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**WWFOR** seeks to replace violence, war, racism and economic injustice with nonviolence, equality, peace and justice. It links and strengthens FOR members and chapters throughout Western Washington in promoting activities consistent with the national FOR statement of purpose. WWFOR helps members and chapters accomplish together what we could not accomplish alone.

### **A Vietnam Veteran's View of Burn's and Novick's "The Vietnam War"**

by Mark Fleming, an activist with Veterans For Peace,  
chapter #109, Olympia WA

Early into the Ken Burns/Lynn Novick PBS documentary *The Vietnam War*, my reaction was "if only..." If only the United States had recognized that Ho Chi Minh led a genuine independence movement based on the same ideals that drove America's own war for independence. If only US leaders had seen the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu as a warning of Vietnamese determination. If only President Kennedy had the political courage to follow the advice of military and civilian advisors who understood that America could not defeat Vietnamese resistance and who recommended reducing the US commitment to an anti-Communist war, that had little or no support among the Vietnamese people.

The Vietnam War lays out the early history of America's involvement in Vietnam well. The documentary also speaks about Ho Chi Minh's revolutionary violence, juxtaposing it with stated reasons for US intervention, including Cold War politics and posturing, protecting persecuted Catholics, keeping "a domino from falling", and plain old, American good will. Once past these implied equivalents, Burns/Novick never look back to the war's historical antecedents.

The remaining episodes present the details of the war—what happened, when things happened, who said what, and what was it like for a variety of individuals—but those episodes rarely recognize the flaws which were a major contributor to US failure in Vietnam. I did not see any explicit recognition that fighting to defend their country against a foreign invader strengthened Vietnamese resistance and enabled the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and National Liberation Front (NLF) to perform mind-boggling feats of logistics and effective military operations against its far more powerful foe. Instead, it offers the gloss of a "well-intentioned effort" "by decent people acting in good faith" that became a "tragedy".

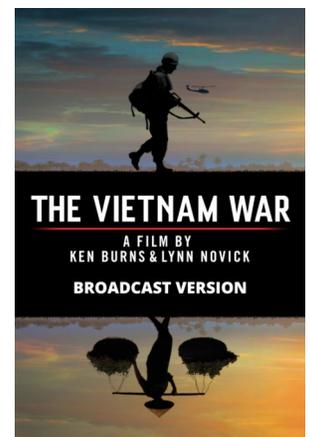
What the documentary does show is that the US made no progress against the NLF in the early years and did not know what to do against such determined resistance. One enduring image in the film is the big reel-to-reel tape recorder playing Lyndon Johnson's bewilderment and frustration about the war and options that ranged from bad to worse. The only available option anyone could come up with was escalating the violence, including more combat troops, "free-fire zones", massive artillery and aerial bombardment, and assassination programs such as

Operation Speedy Express and the Phoenix Program.

About halfway through the series I began to think that its purpose was to anesthetize the viewer to the whole affair or maybe just blow us away with a fire hose of information. By this time the viewer had seen hours of battles, bombs dropping from aircraft, and heard from many of the participants—the many individual tiles that make up the mosaic of this story. All of this is compelling cinematography but leaves the viewer with little or no analytical context. Ken Burns has said that there is no single truth about the Vietnam War; he leaves that to the viewer. But it is difficult for me to escape the fact that my country fought against Vietnamese independence. Knowing that, I cannot escape the truth that America (and I) fought on the wrong side of history in Vietnam. Everything else is interesting but beside point.

By the time the documentary reaches 1968, the deadliest year of the war for US soldiers, I was struck by the fact that it was taking place 14 years after the Vietnamese won their first war of independence against the French. Once again, I kept thinking "if only..." and "what if...". Fourteen years after defeating the French colonists, the Vietnamese were still fighting for their independence against a foreign power. My takeaway is that my country added another decade and a half (in 1968) violence and destruction in Vietnam. As we all know, the final toll was 20 years of violence and destruction. Violence may well have followed Ho Chi Minh's likely electoral victory in 1956 but it would not have continued for two decades, killed millions, poisoned much of southern Vietnam and spread into Cambodia and Laos. If I knew less about the war and its history, I would have difficulty remembering what little of the war's antecedents were presented in the film's early episodes.

