

February 2018

Book Review: Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*

Jacob Dawson
University of North Alabama

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.una.edu/sustainabilityjournal>

 Part of the [Sustainability Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dawson, Jacob (2018) "Book Review: Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*," *Journal of Sustainability Studies*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://ir.una.edu/sustainabilityjournal/vol1/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNA Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Sustainability Studies by an authorized editor of UNA Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact jpate1@una.edu.

Book Review: Naomi Klein's This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate

Jacob Dawson

Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014.

Why is there such a wide and jagged schism between the international environmental conservation community and neoliberal capitalism espoused by wealthy democratic and conservative politicians alike? Which environmental organizations are trustworthy and which ones are facilitating the perpetrators of one of the most important issues of our generation? How is objective science sorted out from pseudoscientific and manipulative studies designed to obfuscate the issue and confuse or deceive the public? Naomi Klein answers these questions and many more in her newest book on the environment.

Published in 2014, *Capitalism vs. The Climate* was immediately hailed as a revolutionary work, with reviews appearing in such outlets as *Vogue*, *The Rolling Stone*, and *The Guardian*, and drawing comparisons to Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring* by *The New York Times*, whom also wrote that it "is a book of such ambition and consequence that it is almost unreviewable." Naomi Klein is the author of several articles, chapters and books, gaining widespread recognition with her 2007 book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. She has been interviewed by Amy Goodman, Bill Moyers, and Charlie Rose among others and writes and serves as a member of the board of directors for prominent climate action organization 350.org.

The introduction to her latest work begins with a confession. She frankly admits “I denied climate change for longer than I care to admit.” The issue is one anyone with an awareness of affairs beyond their doorstep should be familiar with. Emissions from sectors including manufacturing, big Ag, and transportation are rising, resulting in astronomical levels of Carbon Dioxide and other greenhouse gases, and global average temperature is rising although locally this manifests as extreme weather events as various kinds (e.g., the early 2014 southern shift of the Northern Polar Vortex that was the cause of 49 record low temperatures nationwide just on January 7 along with heavy snowfall prompting cancellation of flights, power outages, and other forms of widespread social disruption).

As human population growth, mass-produced and driven by fossil fuels, continues to rise and civilization becomes increasingly concentrated in urban centers the pressure exerted on natural systems overreaches their capacity to sustain life, famine and drought will spread soon followed by disease and civil unrest as poisoning and stripping the land renders it unable to yield crops in sufficient quantities to maintain inflated levels of population supported by artificial systems enabling global production and trade of resources fail because global ecosystems fail. If global population continues to rise along with global emissions and global temperatures, then ecosystems will fail globally. When ecosystems fail globally, i.e., everywhere, *nowhere* will be left untouched.

Klein builds her case by reviewing how the political and socioeconomic climate relates to climate science. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has met annually since 1995 to discuss how to mount a coordinated response to

global warming. Universities, NGOs, corporations, respected scientific personalities, celebrities, and even entrepreneurs and philanthropists recognize the need to reshape humanity's relationship with our environment. Even while the movement is gaining strength, however, there are those who seek to undermine the progress in restoring the health of our shared Mother Earth. We can liken the scenario to a frigate that, although her anchor is inexplicably cast out, is carried forward by sails full of wind. Research and summit meetings aimed at discrediting the theory of human-affected climate change (theory here is used in the context of a series of observations and predictions supported by overwhelming evidence) are frequently funded by oil & gas companies and laissez-faire economic think tanks favoring deregulation to keep costs low. One of the main forces preventing effective and rapid social change from taking place is the devotion to free-market capitalism by the same bodies (governments, corporations, NGOs) that are proponents of the need for environmentally responsibility.

Klein's writing style, though it may initially be taken as biased and will undoubtedly be accused by proponents of the currently prevailing socioeconomic paradigm as liberal propaganda, is a long and sometimes grueling read. Her fondness for detail brings to mind the metaphor "beating a dead horse" after some 400+ pages, but it ensures she does not fail at her task to systematically illustrate the matter. Wonderfully rich with passion and a sense of dire purpose, Klein is not afraid to get personal. Laced throughout with analogies and anecdotes to support the scientific consensus, she truly strives to encourage the weary reader and would-be environmentalist. I made it through, and I encourage you to give it a try to,

however daunting the size and scope of the manuscript may be. This is one of the most important and enlightening books anyone can read.