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Chris Steele

Master of Arts Candidate, Regis University, csteele@regis.edu

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Conversation with Noam Chomsky about Social Justice and the Future

Chris Steele

Master of Arts Candidate, Regis University

(csteele@regis.edu)

with Noam Chomsky

Abstract

Leading intellectual Noam Chomsky offers historical perspectives, insight and critique regarding recent social movements. His views on the Occupy movement, in particular, resonate with some key themes in Jesuit higher education. An interview with Chomsky, conducted by Chris Steele, centers on seven questions, presented here in both text and video, that can be used to spark reflection and discussion in university classrooms.

Introduction

The Jesuit tradition centers on engagement with the real world.¹ Important developments and movements in the world such as the Arab Spring,² the Tea Party,³ and the Occupy Movement,⁴ to name a few, require deep discussion and understanding. Jesuit educators can benefit from leading intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky who think deeply and critically and in a timely way on such contemporary movements. The Catholic Worker Movement and Catholic activists such as Dorothy Day and Ammon Hennacy⁵ were active in the social justice arena and promoted the discipline of ‘service to others.’ As Jesuit educators better understand the contemporary world they can more effectively engage students on these issues. Moreover, Chomsky’s voice in support of marginalized and suppressed groups resonates deeply with core Jesuit values and perspectives represented in the “preferential option for the poor and oppressed,”⁶ concerns for social justice, and care and positive regard for all people.

Noam Chomsky has been deemed the world’s top intellectual by The Prospect Foreign Policy Poll.⁷ He is also the most cited living author, and in 2007 he was the fifteenth most cited author of all time behind Martin Heidegger.⁸ Chomsky has received numerous accolades throughout his life

including the Sydney Peace Prize in 2011 and honorary degrees from universities all around the world. In 2012 he received the Latin America Peace and Justice Award from the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA).⁹ Perhaps, then, his is an important voice to hear in conversations on some key themes in Jesuit higher education.

Chomsky began his activist career by speaking out against the Vietnam War. His essay *The Responsibility of Intellectuals*, published in 1967 stated, “It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and expose lies.”¹⁰ In particular, Chomsky holds views highly critical of the mass media. In his book, *Manufacturing Consent*, coauthored with Edward S. Herman, Chomsky argues that corporatized mass media filters the news in order to spread propaganda to serve the interests of the status quo.¹¹ Bringing to light such critiques and imperatives, it seems to me, serves well the aims of education in its quest for truth, responsible decision making, social action, and change that enhances the common good.

My studies and personal interests have centered on English literature, historical movements, social issues, and cultural resistance throughout my education at Regis University. As a journalist, I followed the Occupy Wall Street movement closely when it was first spawned in September of

2011. Being present at Occupy Denver's first eviction by the police on October 14, 2011, I noticed the dynamics of civil disobedience and protest. "Protesters" who had never been seen before started rallying other protesters and separating them from the crowd, thus causing confusion. Once confusion and separation ensued some protesters called for vandalism and violence. These types of actions are typically seen in protests where agent provocateurs have embedded themselves to instigate violence as a means to discredit a non-violent movement. After reviewing more of the literature on the study of protest and agent provocateurs by such scholars as Gary Marx¹² of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T), I began to understand another dynamic of social movements.

The dynamic of agent provocateurs and their role in protest sabotage is described in the interview I conducted with Noam Chomsky as "pretty routine." Martin Luther King Jr. spoke out against undercover agents inciting violence during peaceful protests. The film, *At the River I Stand*, portrays an incident where an undercover agent broke windows during a march for the sanitation worker's strike in Memphis, TN giving the police probable cause to break up the protest due to this vandalism.¹³ The FBI's COINTELPRO (Counter-Intelligence Program) was created "to disrupt and destroy the black liberation movement and other progressive movements in the US."¹⁴ From the Civil Rights Movement to the Occupy Wall Street Movement it is evident that the tactic of agent provocateurs has been used to disrupt these social movements.

I contacted Noam Chomsky about protest and provocateurs and to my surprise he promptly responded. We kept in touch for several months and he then consented to an interview. I was invited to his office in Cambridge, MA. The interview took place with Chomsky on May 22, 2012 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He answered a set of seven questions covering topics including provocateurs; art and cultural resistance; Occupy Wall Street; advice for the youth; and social justice. (A video stream of the interview is available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10176/codr:2557>.)