Like the war itself, the later episodes of *The Vietnam War* felt to me like an uncomfortable, tedious, and disturbing presence. It just seemed to go on and on, becoming unbelievably worse and worse. The documentary also shows Richard Nixon for the liar and scoundrel that he was. Certainly nothing new there but hearing him straight out lie to Lyndon Johnson about torpedoing the 1968 Paris peace talks should forever enshrine Nixon in the pantheon of American traitors.



The most disappointing aspect of the documentary is its presentation of the anti-war movement in the US. Images of rowdy, violent demonstrators are contrasted with GI's desperately battling NVA and NLF forces. When not demonstrating, long-haired youth are shown enjoying their freedom during the 1967 Summer of Love in San Francisco and a few years later at Woodstock. The documentary respectfully but superficially presents the anti-war veterans' march on Washington in 1971 but other anti-war demonstrators come across as privileged, self-centered and out-of-touch with America. Perhaps the most egregious distortion in The Vietnam War revives the myth of anti-war hostility toward returning soldiers and veterans. Although those stories were debunked in Jerry Lembcke's *The Spitting Image*, the myth remains well-established in America's memory.

The documentary concludes with scenes of Americans coming together at the Vietnam Memorial with the idea that perhaps, somehow, we can resolve our differences about the war and come to some final reconciliation. I found the scene of newscaster David Brinkley standing in a field of tombstones in Arlington National Cemetery more compelling. His statement that perhaps future presidents considering war as an option would come to this place and remember Vietnam. When I thought of Iraq and Afghanistan I wanted to scream at the screen. Vietnam's most important lesson seems long forgotten in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Vietnam War is a valuable resource for anyone who wants to know the history of America's involvement in Vietnam. It's greatest strength is that it offers much information about the war that may not be common knowledge among Americans and allows viewers to come to their own conclusions. The Vietnam War, however is not neutral. It offers its own conclusions that easily fit within the canon of American Exceptionalism and shields the war's lies, distortions and deceptions behind the bravery and determination of the soldiers sent to fight the war as if to suggest that such bravery and determination could not have been wasted in a fruitless effort. With that overarching message, it is easy to understand how the United States has continued to live up to Martin Luther King's 1967 description of the US as the "greatest purveyor of violence in the world."



**My latest letter to the editor of The Lewis County Chronicle**

*by Larry Kershner*

Between 1940 and 1996 the United States spent nine trillion dollars on nuclear weapons including platforms development (aircraft, ICBMs, submarines and support facilities, command and control systems, maintenance, nuclear waste management and administrative costs). The US has produced more than 70,000 nuclear warheads since 1945. This is more than all of the other nuclear states combined. The costs for nuclear research, development, deployment, defense and dismantlement since 1940 is the third most costly government expenditure after general defense and the Social Security program. By February 2006 over \$1.2 billion had been paid in compensation to US citizens for exposure to nuclear accidents in the US nuclear weapons program.

Production, maintenance and modernization of nuclear force diverts vast public resources away from health care, education, climate change mitigation, disaster relief, development assistance and other vital services.

The Congressional Budget Office recently reported that current plans for completely rebuilding all of the US nuclear arsenal between 2017 and 2046 could cost \$1.2 trillion — up 20 percent from the original Obama administration 2009 estimate. This figure could grow closer to \$2 trillion due to inflation and future plans set out in the forthcoming Trump administration Nuclear Posture Review, set to be released before the end of 2017.

At the beginning of 2017, the US maintained a stockpile of 4,480 nuclear warheads with approximately 1,740 currently deployed, most on hair trigger alert ready for firing within minutes. However, since the US entered the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in 2011 we have cut a total of 433 deployed strategic warheads from our arsenal.

