

Welcoming Naomi Klein to SC&I and Rutgers

As Chancellor Molloy has said, the Gloria Steinem Endowed Chair in Media, Culture and Feminist Studies was supported by dozens of generous individuals and foundations. The chair was intended to celebrate the vision and legacy of Gloria Steinem as a leader, an activist, and a warrior for justice. A central part of that legacy is its role in cultural revolution and critique.

The superb search committee with representatives from SAS, SC&I and the fundraising group, led by our wonderful Associate Dean Dafna Lemish, were looking for someone who could express those values in a contemporary setting. They were hoping for a public intellectual who could combine writing and scholarship with activism, who was making a difference on a world stage, who had the vision and dynamism to move this legacy forward. This was a big ask. But we are today welcoming someone who embodies these characteristics and then some, and then some more: Naomi Klein.

Naomi is a journalist, a public intellectual, an author, an activist. She is brave – while others run away from the world's trouble spots, she runs towards them. She doesn't shy away from controversy or speaking truth to power. She has written for The New York Times, Washington Post, Newsweek, the Times, the Globe and Mail, the New Yorker, Harpers, Rolling Stone, the Guardian, amongst many others. And she is regularly to be found in the leading television studios of CNN, BBC, Democracy Now, overviewing her ideas or contributing to debates.

She is best known for a series of books that take on challenging issues and weave together evidence and argument to build an increasingly comprehensive critical case for how we need to change our thinking, our behavior, our politics and the way we organize the world. That impact is shown through prizes, speaking engagements and visiting positions at the world's

leading universities, and her regular appearance high up in the lists of the world's top public intellectuals.

Many of you will have come to Naomi's work, as I did, through her first book **No Logo** that brought the problems of sweatshops, transnational corporations, branding, and cultural censorship to the fore. Scholars like me are happy if our book sells 5,000 copies. **No Logo** went on to sell more than a million copies. It helped shape the worldwide cultural conversation and a new vision of political action. It even has a trendy North London beer named after it!

The Shock Doctrine developed the argument that when war, disasters or financial crises strike they become opportunities for companies and corporations to step in and further their economic control while scrutiny is lax and populations are desperate. Think of Halliburton and the \$40 billion of US contracts it received after the Iraq war. Naomi's most recent book – **The Battle for Paradise** – is a case study in this malign process operating after Hurricane Maria's devastation of Puerto Rico. She is in the midst of a debate to capture the narrative that is still raging.

Naomi Klein's thinking is focused squarely on the acute challenges of the present. Her book on climate change – **This Changes Everything** – highlights the way serious action on climate change has been blocked by politicians and business interests. Her passion for that topic and for linking it broader political questions is extraordinary.

Last year's **No is Not Enough** is her searing critique of a president who is a climate change denier, an enabler of polluters and exploiters, the purveyor of malign, exploitative and asymmetric gender relations. Now she is here living the USA's troubled conversation with itself from within Rutgers.

What I love about Naomi's work is that alongside its unflinching and often uncomfortable critique there is a positive project based on a vision of politics, resistance, rebuilding, and community. She wants to shape a better world. And as a person she has turned out to be a delight – in real life, as we call it, she is thoughtful, funny and modest. We are enormously excited to have her join us at Rutgers, SC&I, and SAS, and looking forward to what emerges from this new phase of her thinking.