Segments of the videos are separated by each question. An interview with Noam Chomsky's daughter, Aviva Chomsky, is also available on the Regis University Digital Repository website.)

Chomsky Speaks

Interview with Noam Chomsky, by Chris Steele, May 22, 2012 at M.I.T. in Cambridge, MA

Provocateurs and Protest

Steele: I contacted you six months ago in relation to provocateurs in the Occupy Denver movement and I wanted to ask you about provocateur activity that has been reported in numerous locations across the U.S. Can you provide some examples of past provocateur interference in social movements in the U.S. and who might be backing them?

Chomsky: It's pretty routine. So for example, in the 60s in the anti-war movement and groups from all over the place had to learn some lessons. One lesson that they had to learn pretty quickly is that if there is somebody in the group who's dressed like a Hollywood version of a hippy and who's shouting you know, "Off the cops" or "let's break some windows" or whatever, you're very likely to see him in court testifying for the police, because that's their job, you know, try to turn activism into something that'll alienate the public and break the law and give you grounds for repression. So they [provocateurs] are all over.

I was involved with groups that were dealing with resistance, so you know, deserters and people like that, but we quickly learned that if there's something really sensitive, we can't do it in a group, we have to do an affinity group, if somebody's life is at stake you know, because chances are there's somebody around who's an informant and you know that's what police do.

You can tell by looking at the FBI cases. They've just been coming up with terrorism cases and they're almost all entrapment. Somebody joins, gets in contact with a bunch of guys with kind of



Photo by Dan Banta and Trenton Cotten

loose ends. They don't know what they're doing. They're confused and if someone suggests something to them or offers them some money, soon they're trying to stuff a fake bomb somewhere and you arrest them and send them off to jail. But that's so routine there's not even any point giving examples. It's just routine police behavior.

The Arts and Community Resistance

Steele: In your latest release, *Occupy*, you describe the effect of theatre and art in Brazil. Do you feel that music can provide people with a political vocabulary and political identity that's otherwise not included in the media?

Chomsky: Yeah, sure there's lots of ways to do it. In fact 99% and 1% wasn't in the media a year ago. Now it's a routine discussion. People are thinking about things in a different way than they did before, even just in the very few months since the Occupy movement. Actually there are some polls on it which maybe you've seen. There was a Pew poll which has been asking people at various times, "What do you think about inequality?" and concern about inequality shot up very fast after September just from the effect. I assume it's the effect of the Occupy movement which has just

permeated a lot of mainstream discourse. Now that can be co-opting, too. Powerful systems will try to incorporate what they see is working and turn it to their own needs, whether it's human rights or you name it. Of course that's what they'll *try* to do. So for example, after the 2008 election, which generated a lot of enthusiasm, right after the election there was an annual conference of the advertiser's association (whatever they call themselves), and every year they give a prize for the best marketing campaign of the year, and that year they gave it to Obama. He beat out Apple Computers. If you take a look at the business press right afterward (which was interesting), they're quoting executives, CEOs, and so on; they were very excited about it. They said this is a new model for how we can behave with respect to the public and in the boardroom, and so on, and we can use this model that worked so well at manipulating people in the 2008 election. They know he ran it but they learned lessons from it.

The use of human rights is quite an interesting case but it's true, there was a huge anti-nuclear movement in the early 1980s—huge demonstrations, millions of people trying to get rid of nuclear weapons and the Reagan administration cleverly co-opted it. They came

out and said “yeah, great idea; we’re all with you against nuclear weapons . . . let’s have Star Wars.” That’s how they got the Star Wars thing through and in the process they diffused the movement. They made it sound as if it was opposed to nuclear weapons, but of course you know what it was And can you change the discourse? Sure.

I mentioned meeting with Lula [former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva]. So for example, before he was elected he was quite popular—if you looked at opinion polls he was highest in the opinion polls—but he never won an election. Mostly it was because of corruption; the election was “bought off,” or last minute there was a huge flood of propaganda advertising, and so on. I asked him at one point if he thought he ever would be able to win an election if there wasn’t corruption? He said he didn’t think it would be possible, the reason being, he said, “I know the mentality of the peasants, that’s what I come from, and they go into the voting booth and they ask themselves, could somebody like me run a country? They’ll say “no.” It has to be one of those rich white guys. So even if they want me, they’re going to vote for those other people.” A couple years later he won. The mentality changed, and it has changed all over Latin America among indigenous people, poor people. It’s just a radical change, and of course it can be done. One of the ways in which it can be done, and there are plenty of others, occurred in Bolivia about ten years ago with the mobilization of the effort to privatize water; it led to a real revolution in the country. The first time in hundreds of years the indigenous population had been able to enter the political arena and take over political power, and it’s kind of interesting the way the governments are reacting. The governments and the corporations still want to privatize water distribution but they learned that the Bolivian method is dangerous because it led practically to a revolution. I was in southern Colombia recently visiting the villages and saw what the government of Colombia is apparently trying to do, namely, to pick the villages off, or the regions off, one at a time. If you come into some poor, remote, endangered villages and you give them a line about how great the water will be if we just buy your land up where the virgin forest is, you can maybe get somebody

