

**MANUFACTURING
CONSENT**

**NOAM CHOMSKY
AND THE MEDIA**

**A CASE STUDY:
CAMBODIA
AND
EAST TIMOR**

A six-part series designed especially for classroom use, based on the award-winning box-office hit.

"There are a number of ways to proceed. One obvious way is to try to find more or less paired examples. History doesn't offer true controlled experiments but it often comes pretty close. So one can find atrocities or abuses of one sort that on the one hand are committed by official enemies and on the other hand are committed by friends and allies or by the favoured state itself — by the United States in the U.S. case. And the question is whether the media accept the government framework or whether they use the same agenda, the same set of questions, the same criteria for dealing with the two cases as any honest outside observer would do."

— Noam Chomsky

This video explores the background for the fighting and atrocities that took place in Cambodia and East Timor (the latter is located just north-west of Australia) between 1975 and 1978. Especially in the case of East Timor, the media neglected to cover the story and the international community did little but send arms to the Indonesian invaders. The invasion, subsequent slaughter and mass starvation of East Timor claimed over a third of its citizens. Chomsky discusses the media coverage, especially in *The New York Times*, and the implications of suppressing the real story. The video concludes with a plea for citizens in democracies to follow through with real action as a result of their ethical concerns.

A Necessary Illusions / National Film Board of Canada co-production
Distributed by the National Film Board of Canada
Directed and Produced by Mark Achbar, Peter Wintonick
Producer for NFB: Adam Symansky

