



SOLIDARITY

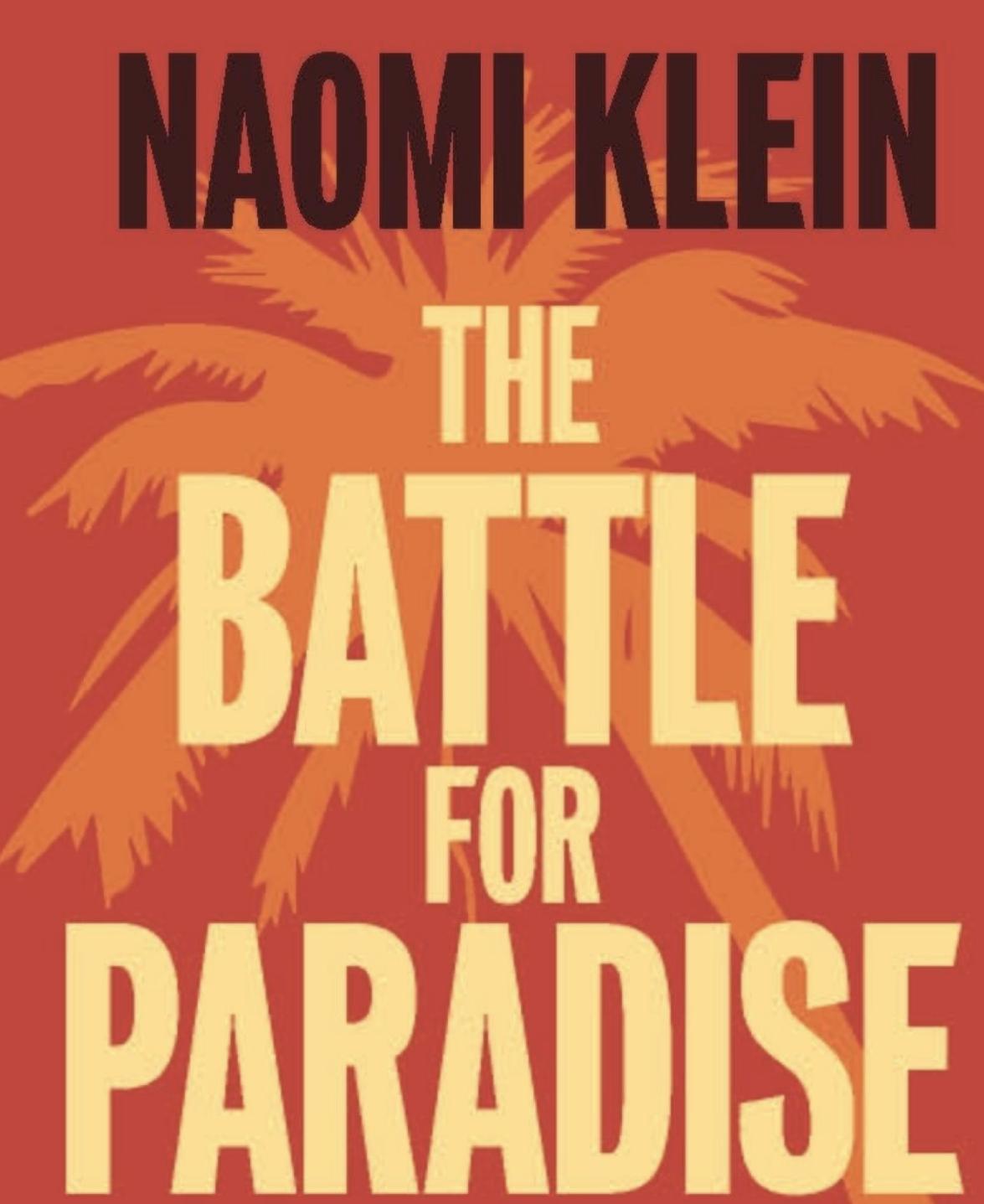
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SUNY Stands With Puerto Rico Recovery & Rebuilding Initiative

"New York State is mobilizing students from SUNY and CUNY to work through non-profit organizations that are aiding in the reconstruction and revitalization efforts of communities across the island damaged by hurricanes Irma and Maria."

Through this opportunity, I volunteered in Puerto Rico for 2 weeks in the late summer of 2018 from August 11– August 25. I refer to this trip as the most meaningful experience in my life yet. 2 years after this trip, I find myself invested in politics, especially New York City politics, where nearly a million Puerto Ricans call home. I'm paying attention to the conversations by local representatives and legislators, because I would like to see them uphold their commitments to help members of our community who have been displaced as a result of the storms.



PUERTO RICO TAKES ON
THE DISASTER CAPITALISTS

As part of this experience, I read *The Battle for Paradise*, by Naomi Klein. She brilliantly explained the reality behind Puerto Rico's financial crisis, which helped me gain a better understanding of the political climate. In her book, she quotes Yarimar Bonilla, who said "the people who seem to be doing the best are those who are helping others, and those who are involved in community efforts" (Klein, 72). The book further explains how helping each other has this healing effect that reverses the feeling of powerlessness. I was extremely grateful to have contributed to this effect. I'd like to see this program require students to read this book. All proceeds from this book support JunteGente, an organization that keeps the local government accountable. This reading served as a great introduction to the history, culture, and conditions of Puerto Rico, and offered critical perspectives on the work we have done.

During the weekends, we had time to explore the city. I went to Old San Juan, because I was amazed with the powerful protest art covering nearly every street. I'd like to encourage future programs dedicate time to view such art. Most famously, the work the La Puerta (The Door) is what made me visit this part of the island. Artists deliberately painted the Puerto Rican flag black and white to demonstrate the injustices they face as a U.S. colony. I wasn't aware of the politically repressive climate in Puerto Rico, especially because it's not reported enough in the mainland. I came back home with a mission to raise awareness about these social injustices to my family, friends, and on campus. To me, the take away message from these events is to be emphatic and mindful of the inadequate representation of Puerto Rico in our federal government. Until they can provide the residents of Puerto Rico the aid they need and deserve, it is up to us to help with what we can. I left this experience with a commitment to social justice for ongoing human concerns.