to accept it. Although, strikingly, they’re organizing and resisting, but from the point of view of the rich and powerful class war never stops, it’s permanent. They’re involved in a constant bitter class war, and very self-conscious. They want everyone else not to participate but they’re always the people carrying it out. That’s why they’re rich and powerful.

Historical Parallels with Occupy Wall Street

Steele: Do you see a correlation between the Paris Commune and the Occupy Wall Street movement?

Chomsky: Well, all popular movements have something in common, but they are pretty different. The Paris Commune took over and ran the city. If you want to find to a parallel in American history it would be more like what happened in western Pennsylvania in the latter part of the nineteenth century, in Homestead where the mills and the mines had a very powerful worker’s movement, one that essentially took them over. These were worker-run communities, in fact, and the state had to call in the National Guard to destroy them; it wasn’t easy.

Another parallel for the Occupy movement, but I don’t know how well it’s known, is Resurrection City. I don’t know if anyone talks about this but it’s quite significant. If you take the history of the Civil Rights movement in the United States centered on Martin Luther King, a great figure, but look at what happened to King. If you listen to the speeches on Martin Luther King Day they typically end in enthusiastic rhetoric similar to King’s enthusiastic rhetoric of his 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech.

Well, he gave another “I Have a Dream” speech, a very eloquent one, on the evening he was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. He was there to support a sanitation workers strike, on his way to Washington to try to organize a poor people’s movement. The speech had biblical overtones of the kind he typically used. The theme was “I can see the Promised Land,” kind of like Moses’ “I can see the Promised Land; I know I’m not going to get there but you will get there.”

The Promised Land he was talking about was not the right to vote, it was rights for poor people. King was concerned about life in the slums, the repression of the poor, generally. Race and class are kind of correlated so poorer classes were very heavily black, but by no means were these classes only black. Then he was killed. There was supposed to be a march from Memphis to Washington [D.C.], and Coretta King, his wife, his widow, led the march, going through all the embattled places in the south—Birmingham, Selma, and so on, and they ended up in Washington. They set up a tent city in Washington, Resurrection City, that was going to be the base in approaching Congress to try to get some legislation that would deal with the plight of poor people. Well Congress, which was the most liberal Congress in American history, had called the police. They came in the middle of the night, smashed up the camp and drove them out of the city. That was Resurrection City. As far as northern liberals were concerned, if you wanted to denounce racist Alabama sheriffs that was fine, but don't come near us.

The Youth and Manufactured Consent

Steele: What are some techniques for the population, and especially young people, to see the truth and wake up from the media's false reality and false history?

Chomsky: I think kids are ready for it. They just have to pay attention; most people just don't pay attention. Because they think everything's hopeless it's kind of driven into your heads that everything is hopeless—there's nothing you can do, the powers are too great. In fact, the sense of hopelessness in the country is astonishing. For example, if you look at polls, over half the population thinks that Congress should be totally thrown out and replaced by your neighbors—they'll do a better job. Approval of Congress is in the single digits. Nobody thinks "I can do anything about it." It's like the peasants in Brazil thinking, "How can somebody like me do anything about it?" Take a look at the "9/11 movement," a kind of interesting phenomenon where the view is held that "Bush blew up the World Trade Center." There is sympathy at least for this kind of thinking. I forget the numbers, but I think about a third of the population, a huge

part of the population, holds to this. That means that a large part of the population is willing to accept the possibility we're run by a bunch of homicidal maniacs who are trying to murder us all, and they don't think they can do anything about it. "Ok, that's the way it is; we'll hide in the corner and wait till it happens." And so they don't lift a finger to do anything.