So in our schizophrenic government, on the one hand we plan to spend almost two trillion dollars to build a genocidal weapons system that no one outside of Donald Trump even considers usable while on the other hand we have committed ourselves by treaty to get rid of the same nuclear weapons.

Trump threatens nuclear genocide against the people of North Korea while pledging to make our nation's nuclear program "far stronger and more powerful than ever before". It is plain to me that Trump doesn't understand the qualitative difference between nuclear and conventional arms. Rep. Adam Smith stated "Congress still doesn't seem to have any answers as to how we will pay for this effort, or what the trade-offs with other national security efforts will be if we maintain an arsenal of over 4,000 nuclear weapons and expand our capacity to produce more."

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The Republican Party in Congress bemoans deficits, and cuts programs for children, veterans and the elderly while giving tax welfare to oligarchs, might find a better way to reduce government spending in eliminating this plan to spend trillions on a weapon system that no sane person would ever use.

Think what kind of world we could now have if the ten trillion dollars wasted on nuclear weapons had been spent on roads, schools, hospitals and clean water around the world. Educate yourself about nuclear weapons. Call on Rep. Herrera-Beutler ( or the respective Congress member of your district) to oppose this waste of our tax dollars.

### Grassroots Lobbying Via Advocacy Teams

by Louise Lansberry

Founded in 1943 by members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) lobbies Congress and the Administration to advance peace, justice, opportunity and environmental stewardship. FCNL fields an expert team of lobbyists on Capitol Hill and works with a grassroots network of tens of thousands of people across the country to advance policies and priorities established by a Governing Committee. FCNL is a nonpartisan organization that seeks to live the values of integrity, simplicity and peace as it builds relationships across political divides to move policies forward.

Three years ago FCNL established a new strategy for enabling people at the grassroots level to get involved. The goal is to get groups of Quakers (and non-Quakers) in a legislative district to work for change in a fairly systematic way. Called Advocacy Teams, these groups (6-10 people) first participate in a training program to learn how the Teams operate and what are the best strategies for lobbying their House member and two Senators. In addition, people begin to educate themselves regarding the particular issue that FCNL is focusing on at the time. This year that focus has been reducing the military budget so as to allow for a more moral budget that addresses the social safety net. Team members participate as well in a monthly call-in from the DC staff to learn about specific bills that may be coming up as well as hear from the experts on the issues.

Additional parts of the organizational set up include members who learn what other groups around the country are doing, and members who are working to set up times to meet with our Representative or Senators (more likely their staff). A major goal is to build relationships with the reps and staff by meeting with them several times a year so that they can get to know and trust us and we get to know them. Advocacy Teams want to learn what is

important to the representatives and what motivates them to vote in a particular way. One other focus for the Teams is to get to know the editorial boards of local newspapers and other media in order to encourage them to take stands on issues we deem significant.

Surveys of hundreds of Congressional staff conducted by the Congressional Management Foundations confirms that in-person lobbying with members of Congress are the most effective way to influence policy decisions. As of November, 2017 there are 83 Advocacy Teams in 35 states involving some 1300 members.

If you have any interest in becoming a member of the Seattle group or forming a group outside of Seattle, feel free to get in touch with me. Contact [wwfor@wwfor.org](mailto:wwfor@wwfor.org) or call 206-789-5565.

### Reframing the Trump Election

A review of Naomi Klein's [No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need](#) (2017)

by John M Repp

The epigraph of [No Is Not Enough](#): "I'm not looking to overthrow the American government, the corporate state already has." John Trudell, Santee Dakota activist, activist, artist, and poet (1946-2015)

Naomi Klein's thesis is contained in her title. She encourages the various progressive movements in the United States to start meeting with each other to see what connects them. Klein writes that an informal beginning of such collaboration was happening at Standing Rock. Then Trump got elected.

She describes a two-day gathering in Toronto in the spring of 2015 for Canadian progressive groups where they wrote [The Leap Manifesto](#), a vision statement and a platform that all could stand behind. [The Leap Manifesto](#) is reprinted at the end of the book. It is indeed inspiring.

