

A Review of Klein, N., & Steffoff, R. (2021)'s *How to Change Everything: A Young Human's Guide to Protecting the Planet and Each Other*

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When we know that children between the ages of 5 and 17 spend most of their waking hours in schools, we, educators, should be troubled when a book written for youth about climate change only dedicates six pages of its 300 total to the role that schools can play in mitigating the climate crisis. Yet in Naomi Klein's (2021) most recent book, *How to Change Everything: A Young Human's Guide to Protecting the Planet and Each Other* (co-authored with Rebecca Steffoff), that is exactly what readers will find. In this work, Klein effectively recalibrates the era defining *This Changes Everything* (2014) towards a younger generation. In doing so, it becomes clear that she has given up on schools' abilities in the West to shift societies *en masse* towards cultivating the skills, attitudes, and knowledge for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Instead, supported by Rebecca Steffoff, an author with an extensive catalog of young-adult nonfiction publications, *How to Change Everything* is a story about how we got to critical trajectories of global heating, and presents case studies of the individuals that stepped beyond the norms of a child—and the school day—to challenge government policy and business practice.

How to Change Everything comes after a string of era-defining books from Klein that has seen her rise to prominence, beyond just activist circles, to enter the rare sphere of public intellectual. Klein's previous writing, such as *No Logo* (1999), illuminated a generation to the impacts of globalization and corporate capitalism and *The Shock Doctrine* (2007) coined the term *disaster capitalism*, which was described as a doorway for ramming through neoliberal reforms. *This Changes Everything* (2015), a multimedia project, captured the multitude of ecological violence perpetrated on the planet through extractivism, and more recently, *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal* (2019), presented a case for how the Green New Deal enacts meaningful change to mitigate and adapt to climate change, inspired by the climate strikes of 2019. In *How to Change Everything*, Klein has shifted audience, speaking directly to youth.

As a school leader in public education, I came to this work looking for a book that would guide my work as an educator and mentor, a text that would educate and inspire youth to engage in climate action. I have been an avid reader and supporter of Klein's work over the last two decades, which has informed my worldview, and consequently the content I facilitated in my classroom. *This Changes Everything* (2015) in particular included case studies and a documentary of the same name which I used in conjunction with the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report in the lead up to the 2019 climate strikes that my learners and I participated in. So, I thought a book written by Klein aimed at youth would surely include guidance on how to support ecological literacy through public education?

Not so. Instead, the book is almost entirely focused outside of school. The book maps out three sections, which focus on the past, present, and future of climate change, with specific emphasis on a North American audience. The text is written for and accessible to a high school and middle years audiences, particularly those who are already aware of and concerned about climate change, as well as those who are curious to learn more. One of the assets of the book which permeates each of the temporally organized sections is that the authors are particularly adept at making an emotional connection with the reader, beginning by speaking directly to causes at the individual level, before making the case for collective action as key to pushing government

towards climate policy. As with *On Fire* (2019), Klein continues to highlight a Global or National Green New Deal as the horizon to which all climate action should work towards. Research on the teenage brain shows that adolescents are keen to explore their identity, to take risks in search of boundaries, but do so within larger cultural spaces built and occupied by their generation (Blakemore, 2018). In the first third of the book on *Where We Are*, Klein and Steffoff frequently speak directly to the reader stating for example that “kids like you have shown that they are fierce and determined defenders of life on earth” (p. 28). Once outlining how youth can join an already developing movement that rejects ecologically devastating norms established by previous generations, the authors then provide a path for youth to mobilize.

Early passages in the book detail a succinct and engaging case for why youth should care about the climate crisis, and what they can do about it. *This Changes Everything* (2015) preceded the 2019 global climate strikes, presenting an outstanding case of how capitalism was linked to climate change, concluding with a call for sustained democratic action in the form of massive civil disobedience. As with Klein's 2015 book, which situated capitalism in its crosshairs, the 2021 text continues this approach. It is rare for capitalism to receive rebuke in a youth non-fiction text, and so Klein and Steffoff should be praised for accessible historical analysis which makes the link between economic systems (particularly neoliberalism) with carbon emissions and the challenges in reducing fossil fuel extraction and consumption. The established relationship between capitalism and current economic and ecological crises here lends well with what research is telling us in a resurgence of anti-capitalist sentiment in Western democracies. For example, in Britain, the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) has found that nearly 80% blame capitalism for the housing crisis, while 75% believe the climate emergency can be blamed on capitalism, and 72% back sweeping nationalization of private infrastructure such as railways and energy production. All in all, the study states, 67% want to live under a socialist economic system (Institute for Economic Affairs, 2021). This data is mirrored by studies in the United States (Harvard University, 2016) and Canada (Innovative Research Group, 2021).

