

Shocking Doctrines, Shocking Short Shrift

A Review of Naomi Klein's "The Shock Doctrine"

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I recently had the opportunity to view a lecture by Michael Parenti whom I consider a foremost expert on imperialism. Parenti began his lecture with the use of the word "stochasticism" which essentially means random, non-deterministic, based on conjecture or guess. A simpler way of summarizing it is, "stuff happens." It is, in fact, the polar opposite of "conspiratorial." In the lecture Parenti went on to criticize those who refuse to admit that the United States is imperialistic and who explain its imperial adventures around the world as something that "just happened." Generally, those in academia who rationalize U.S. imperialism are astute, incisive thinkers on other issues, so one is perplexed by the obtuseness they demonstrate around the topic of imperialism.

In the same way, I have been bewildered by a singular stochastic perspective of Naomi Klein in her brilliant, exhaustive, superbly-documented book [The Shock Doctrine](#). In it Klein builds an intricate and convincing case for the use of various techniques of trauma applied to societies and individuals during the twentieth century and continuing into the current moment for the purpose of perpetrating what has become one of her hallmark phrases, "disaster capitalism" Yet two pages in the book left me aghast. The first is Pages 11-12 which refer to September 11, 2001 and state:

The Bush team seized the moment of collective vertigo with chilling speed-not, as some have claimed, because the administration deviously plotted the crisis but because the key figures of the administration, veterans of earlier disaster capitalism experiments in Latin America and Eastern Europe, were part of a movement that prays for crisis the way drought-struck farmers pray for rain, and the way Christian-Zionist end-timers pray for the Rapture.

After hearing endless interviews of Klein and reading numerous articles about the book when it first hit the stores in September, and being very familiar with the disaster capitalism thesis, the above quote from the book's first pages were astonishing in their inconsistency with nearly every other page of the book.

If you're wondering about that second quote that left me aghast, please bear with me. I will address it, but first things first.

Disaster Capitalism-Microcosm and Macrocosm

Disaster capitalism is according to Klein "...orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities." (6) It has its origins in the "Chicago School" of economics made famous and perpetuated for decades by University of Chicago economics professor, Milton Friedman, who actually coined the phrase "shock treatment" to describe the psychological pummeling

of societies and individuals who might stand in the way of or could be made more useful to the advancement of corporate goals. One recent example was the dramatic use of shock and awe, including using those very words to describe it, against the nation of Iraq during the invasion by the U.S. in 2003. A more recent example to which Klein devotes a great deal of attention is the devastation of New Orleans during and after Hurricane Katrina.

The endgame of disaster capitalism is the total privatization of what have throughout American history been state services. Not surprisingly, the ultimate outcome of unbridled disaster capitalism will be the supplanting of government by corporations.

While these are examples of societal decimation, the book's first chapter focuses on the origins of the current forms of torture used by the U.S. in the incipient, CIA-funded experiments of Ewen Cameron, a Canadian psychiatrist who "believed that by inflicting an array of [electrical] shocks to the human brain, he could unmake and erase faulty minds, then rebuild new personalities" on what he believed would be a "clean slate." (29) I was quite familiar with Cameron as a result of a History Channel documentary called "Mind Control: America's Secret War" which I frequently show in my classes, but for the most part, progressives have been loath to discuss many of the CIA's early torture escapades and have minimized them as perhaps "borderline conspiratorial"-until Klein published *Shock Doctrine*. As a result, her research is now currently quite fashionable in progressive circles, but ten years ago, it was a bit "fringy" for the left-liberal establishment as many of us were exposing the MK Ultra mind control agenda of the CIA, only to be labeled "whacky."

The grotesque details of Cameron's electroshock experiments are a matter of public record and gave birth to many strategic forms of torture subsequently used and sanctioned by the U.S. government. Klein specifically cites the CIA's Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation manual authored by those who were profoundly impressed with Cameron and his focus on psychological regression. The principle idea was to deprive people of "their sense of who they are and where they are in time and space" and by so doing, converting them "into dependent children whose minds are a blank slate of suggestibility." (40) One desired outcome of this psychological battering was the manipulation of the subject in their regressed state to believe that someone or something (the torturers, the government) were in fact father figures who would eventually save them from further harm. In other words, the uncanny and diabolical intent was to cause the victim to unequivocally bond with his/her tormenters and experience them as saviors.

