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Books: Klein-do attitude

Writer and activist » Canadian journalist Naomi Klein set to read at Sundance series.

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Naomi Klein launched her first book, *No Logo*, from the perch of her journalism career at the *Toronto Globe and Mail* in 2000. A critical analysis of global capitalism -- some called it a free-floating polemic against commercialism -- the book earned Klein a stern rebuke from Nike footwear company. It also earned her a mantle on the short list of North American authors with unabashed leftist leanings who know how to speak to a popular audience.

The child of an American family who moved to Canada in the 1960s as a statement against the Vietnam War, Klein said she remembers politics as "the oxygen of my childhood."

Her latest book, 2007's *The Shock Doctrine*, details ways in which corporations and business interests take advantage of the "shock" of chaos and disaster to impose a brand of Chicago School, "fundamentalist" capitalism on the powerless. Post-Katrina New Orleans, an Asian coast wracked by the tsunami and Chile's tumultuous history all get a hearing. The Cato Institute last year issued a rebuttal of Klein's latest book, which Klein said she welcomed.

"If I didn't want to debate these issues I wouldn't write the book the way I've written it," she said during a phone interview from British Columbia. "I wrote *The Shock Doctrine* because I want people to be prepared for these tactics when they hit again."

Part of The Shock Doctrine details how a post-Katrina New Orleans was filled with contractors who removed the union wage and implemented other measures undermining public institutions. Are you familiar with Dave Eggars' latest book Zeitoun, which tells the real-life story of a Syrian-American man detained without charge after he roamed the submerged city in a canoe to help the stranded?

I've not read Eggars' new book, but I'm not surprised that an Arab-American would find himself in that situation. After Katrina you had private firms like Blackwater coming in and vigilantes running around ready to shoot looters. A lot of African Americans said they felt like they had a target on their back just walking in their own neighborhoods. It was a climate of anything goes -- made all the worse because many parts of the city's public works were already in a disaster state before the hurricane hit.

Many people who've read Adam Smith, capitalism's greatest proponent, are struck by how far his original ideas are from those who espouse markets completely free of interference. Smith supported progressive taxation, central bank control and was skeptical of taking labor offshore. Why do you think Friedman and the Chicago school of economics you criticize took a divergent path?

Smith was abused by [Friedrich von] Hayek and Friedman, really. My book quotes a letter written by economic historian [Andre] Gunder Frank, who studied under Friedman, where he complains about the narrowness of their education at University of Chicago. They only read Hayek and the first two chapters of *Wealth of Nations*. To understand the Chicago school of economics, you have to understand it along with the rise of fascism and communism. A lot of these people, such as Hayek and Ayn Rand, were personally scarred from their experiences. Rand's father lost land to the communists.

What do you say to people fatigued by the polarization of politics?

In some sense, we need to be more polarized. The right in the United States has gone off the deep end, and the Obama administration is by no means leftist. If big pharma is contributing \$150 million to direct the health-care debate, we know reform will in no way change their way of business. Single-payer health care isn't even on the table. Right now we have a

polarized debate, but no broad spectrum of policy on the table. It's the worst of all worlds.

Your breakthrough book No Logo took branding to task. How do you shop?

It's about changing the rules of free trade so workers can organize. We can't shop our way out of this. I care, but I'm not doctrinaire, either. If I want a coffee and no other store is around, I'll buy one from Starbucks. That said, we all have a responsibility to live our politics.

Tree Room Author Series continues

Naomi Klein will speak at the Sundance Resort, Provo Canyon, Aug. 29. Doors open at 11:30 a.m. before a noon brunch, with Klein hosting a question-and-answer session and book signing beginning at 1 p.m. Tickets are \$95, available by phone at 801-223-4242.

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