28 minutes 30 seconds

Part of a six-volume package, order number: 193C 9192 183



NECESSARY ILLUSIONS

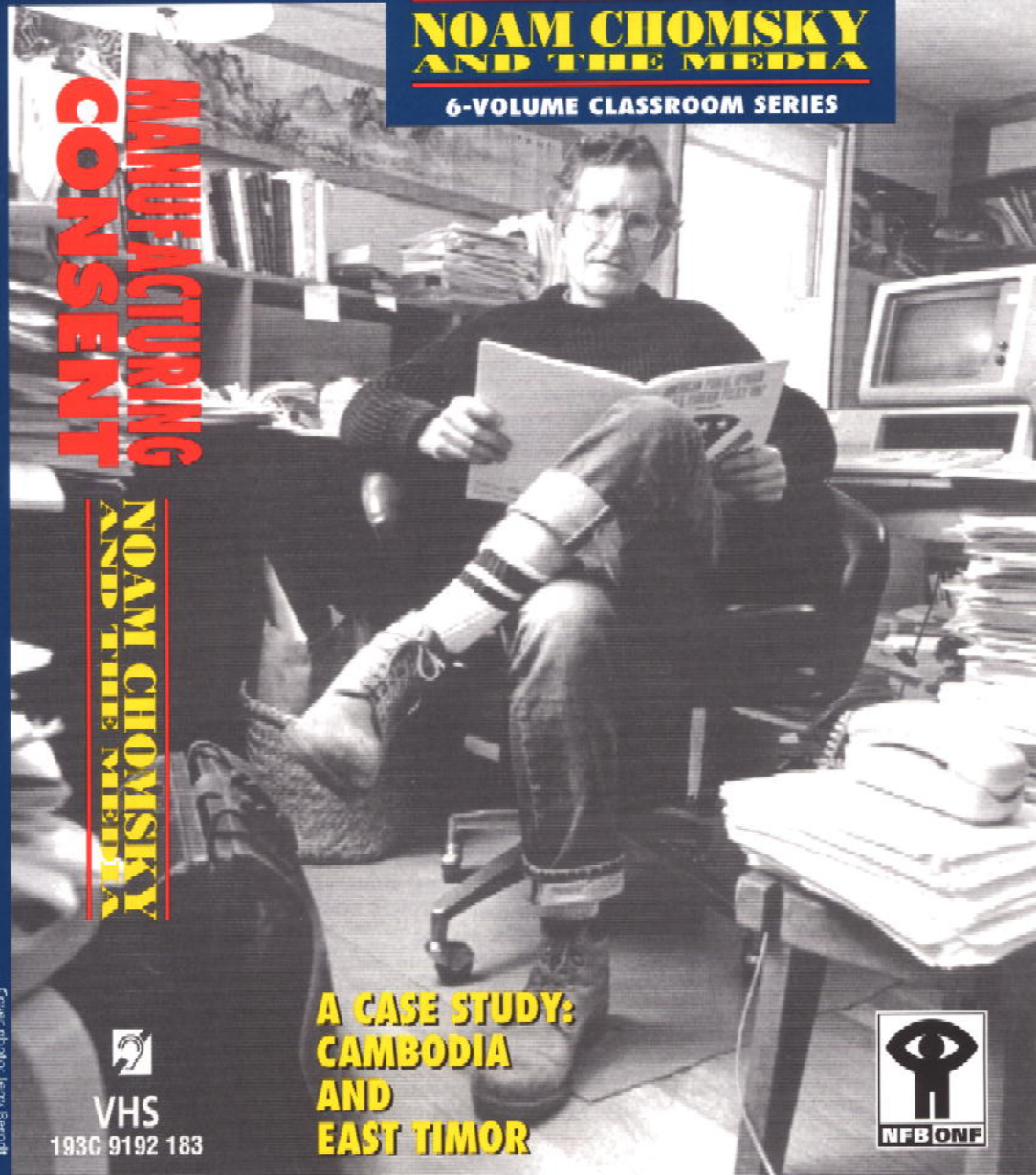


Closed captioned.
A decoder is required.

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Cover photo: Jerry Berndt



VHS

193C 9192 183





PRESCREENING ACTIVITIES

1• Locate Cambodia, East Timor and Indonesia on a map. Learn some of the essential political background of these countries. What has been the basis of our foreign policy toward these

countries since the 1960s? (See pp. 93-117)

2• Every year, Project Censored publishes a list of ten important but largely unreported news stories compiled by a group of media critics. Suggest possible reasons why these stories were ignored. What does this tell us about the problems facing socially committed journalists in democracies? (Project Censored, Sonoma State U., Rohnert Park, CA, 94928; also see the book, *Censored! The News That Didn't Make the News and Why*, \$14.95, Four Walls Eight Windows [1-800-626-4848]).

POSTSCREENING ACTIVITIES

1• Contact several journalists working in different media and ask them what important stories they believe are inadequately covered or not investigated in your community. Where feasible, apply some of Chomsky's insights. Does the propaganda model work at the level of local news?

2• Read some current columns by Noam Chomsky in periodicals such as *Lies of Our Times* or *Z Magazine*. Compare Chomsky's perspective on a news story with coverage of the same story in mainstream publications such as newspapers, *Time*, and *Newsweek*.

3• Ask a working journalist to do a database search for stories on East Timor and another crisis area in the world for the past year. How do you account for the discrepancy between them?

4• "A propaganda system will consistently portray people abused in enemy states as worthy victims, whereas those treated with equal or greater severity by its own government or clients will be unworthy. The evidence of worth may be read from the extent and character of attention and indignation." (*Manufacturing Consent*, p. 37) Apply Chomsky's and Herman's observation by following news stories where the government is dealing (or not dealing) with human rights violations or civil wars in other countries.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1• Filmmakers Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick have stated the rationale for their cinematic style in the film: "There is a diversity of 'learning styles,' and information reaches individuals most effectively through different channels: visual, aural, textual, through story, metaphor, etcetera. Synthesizing many cinematic styles, we tried to make the film work on all these levels. Also, by using a media-within-media perspective, we reveal processes of media construction (including our own) and attempt to create in the viewer a sense of critical engagement." Everyone should decide for him or herself how these techniques worked. In what situations did these techniques give you a sense of "critical engagement"? Talk about several examples of ideas that were presented in engaging ways, either visually, aurally or both. (See "Notes on Process," p. 12)



Text written by
Barry Duncan

Unless otherwise noted, all page references are to the film's companion book *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*

Mark Achbar ed., Montreal:
Black Rose Books, 1994

2• Chomsky talks about the advantages of using a method of studying paired examples, in this case Cambodia and East Timor: "...one can find atrocities or abuses of one sort that on the one hand are committed by official enemies and on the other hand are committed by friends and allies or by the favoured state itself — by the United States in the U.S. case." (p. 94) Discuss Chomsky's observation in light of the wars that took place in these countries.

3• Referring to East Timor, Chomsky states his position quite bluntly: "There is no Western concern for issues of aggression, atrocities, human rights abuses and so on if there's a profit to be made from them. Nothing could show it more clearly than this case." Which other situations in the world today illustrate the same point?

4• Chomsky commends the small group of people who persisted successfully in alerting some key leaders in the United States Congress and at the United Nations about the tragedy taking place in East Timor. Why is this an appropriate way to end this video? What are your emotional reactions to their commitment and to the kind of story they were reporting?