Disaster Capitalism Globalized

Those at the highest levels of government theorized that in the same way that Cameron achieved these objectives with countless individual patients, a similar result could be achieved with entire societies. Thus, writes Klein:

The terrorist attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon was a different kind of shock from the ones imagined in the pages of the Kubark manual, but its effects were remarkably similar: profound disorientation, extreme fear and anxiety, and collective regression. Like the Kubark interrogator posing as a 'father figure', the Bush administration promptly used that fear to play the role of the all-protective parent, ready to defend 'the homeland' and its vulnerable people by any means necessary. (42)

Klein goes on to point out that just as Ewen Cameron had a dream of taking people back to

a state of “natural” health before human interactions created distorting patterns, that is to a “blank slate” status, Milton Friedman dreamed of de-patterning societies and returning them to a state of pure capitalism. Like Cameron, Friedman believed that in order to achieve this end, the deliberate inflicting of painful shocks (Friedman’s words) in the form of economic adversity or natural disaster would provide the “bitter medicine” necessary to remove barriers to the desired result. (50)

Klein proceeds in Chapters 3-13 to explain how the shock doctrine was applied by the U.S. government around the world, but in Chapter 14, “Shock Therapy In The USA”, she returns to 9/11 where she astutely notes that:

What happened in the period of mass disorientation after the attacks was in retrospect, a domestic form of economic shock therapy. The Bush team, Friedmanite to the core, quickly moved to exploit the shock that gripped the nation to push through its radical vision of a hollow government in which everything from war fighting to disaster response was a for-profit venture. (298)

Creating a whole new framework for its actions, “the Bush team used the omnipresent sense of peril after 9/11 to increase dramatically the policing, surveillance, detention, and war-waging powers of the executive branch which some have called a ‘rolling coup’.” (298)

Klein demonstrates that 9/11 resulted not only in the shredding of the U.S. Constitution and the launching of a permanent state of war that would reap unprecedented profits for the military industrial complex, not to mention the perpetual pursuit of fossil fuels, but also the creation of two burgeoning new industries, the security industry and the disaster industry, both of which have become as large and lucrative as the dot com phenomenon. Thus Klein documents and brilliantly defines corporatism as “big business and big government contributing their formidable powers to regulate and control the citizenry.” (307) All of this, she argues, is a result of 9/11.

Throughout the book she posits that whether it is through the application of electroshock “therapy”, military campaigns of shock and awe, or the pseudo-management of natural disasters such as Katrina to dramatically enhance corporate profits, individuals and populations are traumatized and manipulated to achieve the ends of disaster capitalism.

The Stochastic Steady Stream and 9/11

By the time one arrives at Page 300 of the book, one is riveted by the array of conspiracies and I use that word intentionally, that Klein lays out. The genesis and evolution of disaster capitalism from her perspective are anything but stochastic. They are intentional, well-orchestrated, and brilliantly executed. It’s almost like watching the 2001 film “[Conspiracy](#)” a “dramatic recreation of the Wannsee Conference where the Nazi Final Solution phase of the Holocaust was devised.” Nothing is spontaneous, accidental, or left to chance. Consequently, disaster capitalism’s escapades constitute in terms of lives lost and suffering perpetrated on humanity the most horrific holocaust in human history.

But what it seems that Klein hasn’t quite grasped is that disaster capitalism is the mechanism for achieving the consummate agenda of [organizations such as the Bilderberg Group](#), the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Trilateral Commission, namely the dissolution of nation states which will ultimately be replaced by global corporatocracy. For most progressive intellectuals, the mere mention of these organizations suggests

“conspiracy theory” since progressives tend to minimize their role in international and domestic affairs. Moreover, a number of left-liberal poster children are members of one or more of the ruling elite groups mentioned above—an inconvenient truth, so to speak, for true believers tethered to the progressive wing of the Democratic Party in search of salvation from all that they perceive as evil.

