

FROM THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA



MANUFACTURING CONSENT

**NOAM CHOMSKY
AND THE MEDIA**

6-VOLUME CLASSROOM SERIES

**MANUFACTURING
CONSENT**

**NOAM CHOMSKY
AND THE MEDIA**

**TOWARD
A VISION
OF A FUTURE
SOCIETY**



VHS

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PRESCREENING ACTIVITIES

- 1• Since the mid-sixties, there have been major gains in civil rights, anti-racism, anti-sexism and environmental awareness initiatives, as well as in many other socially important areas. What activities have you or your friends participated in where you felt you could make some impact? What are some other examples where you can “fight city hall”? What political strategies worked best? What would you now do differently? How did you analyze the system before you acted?
- 2• Read and discuss the pros and cons of communal living. How successful are “intentional communities” in North America? How successful are the kibbutzim in Israel? What have we learned from their social and intellectual practices? To what extent can transfer take place into the realm of politics? (See pp. 216-218, 255)
- 3• If we accept the hypothesis that control in the communications industry is exercised by a privileged elite, what are some concrete ways for ordinary people to assume some influence and begin taking control? (See p. 192)

POSTSCREENING ACTIVITIES

- 1• Chomsky assigns considerable power to television’s ability to numb the intellect. Research this topic by reading critics such as Neil Postman and Marie Winn who support this thesis. Then read critics such as John Fiske and David Morley who believe that audiences are not empty vessels receiving messages and can, more often than not, resist the alleged negative effects of the medium. See *Television Culture* by John Fiske (Methuen, 1987); *Understanding Popular Culture* (Unwin Hyman, 1989); *TV Audiences and Cultural Studies* by David Morley (Routledge, 1992); and John Leonard’s article, “Why Blame TV?” in *The Nation* magazine, December 27, 1993. (Back issues \$4 from 72 Fifth Ave., New York, NY, 10011, reprinted in *Utne Reader* No. 63, May/June, 1994.)
- 2• Media coverage of the “political correctness” (PC) movement has tended to trivialize social and intellectual changes needed in our pluralistic society. Chomsky has claimed that right-wing conservative groups dominate our politics, but through an effective propaganda campaign they shifted the blame for harsh standards onto what have been called “left-wing fascists.” Read several accounts on political correctness in periodicals and newspapers from 1990 to the present and do a social-political analysis. (p. 210)
- 3• To learn how teachers can discuss media effectively with their students, it is important to learn about media literacy. The following are some organizations that can assist you: Association for Media Literacy, 40 McArthur St., Weston, Ontario, M9P 3M7, (416) 394-6992; Strategies for Media Literacy, 1095 Market St. #410, San Francisco, CA, 94103; Centre for Media and Values, 1962 Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA, 90034; National Teleclil, 120 E. Wilson St., Madison, WI, 53703.



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

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 offers a critique on the nature of change in which he points out that **“the reason things change is because lots of people are working all the time.”** This is in contrast to: **“...in the history books there’s a couple of leaders. You know George Washington and Martin Luther King...”** Why is it important to move beyond the ‘great leader’ model of change to that of the role played by ordinary people? (p. 192)
- 3• **“No one knows enough to predict what humans will or can achieve. We are faced with a kind of Pascal’s wager: assume the worst, and it will surely arrive; commit oneself to the struggle for freedom and justice, and its cause may be advanced.”** (p. 224; see also p. 64, *Deferring Democracy*, Harper Collins Canada, 1992). What attitude about people as agents of change and the nature of hope is implied in Chomsky’s comments?



4• Chomsky asserts that his work serves the following goal: **“I feel that I’m simply helping people develop courses of intellectual self-defense.”** He then states that schools do not provide such courses. (See pp. 48, 157-158, 194, 227) Is your present discussion part of a school course? To what extent does it provide you with the tools of “intellectual self-defense”? Brainstorm ideas of what you would like to see included in such a course.

5• Chomsky assigns considerable power to television: **“Each person is sitting alone in front of the tube. And it’s hard to have ideas or thoughts under those circumstances.”** (p. 195) Debate this notion using concrete evidence for your point of view. (See Postscreening Activities)

6• After responding to several of the following statements made by Chomsky in the video, brainstorm around what generalizations you can make about his vision of the future and the changes needed in our institutions:

a) **“In an advanced technological society human beings do not have to be forced into the position of tools, of cogs in a machine.”** (p. 31)

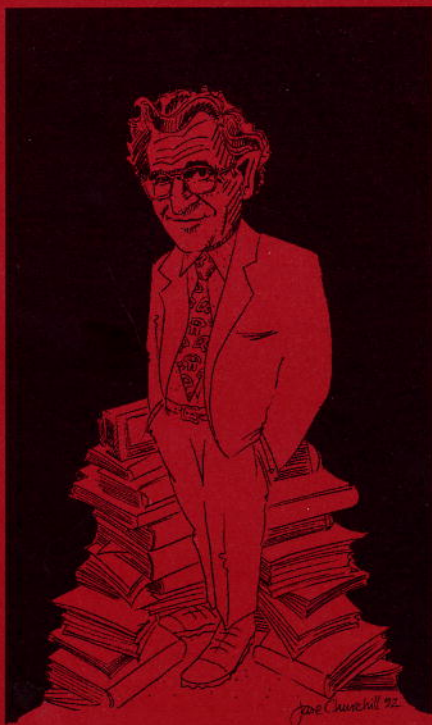
b) **“We should be seeking out forms of authority and domination, and challenging their legitimacy.”** (pp. 35-36)

c) **“States are violent institutions. The government of any country, including [the U.S.], represents some sort of domestic power structure and it’s usually violent. States are violent to the extent that they’re powerful, that’s roughly accurate. You look at American history, it’s nothing to write home about. You know, why are we here? We’re here because some ten million Native Americans were wiped out.”** (pp. 208-209)

d) **“I think much of the general population recognizes that the organized institutions do not reflect their concerns and interests and needs. They do not participate meaningfully in the political system.”** (pp. 211-212)

e) **“I go into a polling booth and I push one or another button depending on which of those positions I want. That’s a very limited form of democracy. Really meaningful democracy would mean that I play a role in forming these decisions, in making, creating those positions.”** (pp. 213-214)

7• Over images of environmental destruction, the video concludes with Chomsky's observation that **"the conditions of survival, let alone justice, require social planning in the interests of the community as a whole, and by now that means the global community."** (p. 221-222) In the context of the world in the 1990s, why is it so important to acknowledge the significance of the 'global community'?



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TOWARD A VISION OF A FUTURE SOCIETY

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

"I have my own ideas as to what a future society should look like — I've written about them, I mean, I think that we should, at the most general level, be seeking out forms of authority and domination, and challenging their legitimacy."

— Noam Chomsky

In this video, Chomsky concentrates on the contemporary institutions and powers which have set limits on human progress and offers us some concrete ways of challenging them; in effect, he presents a vision of a future society. Chomsky's work is directed at developing intellectual self-defense for "ordinary people" who are often isolated in their struggles. States are seen to be violent through such strategies as the near-genocide of aboriginal peoples. Ultimately, Chomsky feels we must move beyond the myths of modern industrial civilization and the privileged elites who dominate mass communication, and instead foster the interests of a truly global community.

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

23 minutes

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



NECESSARY ILLUSIONS



Closed captioned.
A decoder is required.

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