Navigating the waters of how to talk about capitalism in classrooms can be difficult, but the critique in Klein and Steffoff's book is embedded partially in case studies, such as Hurricane Katrina, which the reader is encouraged to extrapolate into other natural disasters. This offers an important signpost for the classroom teacher, who can guide learners through understanding how capitalism has both exacerbated climate change and continues to undermine mitigation and adaptation efforts, through using concrete examples and voices of those impacted. Further links are made by further exploring Rich's (2019) *Losing Earth* that detailed how business and government, led by the United States, pivoted away from addressing carbon emission reductions in the late 1980's. As with Rich (2019) there are passages on neoliberalism, a mutation of capitalism spearheaded by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, presented to the reader with clarity, yet without setting aside the complexities of economic policy. The authors know the value of the teenage reader being exposed to these ideas and understanding them in order to solidify their grounding of how capitalism and climate change are entwined. The linking of capitalism to environmental and wider social justice causes is central to their thesis.

The midsection of the book contains a critique of capitalism as tied to the erosion of democracy, a belief which Klein and Steffoff determine is absolutely crucial as a lever for pressuring government into climate action. A particular strength of *How to Change Everything* (2021) is the careful and accessible presentation of the importance of democracy, outlining lawful and actionable moves that youth can make. There are two avenues that Klein and Steffoff take in

providing a pathway for action: firstly, youth can continue their involvement in climate strikes, can boycott products or choices that lead to excessive carbon emissions, can get involved in politics, and can spend time in nature; secondly, the authors highlight, without explicitly encouraging, powerful forms of climate action that youth may decide to become involved in, or could indirectly support, such as Extinction Rebellion who engage in civil disobedience and suing government and business. This careful balance allows Klein and Steffoff to sidestep accusations that they are attempting to radicalize youth into civil disobedience.

A presentation of why climate justice must be tied to the mast of democracy, uniting the intersecting elements of climate change, with poverty and racism, aligns particularly with the Sunshine Movement. These individuals, while “too young to vote, took a passionate interest in politics” (p. 244). The Sunrise Movement organized sit-ins of politicians as a way to both highlight the lack of climate action, while calling for a Green New Deal in the United States. What was particularly powerful about their actions, write Klein and Steffoff, was that they “offered a story about what the world could be like after a deep change, and they offered a plan for how to get there” (p. 251). The Sunrise Movement is heralded as a model for youth democratic action.

“Individuals alone cannot bring about the sweeping changes we need ... government, business and industry... must also make very different choices” (p. 56), which Klein and Steffoff claim will be achieved through collective democratic action. The New Deal and the Marshall Plan, two historical precedents that involved the mass mobilization of funds and people towards infrastructure projects in the mid-twentieth century, are the two political projects that are detailed to emphasize that large scale infrastructure work and the money to finance them has been possible in the past. The alternatives that Klein and Steffoff allude to include more examples of disaster capitalism (citing for example in New Orleans, following Hurricane Katrina, where a natural disaster caused by climate change was used as a trojan horse to privatize and gentrify parts of the city that excluded poor and racialized groups), and eco-fascism (an ideology that blames and seeks to persecute peoples and nations with high populations or high carbon emissions). The close of an historical analysis leaves the reader with one pathway, that only democratic social movements that intersect with social and economic justice can turn the tide of climate change.

The shadow of climate change activist and Generation Z figurehead Greta Thunberg looms large throughout the text. Klein and Steffoff clearly consider the potential that lies with Thunberg, a youth whose path to activism began in her teenage years. If, as suggested, “young people are grit in the gears of the current system” (p. 162), then Thunberg is the proverbial sugar in the gasoline tank. In the years since her individual protest outside of the Stockholm National Parliament, Thunberg has been catapulted into the spotlight, writing books, speaking at conferences, and leading a series of climate strikes replicated globally, where millions of youths have seen an individual begin to have demonstrable impacts on government policy. Had COVID-19 not forced many youth activists indoors for an extended period, the climate strikes of fall 2019 could certainly have grown in participation and frequency. While the authors may have started this work prior to the global pandemic, *How to Change Everything* has the potential to operate as a catalyst for re-engagement as we emerge from quarantine, rather than a work that can sustain the movement.