Yes, we must defend those people and groups Trump attacks and resist his destructive policies. However, we must develop a more powerful vision, a better narrative for the future. At some point, we must take the offensive. There are many more people stepping into activism after Trump's election and a vision and narrative can coordinate all our efforts. The Trump election is a warning but also an opportunity. If all the people and groups who are being attacked could unite around a vision, a narrative and a platform, we can win the world we need.

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Klein writes that Trump is only a symptom of a failing democracy and foreign policy. He could never have gotten elected unless the system was already corrupt. If we just get rid of him, Pence and the Republicans lose their majorities in Congress, we will still have a set of corrupt systems.

Klein applies some of her earlier ideas about branding and shock to the Trump phenomenon. She warns us that we should expect even bigger shocks from this regime if there is another large terrorist attack or a financial crisis. They may try to establish a “state of emergency”. Klein’s biggest fear is that when it becomes obvious to Trump’s base that he cannot make America great again, he will start a war. He is already war-mongering, provoking North Korea and Iran.

The tragedy of the Trump election is that “the climate movement was on a roll, winning victory after victory against oil pipelines, natural gas fracking, and Arctic drilling, very often with resurgent Indigenous communities in the lead.” (p.20) Similarly, the anti-corporate globalization movement was starting to win victories after the battle of Seattle at the end of 1999, but then 9-11 happened. This short look back shows us the neo-liberal economic system has been in crisis for many years because it cannot produce the promised prosperity for all.

Giving tax cuts to corporations and wealthy investors was supposed to create more jobs. Where are the jobs? Privatizing parts of government was supposed to increase efficiency and lower cost. It has not. The “free market” is supposed to bring the best of all possible worlds. But inequality increases, wages stagnate, homelessness gets worse and the life expectancy of white non-college educated men is falling. Klein does not explain this but the reason we have these dismal results is that we really don’t have a free market. We have huge corporations, often 3 or 4 in each major sector, and huge Wall Street banks, all with massive political operations. With globalization the international investor class has the power to veto any policies they don’t like in any country, by just devaluing the currency or selling off stocks or bonds and pushing down the markets. We are several generations past a time when there were hundreds of small firms competing in a free market such that the most efficient prospered the most. The free market model as a model works, but it does not describe our current economic and political reality. The “free market” has become a slogan that masks the reality of a corporate dominated economy.

And people can see the hypocrisy. There was nothing free market about the bailout of Wall Street after the financial crisis of 2008/9. There is nothing free market about the huge subsidies the fossil fuel industry receives. As the legitimacy of the system decreases, ever more extreme measures are needed to prop it up.

At the Canadian meeting to write The Leap Manifesto Klein writes, “the greatest obstacle our platform would face was the force of austerity logic – the message we have all received, over decades, that governments are perpetually broke, so why even bother dreaming of a genuinely equitable society?” (p. 246) She lists a set of tax policies that would produce the revenues to pay for the plans in the manifesto and are more just. These policies require increasing the taxes on corporations and the wealthy as well as cuts to subsidies for example to the fossil fuel sector. All are policies left progressives in the United States would wholeheartedly support. But advocates of MMT i.e. modern monetary theory would say Klein herself has not completely broken with austerity logic. MMT activists are trying to speak with Klein about this. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern\\_Monetary\\_Theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_Monetary_Theory) MMT points out the Federal budget spending need not be constrained by income (i.e. taxes and borrowing) like a household or a business is. Why? It is because a sovereign government has the power to create money. <http://www.wvfor.org/can-afford-save-planet/> This is a very simple concept but the implications are revolutionary.

Klein also writes that “the capacity to pit populations against each other based on skin color, religious faith, and sexuality has been the single most potent tool for protecting and sustaining this lethal order.” (p.264) Trump uses this tool and continues to shock us. But facing a common threat, we can choose solidarity and make “an evolutionary leap”. (p.266) We can reframe Trump’s election and see it as a chance to win the world we need.

