

**MANUFACTURING
CONSENT**

**NOAM CHOMSKY
AND THE MEDIA**

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

"I'm not given to false modesty. There are things that I can do and I know that I can do them reasonably well, including analysis, study, research. I mean, I know how to do that sort of thing and I think I have a reasonable understanding of the way the world works — as much as anyone can. And that turns out to be a useful resource for people who are doing active organizing, trying to engage themselves in a way which will make it a little bit of a better world. And if you can help in those things, or participate in them, well, that's rewarding."

— Noam Chomsky

This video focuses on the formative influences in Noam Chomsky's life — those factors which enabled him to become a politically engaged intellectual. Starting out as a linguist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where his work revolutionized the study of language, Chomsky was radicalized by the 1960s anti-war movement and became a major critic of American policy. We learn about the important Jewish intellectual influences of his family, as well as those defining incidents in his early schooling that made a lasting impression.

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

27 minutes 30 seconds

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



NECESSARY ILLUSIONS

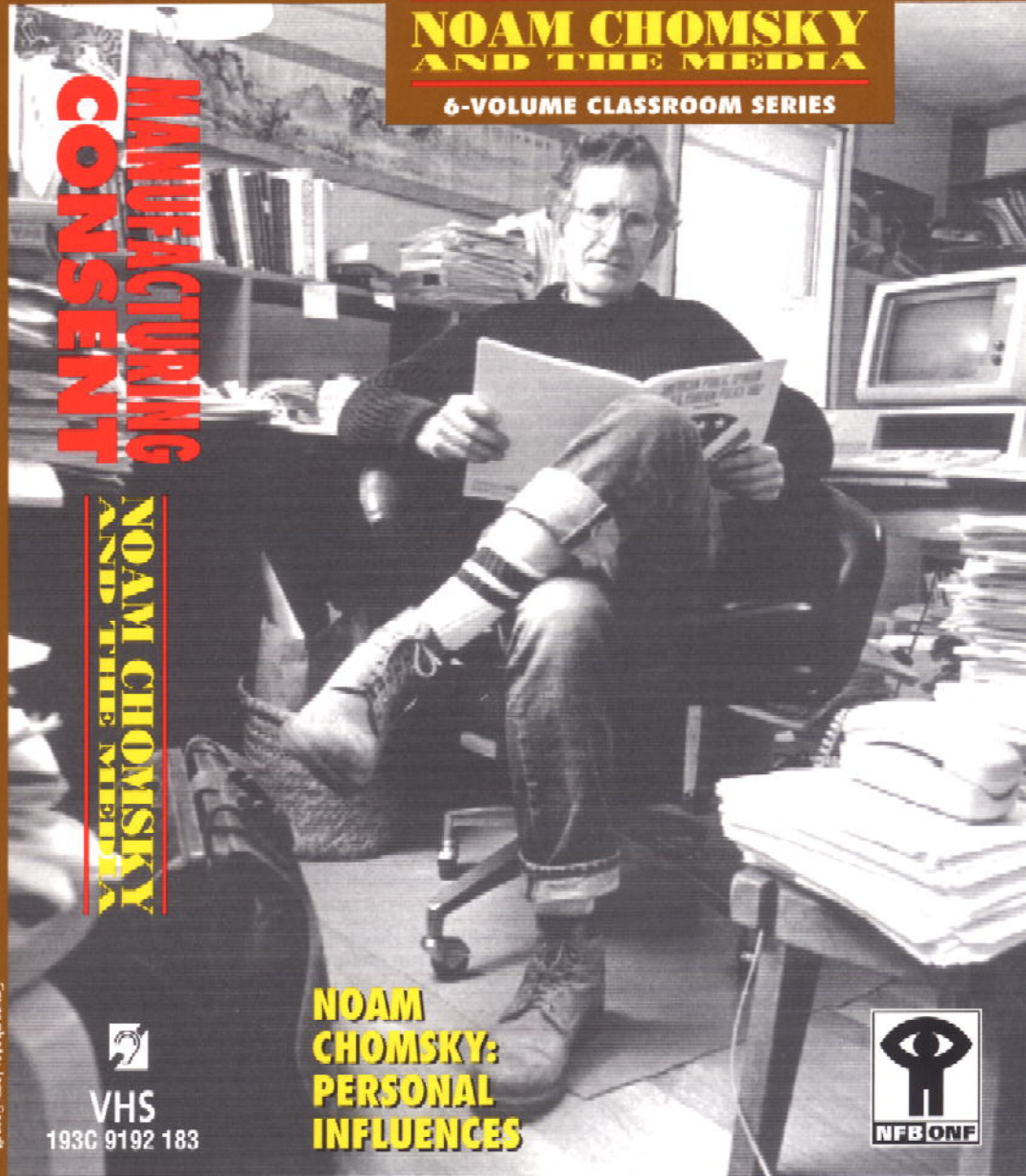


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6-VOLUME CLASSROOM SERIES

**NOAM
CHOMSKY:
PERSONAL
INFLUENCES**

Cover photo: Jerry Berndt



VHS
193C 9192 183





PRESCREENING ACTIVITIES

1• Viewers who want to learn about linguistics, Chomsky's main professional career, may wish to research the subject and share their insights with the group. (pp. 23-29, 240)