And what of public education? Yuval Noah Harari bluntly detailed in his chapter on education, “21 Lessons for the 21st Century” (2018), the public school student might be well advised to ignore the adult, and follow their own path, with a focus on general life skills that can broadly fit under the “four C’s”: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. In many ways, these all fit well with the present and future work of climate action presented by Klein

and Steffoff. As I have written elsewhere (Burton, 2019), these authors are right to be cautious of the role of Provincial curriculum documents in guiding K-12 learning around climate change, as learning outcomes or standards do not adequately meet the need of prompting educators to design learning experiences that pertain to issues of climate justice. Recent research from Learning for Sustainable Futures (LSF, 2019) outlined that the Canadian public is under educated on climate change, but keen to see a school curriculum that is more reflective of the needs of humans and the planet. Of concern was that only a third of reporting teachers in the LSF report touched on climate change education per semester or year, and most of this group does so between just 1-10 hours per year. There was, however, an awareness that more should be done, with 81% of surveyed teachers reporting a need for all educators to integrate climate change education into their classrooms, and 82% of non-teaching respondents in Canada supporting such moves (LSF, 2019).

In a typical high school subjects are siloed, with little curriculum content explicitly engaging with one class to the next. A North American high school student may visit four to five different classes in a day, each with different teachers. Yet, tackling a problem such as climate change will require the collaboration of diverse skill sets, not just those in the domain of science, engineering, or mathematics (Incropera, 2016). So, one of the questions might be, where would climate change education and a text like *How to Change Everything* (2021) fit in a school? Is it a social studies issue because of the impacts on people and society? Or should it fall within science, owing to the understanding of the atmosphere and relationship to weather? The use of story is a powerful motivator in changing behavior, so should it sit within the English language arts curriculum? This is not to mention rich content that the book could offer in the mathematics, career development or health education classroom.

Climate change education that encompasses mitigation and adaptation should be for all learners. Educational leaders and practitioners must not allow it to be pushed to the margins of the school day, where youth are forced to engage with the content on their own time through extra-curricular experiences. Instead, educators need to recognize that climate change will increasingly impact societies and individuals, demanding it be drawn into a variety of learning environments during the school day, and across all subject areas, in ways that go beyond theory and into places and spaces which allow youth to become involved in their communities by raising awareness and becoming politically active. Us adults might do well to read this work and think about utilizing the text, in whole or part, across the curriculum, as there are few contemporary books that articulate as powerfully and eloquently as Klein's and Steffoff's work does, without pulling punches.

It is an unfortunate omission, then, that the work that educators and schools were engaged with that laid the groundwork for the climate strikes to take place was not included. It is wrong for Klein and Steffoff to ignore the decisions of classroom teachers to bring issues of climate change into schools, to create space for discussion and action, whether during compulsory senior years courses, or on the periphery of the school day through extracurricular activities. A failure to acknowledge the work of activist teachers neglects the revolutionary potential of public education (Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 2005; Simon, 1992), which needs to situate itself as central to the cultural transformation that wider Western society needs in order to shift into a just transition. Beyond classroom instruction, there is also a role for the activist teacher in pushing school boards towards more green policy. In *On Fire* (2019), Klein includes public education as a "green job" with opportunities, not just in the classroom, but also in transportation and school building heating and powering that can play a leading role in a just transition away from a fossil-fuel-dependent society. This only underscores how strange the absence of school to climate action is in this text.

Further avenues left unexplored in the book are the connections between the role of public education in reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and settlers. “Sacrifice zones,” a term first articulated by Klein in *This Changes Everything* (2015), spoke to fossil fuel extraction and environmental degradation as targeting specific communities inhabited by racialized peoples, the benefits of which would go to White urban settlers. When the stories of Indigenous land defenders at Standing Rock in North Dakota and Heiltsuk in British Columbia are highlighted by Klein and Steffoff, there should be a stronger link presented in how acts of solidarity supporting these efforts could be brought into schools and classrooms (the current struggles of the Wet’suwet’en in British Columbia are one such example here).

A recent study by Yale University (2020) found that two out of three millennials or those younger “strongly or somewhat” support climate activists, and according to the American Psychological Association (2017), schools can expect to see increasing prevalence of “eco-anxiety,” a new mental health issue driven by the fear of climate catastrophe. Neither of these reports should surprise, as youth stand to lose the most from an unlivable planet, and have the least interest or investment in the cultural and economic status quo. It is time we started listening to the planet, and listening to those who will inherit the mess. Klein and Steffoff do not see schools as places that are able to meet either the needs of youth or the planet. The question educators must ask themselves is whether their primary responsibility is to the youth in our care and their future, or government documents that seek to preserve an economic system driving the collapse of planetary systems? We have known the science of climate change for a long time; it is long overdue that we start aligning what happens in schools with the “inspiration, ideas and tools for action” (p. 7) held within the pages of *How to Change Everything* (2021).

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