underpinning neoliberal economics. It reminds us of the importance of reconnecting with the non-human world in a way that fosters an understanding that our survival and well-being depends on the health of the world around us.

Ultimately, Klein's books connect the dots in ways that can't be ignored: between the rise of populism, white supremacy and climate change; between corporate influence to privatize infrastructure and schools after disasters – and how this same influence is blocking meaningful climate action; and between movements struggling for the rights of people and for the very life support systems of our planet.

Reading her books makes abundantly clear that tinkering around the edges of incremental change won't win the world we need; nothing less than radical transformation of politics and economics will do. It's a daunting proposition. And yet her books leave me feeling hopeful – that if we come together with a critical analysis, a clear-eyed understanding of historical and current injustices, and a deep commitment to working together and uplifting

Indigenous jurisdiction and all marginalized and oppressed voices, that we can choose a liveable future. The alternative – the eco-apartheid being plotted in boardrooms by a privileged few – would make life much, much worse off for the vast majority of us.

Our choice is clear, and everyone has something to offer to this transition.

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