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Marilyn Waring on Politics: Local & Global

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Politics: Local & Global



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The
Who's Counting? SERIES

A three-part series for classroom use

Marilyn Waring on Politics: Local & Global

“The system recognizes no value other than money, regardless of how that money is made. This means that there is no value to peace. This means there is no value to the preservation of natural resources for future generations. This means there is no value to unpaid work, including the unpaid work of reproducing human life itself, including the unpaid work of women who feed and nurture their own families. This system cannot respond to values it refuses to recognize...this is an economic system that will eventually kill us all.” — Marilyn Waring

During World War II, Sir Richard Stone and John Maynard Keynes devised a system for measuring economic activity that was used to help Britain pay for the war. In 1953, this system became the basis for the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA), which was quickly adopted as a world standard. All nations must conform to the rules of the UNSNA or they cannot belong to the UN, obtain loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), or be funded by the World Bank.

The problem with the UNSNA — which, like the IMF and the World Bank, is a system devised by the world’s wealthiest countries — is that it only values activities that produce money. This places developing countries at a distinct disadvantage, forcing them to conform to Western ways of managing their economies. As a result, many Third World countries have become trapped in a cycle of producing goods for export to help pay off their escalating debts to the World Bank. By using their farmland, labour and natural resources to supply the rest of the world with cheap goods, the indigenous peoples of these countries often suffer increased hardship.



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Lance Neveu
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Oratorio” (Marilyn
Waring - Soprano)**

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30 minutes 15 seconds
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Because the UNSNA only measures whatever passes through the marketplace, it doesn't take into account "hidden economy" activities that can have a huge impact on people's lives. There is no way of factoring in unpaid labour, particularly that of women, who, in some countries, routinely put in 16- or 18-hour days caring and providing for their families. There is no acknowledgment of the poverty, illness, suffering and environmental destruction that results from profit-generating activities such as war, industrial development and child prostitution. In short, the quality of life is simply not part of the equation.

Discussion questions:

- ◆ Do you think that NAFTA has been good or bad for your country? Do you think that Canada, the USA, and Mexico are benefiting equally from the deal? How has it positively — and negatively — affected each country?
- ◆ "The rich just get richer, while the poor get poorer." Can you see evidence of that statement in your society? What mechanisms, either political or economic, contribute to such a situation?
- ◆ Do you think that women and members of minority groups (i.e. gays/lesbians and ethnic groups) are represented fairly in the government? How about in other countries? What effect does this have on public policy?
- ◆ What political and social theories are considered "radical" in mainstream North America? Why do you think that most people are suspicious of, and often deride, the opinions of fringe groups?
- ◆ Do you think the efforts of special interest groups (like environmental and women's rights organizations) have much effect on public policy? Why or why not?

- ◆ What kind of person, with what qualifications, tends to go into politics? Why do you think that Marilyn Waring was so popular and effective when she was in Parliament? What does this say about politicians and how the public views them?
- ◆ How would you interpret the meaning of *Turangawaewae*?
- ◆ Some people argue that the benefits of nuclear energy outweigh the potential hazards, and that nuclear weapons are an effective deterrent to global war. Would you agree?
- ◆ What are the ironies that you see in the Dubai Air Show segment? Who do you think profited the most from the Gulf War? What were some of the negative results (i.e. pollution from the bombing of the oilfields)?
- ◆ Discuss the following statements:
 - for every soldier the average expenditure is \$22,000.
 - for every school-age child the average public expenditure is \$380.
 - one new nuclear submarine equals the annual education budget of 23 developing countries with 160 million school-age children.
- ◆ Is foreign aid effective in alleviating poverty in developing countries? Why or why not?
- ◆ Why do you think there is such an imbalance in the world's wealth? Do you think that wealthy countries are doing enough to help poorer nations? Why or why not?
- ◆ What issues would you make a priority if you were elected to Parliament?

Chapter breakdown:

1. Before and NAFTA (2:20)

Industrial growth may raise the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but it can have far-reaching negative effects on the well-being of communities. In a candid interview, Marilyn Waring lays bare the downside of NAFTA and similar trade deals, soundly denouncing the political rhetoric used to champion systems that, in the larger view, may actually do more harm than good.

2. *Turangawaewae*: A Place to Stand (7:13)

Waring recalls her entry into politics as New Zealand's youngest-ever female MP, representing a rural conservative riding. She tells how the basis for her "radical" views are actually drawn from the earth-centered, commonsense values of her constituency. In the idyllic farmland where she makes her home, Waring has found her *Turangawaewae* — a Maori word meaning "one's place to stand" — from which she draws both strength and inspiration.

3. Kiwis Need Nuke Ships Like Turkeys Need Christmas (5:45)

In 1984, Waring brought down her own government when she took a stand on declaring New Zealand a nuclear-free zone. In this chapter, she extols another "radical" concept — that those elected to public office have a responsibility to be guided by principle and integrity — and the importance of fighting for what one believes in.

4. Making a Killing (3:42)

The international arms trade is the biggest growth industry in the world. The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council are also the five leading arms exporters in the world. A chilling sequence at the Dubai Air Show, which took place ten months after the Gulf War, shows how war is considered to contribute to growth and development, while the poverty, death, and environmental damage it causes is not even registered as a deficit.

5. If Women Counted* (6:23)

Waring examines the Philippines as a microcosm of the developing world where the majority works long hours for diminishing returns, while wealth is concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. In the Philippines, a small elite owns 90 percent of the land, 20 million are homeless, and women and their families are routinely kicked off their land to make room for "more profitable" export crops. This disparity is encouraged by the policies of the World Bank and the set of conditions that accompany foreign aid.

* Also the title of Waring's book, published by Harper Collins, San Francisco.



Marilyn Waring on Politics: Local & Global

(selected excerpts from *Who's Counting?*
*Marilyn Waring on Sex, Lies & Global
Economics*)

"Economics is a tool of people in power...economics didn't just come up from nowhere. It's a tool of those who want to exploit; it's a justification."

— Marilyn Waring

In 1975, 22-year-old Marilyn Waring became the youngest member in the New Zealand Parliament. At the age of 24, she became Chairperson of the prestigious Public Expenditures Committee, which reviewed all the parliamentary budgets of her government. She travelled to over 35 countries in this capacity, and discovered that the rules which governed the finances of her own country were operating worldwide.

By approaching politics from the viewpoint of an average citizen, Waring challenges the assumption that the systems that currently determine how the world does business are adequately meeting the needs of both local and global communities.

Using plain language laced with ironic humour, Waring makes it clear that classic economics work to benefit one particular group, while the rest of us — the vast majority — pay the price.

Marilyn Waring on Politics: Local & Global is divided into five short chapters:

- *Before and NAFTA* (2:20)
- *Turangawaewae: A Place to Stand* (7:13)
- *Kiwis Need Nuke Ships Like Turkeys Need Christmas* (5:45)
- *Making a Killing* (3:42)
- *If Women Counted** (6:23)

* Also the title of Waring's book, published by Harper Collins, San Francisco

The three-volume *Who's Counting?* classroom series challenges the myths of economics, its elitist stance, and our tacit compliance with political agendas that masquerade as objective economic policy. Each volume will stimulate debate on a wide range of issues, serving as entertaining and compelling springboards for further study. Chapter synopses and suggested study questions are included.

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Director: Terre Nash

Producer: Kent Martin

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