2• Because of the strong intellectual, religious and cultural influences on Chomsky's life, a useful discussion could center on: a) how a religious upbringing may affect your attitudes toward such topics as peace, justice and political dissent; b) how intellectual and political stimulation at an early age can affect your attitudes as an adult. (pp. 44-50, 64-65)

POSTSCREENING ACTIVITIES

1• **"It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and expose lies."** (p.70) Compare Chomsky's contribution with other individuals, groups or organizations playing (or who have played) an oppositional role in our culture. These would include I. F. Stone, a dissident publishing voice in Washington journalism; Ralph Nader, "the people's advocate" in Washington; Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth; the Green party; civil rights advocates such as Martin Luther King and Saul Alinsky; Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting; The Media Foundation (who publish *Adbusters*, 1243 W. 7th Avenue, Vancouver, B. C., V6H 1B7, a magazine critiquing advertising and rampant consumerism). Other publications and groups are listed in the Resource Guide (pp. 239-256).

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)

2• Chomsky's two half-hour interviews with Bill Moyers on public television generated more requests for transcripts than any of the other fifty programs in the *World of Ideas* series. How might you account for the program's popularity? (p. 21)

3• Chomsky has said, **"Propaganda is to a democracy what violence is to a dictatorship."** (See pp. 20, 43) He also admits that he has often not escaped the media's ideological indoctrination. (p. 64) Can you identify an example of your own ideological indoctrination?

4• Though Chomsky considers the statistics "meaningless," a survey of citation indexes in the arts, humanities and social sciences revealed that Chomsky is the most-cited living author and ranks in the top ten ever, in the company of Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare and Freud. (p. 17)



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

Talking about Chomsky's findings in language, Cambridge historian Jonathan Steinberg states: **"The implications of these views have washed over the fields of psychology, education, sociology, philosophy, literary criticism and logic."** He could also have added artificial intelligence. How might the study of language affect these areas of knowledge? Can you think of others to add to the list?

5• Chomsky states that he can only find "tenuous points of contact" between his work in linguistics and his engagement with politics. (p. 30) What connections might you or your group find between the two areas?

6• Many radicals dissociate themselves from established institutions. Chomsky has been on the faculty of Massachusetts Institute of Technology since the 1950s and yet admits in the interview in the video that a **"club of academic intellectuals designed and implemented the Vietnam war and other similar, though smaller, actions."** What might be the advantages of Chomsky's working within the context of a prestigious university? Are there other outspoken radicals you are aware of operating within universities? How successful have they been in their roles as critics or agents of change? How have the institutions compromised their effectiveness? (See p. 34)

7• The film shows us key moments that helped shape the character, courage and social radicalism of Chomsky. How do you think he was influenced by the following:

- his religious background (pp. 44-47);
- working as a kid during the Depression at his uncle's newsstand in Manhattan (p. 50);
- his experience in a progressive elementary school that didn't foster competitiveness (p. 48);
- his shame in not aiding a boy being bullied in the schoolyard (pp. 64-65).

8• In his interview with William F. Buckley, Chomsky makes a strong attack on **"sane, reasonable, sensible"** people who watch with **"apathy and equanimity"** as leaders such as Hitler and modern-day counterparts commit atrocities. **"These reasonable and tolerant people share a very serious burden of guilt that they very easily throw on the shoulders of others who seem more extreme and more violent."** (pp. 68-70) If we take Chomsky's indictment seriously, one might argue that most of us would have to plead guilty. How do you respond?

9• The video concludes with Chomsky's comments on his role as researcher and provocateur: **"[I am a] useful resource for people who are doing active organizing, trying to engage themselves in a way which will make it a little bit of a better world."** Elsewhere he says: **"What I would like to do is help people persuade themselves. I tell them what I think, and obviously I hope they'll persuade themselves... I think there are a lot of analytic perspectives, just straight information, that people are not presented with."** (p. 208) To what extent has Chomsky persuaded you in this video or in other interviews and writings about his views on politics and the media? What analytic perspectives and/or "straight information" have you gained? What difference will these insights make in your reading of the news?