With respect to 9/11, Klein’s incisive grasp of disaster capitalism’s brilliantly devised, superbly-engineered machinations alongside her stochastic insistence that the administration did not deviously plot the catastrophe defies all logic. By Page 400, the reader has digested an encyclopedia of conspiracies carried out by a series of U.S. administrations of both political parties, but on Page 426 is nevertheless asked to believe that 9/11 “just happened”.

On that page comes the most breathtaking statement of all—that quote to which I promised to return. Arguing that the U.S. government did not have a hand in the attacks, Klein states:

The truth is at once less sinister and more dangerous. An economic system that requires constant growth, while bucking almost all serious attempts at environmental regulation, generates a steady stream of disasters all on its own, whether military, ecological or financial.

I could not agree with Klein more in terms of economies based on growth generating a steady stream of disasters, but 9/11 is a bit more than a few molecules in a “steady stream.” It was and is the defining moment in the history of disaster capitalism.

The truth of 9/11, says Klein is “less sinister, and more dangerous”? What could be more dangerous than the U.S. government orchestrating the attacks in order to achieve all of the motivations that Klein has so incisively and painstakingly explained? After 425 pages of unrelenting recitations of *bona fide* conspiracy, I am asked to swallow the stochastic non-analysis of a steady stream in which 9/11 just happened to rear its ugly head?

Progressive Constitutional scholar Jonathan Turley [recently noted](#) that: “This administration was seeking a massive expansion of presidential power and national security powers before 9/11. 9/11 was highly convenient in that case,” George Washington University law professor Jonathan Turley told Keith Olbermann on Countdown. “I’m not saying that they welcomed it, but when it happened, it was a great opportunity to seize powers that they have long wanted at the FBI.”

No Jonathan, you and the overwhelming majority of American liberal academia would not say they “welcomed it”, but you’re stepping right up to the line between “it just happened” and the U.S. government’s orchestration of the attacks. Both you and Klein realize the cost to you in left-liberal circles if you were to actually cross the line.

I cannot recommend *Shock Doctrine* highly enough for a multi-layered understanding of the origin, evolution, and likely outcome of disaster capitalism. It offers an extraordinary economic and geopolitical map of historical and current events. Yet the book’s treatment of 9/11 is disappointingly characteristic of the progressive response to the tragedy which belies once again its intellectual armoring against venturing into the territory of conspiracy. Yet nowhere in *Shock Doctrine* is the most absurd, incongruous, intellectually insulting conspiracy of all, the “official” story of 9/11, challenged.

While I have been on record for years arguing that the attacks were orchestrated by the U.S. government, and while [I have repeatedly supported the 9/11 truth movement](#), I no longer feel a sense of urgency in pursuit of 9/11 truth. The larger picture of the collapse of empire and civilization, of which 9/11 was only one piece, compel me to expand my horizon. Nevertheless, when otherwise perspicacious minds tenaciously embrace the official story, no doubt in fear of being labeled a conspiracy theorist, I feel equally compelled to challenge the contradiction.

Shock Doctrine offers us priceless documentation of the lengths to which empire has gone and will go to achieve and maintain primacy; however, its one shocking and pivotal incongruity must be illuminated. Unless we are willing to cross the line into the forbidden domain of pre-meditated mass murder that was 9/11, we are adrift in a stochastic world of “stuff happens” while surrounded by a sea of intentional, well-orchestrated holocausts.

So What Does It Matter If Progressives Can't Go There?

With respect to a book like *Shock Doctrine* which plumbs the depths of malignancy that the United States has inflicted upon the world and on its own citizens, the inability of its author to allow herself to know the whole truth about 9/11 and speak it, is astounding. Not only does it reveal the intellectual constraints which the progressive movement has foisted upon itself, but it facilitates a tenacious clinging to endless layers of denial. Even worse, in so doing the liberal left perpetuates not only everyone else's denial but the false hopes and pseudo-solutions of the American political chimera, the corruption of which is consummate and which serves no other purposes than choreographing a caricature of democracy and ensuring massive social control.

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