

**ACTIVITY: Observations by Noam Chomsky taken from:  
*Imperial Ambitions: Conversations on the post-9/11 world.*  
2005. Henry Holt & Co., New York**

Chomsky "...is generally considered to be a key intellectual figure within the left wing of United States politics... Chomsky is widely known for his political activism, and for his criticism of the foreign policy of the United States and other governments." Wikipedia

***[Write a well thought out and reflective reaction to Chomsky's thinking and add up to \$20.00 to your grade]***

***On fear and propaganda***

Only in the United States do people fear Iraq. This is a real achievement in propaganda. It's interesting that the United States is so susceptible to this. But for whatever reasons, the United States happens to be a very frightened country by comparative standards. Levels of fear here on almost every issue--crime, immigration, you pick it, are just off the spectrum. And the people in Washington know this very well. Many of them are the same people who ran the country during the Reagan years and the first Bush administration. And they're replaying the script. They pursued very aggressive domestic programs that harmed the population and were very unpopular, and they succeeded in staying in political power by pushing the panic button every year. And they're doing it again now. In the United States, it's not hard to do...

Certain kinds of propaganda become much easier to implement. When my kids were in school forty years ago, during the Cold War, they were being taught literally to hide under desks to protect them from atomic bombs. Actually there is a comment by the Mexican ambassador back at that time that ought to be famous. President Kennedy was trying to organize the hemisphere to support his terrorist attacks against Cuba, which were very severe. Generally other countries in the Western Hemisphere just have to do what they're told by the United States, or they're in bad trouble. But Mexico refused to go along with the campaign against Cuba. And the Mexican ambassador said, "If we publicly declare that Cuba is a threat to our security, forty million Mexicans will die laughing

In the United States, people don't die laughing. People are afraid of everything. Take the issue of crime. The crime rate of the United States is comparable to that of other industrial societies; it's toward the high end of that scale but not off the spectrum. Yet fear of crime here is much higher than in other countries. Drug use is about the same here as in any other country, but fear of drugs is off the scale...

...there is also a background of fear that is probably has to do with conquest of the continent, when you had to exterminate the native population, when you had to control a population that was regarded as dangerous, because you never knew when the slaves might turn on you. And it may also be a reflection of the enormous security we have here. The security of the United States is unparalleled. The United States controls the hemisphere; it controls both oceans and the opposite sides of both oceans. The last time the United States threatened was during the War of 1812. Since then it has just conquered others. Somehow this engenders a sense that somebody is going to come after us, and ends up being very frightened.

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### ***On caring about others***

Social Security is based on a principle that is considered subversive and that has to be driven out of people's heads: principle that you care about other people. Social Security is based on the assumption that we care about each other, that we have a communal responsibility to take care of people who can't take care of themselves. Whether they're children or the elderly. There is huge pressure to turn people into pathological monsters who care only about themselves, who don't have anything to do with anyone else, and who therefore can be very easily ruled and controlled. That's what lies behind the attack on Social Security. And it reflects a deep imperative that runs through the whole doctrinal system.

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### ***On government***

You don't have to go back to David Hume to understand this, but he rightly observed that "*force* is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is, therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular." In other words, in any state, whether a democratic state or a totalitarian state, the rulers rely on consent. They have to make sure that the people they are ruling do not understand that they actually have the power. That is the fundamental principle of government.

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### ***On religiosity***

No other industrial country has anything like the degree of extremist religious beliefs and irrational commitments that you commonly find in the United States. The idea that you have to avoid teaching evolution or pretend you're not teaching it is unique in the industrial world. And the statistics are mind-boggling. Roughly half the population think the world was of thousand years ago. A huge percentage, maybe a quarter or so, say they've had a born-again experience. A substantial number of people believe in what's called "the rapture." Large majorities are convinced of miracles, the existence of the devil, and so on.

These strains go pretty far back in American history but in recent years they have come to affect social and political life to an unprecedented extent. For example, before Jimmy Carter, no U.S. president had to pretend to be a religious fanatic, but since then every one of them has. This has contributed to a genuine undermining of democracy since the 1970s. Carter, probably inadvertently taught the lesson that you can mobilize a large constituency by presenting yourself, honestly or not, as a Bible-fearing, evangelical Christian. Up until that point, religious beliefs were personal concerns. There has been a conscious takeover of the electoral system by the public relations industry which now sells candidates the way they sell commodities. And the image of a God-fearing, believing person of deep faith who is going to protect us from the modern world is one you can sell.