Some of the most effective kinds of propaganda are the kinds that allow you to see what's going on, such as the 99% and 1% economic categories, but you feel, "I can't do anything about it; I'm isolated, alone; I don't talk to anybody; people like me can't do anything; we just have to suffer and bear it." That's really effective propaganda. That's how slavery could last forever without many slave rebellions.

It's how women were oppressed. Take my grandmother's generation for instance. If my grandmother had been asked if she's oppressed, she would not have known what you were talking about. "That's life; women are doormats; that's it." You get to my mother's generation. There was still plenty of oppression, and she was bitter about it, but didn't think she could do anything about it. But by the time you get to today, it's quite different. It's very much like the peasants in Brazil, or the indigenous people in Bolivia, or the blacks in the south after the early days of the Civil Rights Movement. Yes we can do something about it even if it's brutal and harsh and we might get killed—but we can do something. Getting back to your question, for a lot of young people it's called apathy but I suspect it's more hopelessness, powerlessness. But people can learn they are not powerless. Just take a look at what's been done. Take a look at what other people have done under much harsher conditions than you'll ever face, and what's been done right here in your own country.

The sixties really did civilize the country. The United States is a very different country today from what it was in the 1960s. It's mainly young people who just didn't give up and didn't feel they can't do anything. Actually, sometimes it's kind of dramatic. For years, what's called "McCarthyism" intimidated people tremendously. I remember; I lived through it and people were just scared out of their wits. They felt they couldn't do anything.

When the House Un-American Activities Committee called people to be questioned, they just trembled in fear, but what could they do at the time? In the 1960s, people like Abbie Hoffman just started making fun of them and it ultimately collapsed. It's a very thin structure of power—as soon as you submit it to ridicule or you dismiss it, it can collapse. This has been understood for centuries. Go back to David Hume, for instance, one of the great founders of classical liberalism and a great philosopher. He wrote about the foundations and the theory of government where he posed a kind of a paradox.¹⁵ He said in every society, whether it's a feudal dictatorship, a military dictatorship or a semi-parliamentary system like England, whatever it is, he says power is always in the hands of the governed. Of those who are being ruled, power is always in their hands. So how come they just don't overthrow the rulers and take things for themselves? He says always that every society is a matter of the control of opinions and attitudes. If you can convince people, if the powerful can convince people that they have to stay in a slot, that's where they belong, that's their role in life, and that nothing can be changed, then the powerful, the rulers, control the people.

Now take a look at the history of revolutions and its significant changes when people broke free. Not long before Hume (and he may have had this in mind), in England and a century earlier, there was a major conflict between parliament and the king. Parliament consisted of basically the bourgeoisie and landowners and not representatives from the general population. The question arose, "Is the king above the law?" King Charles insisted that he was above the law, but parliament led by jurists and others who were saying "no" to the Magna Carta, determined that the king is subject to the law, at the time essentially subject to the nobles and the parliament. A real major conflict about it developed. In fact, it soon led to the brutal civil war—but parliament prevailed and compelled the king to sign some document conceding that he was not above the law. At that time the king was regarded as a representative of God and you didn't fiddle around with God; you know it's serious business. It was essentially standing up to a kind of divine authority. This is not the case in our society today, but that meant something then and

to break through that was very difficult. But they did and brought about a constitutional parliament, a parliamentary monarchy that was very different from a feudal monarchy.

Occupy Wall Street, Public Policy, and Public Opinion

Steele: You talked about the secondary organizations that have been restored by Occupy Wall Street. Do you feel that creating these dialogues could help marry public policy and public opinion?

Chomsky: It could. If you look at the Occupy movements, there are two major streams that I think are important. One is policy oriented: "we should do something about radical inequality;" "we should have a financial transaction tax;" or "take away corporate personhood," or "fix up campaign financing." There are a lot of constructive sensible suggestions on the policy side. The other part, which I think may be more important, is just forming communities. We are living in a very atomized society. People really are alone. I think some of the attractiveness of the social media, especially through Facebook, allows everybody to talk about themselves, but this does not engender many real communities. You don't talk to your friends or your neighbors. The internet kind of community is sort of anonymous. You can kind of feel, "I am really alone, even if I am writing about my date last night." You get a lot of exhibitionism in Facebook culture. It's partly a reflection of the kind of alienation that's imposed on society. People really are alone. This didn't just happen; there are massive efforts to create this. The best way to control people is isolate them, atomize them and cause them, drive them, to be concerned just with themselves and not anything else. The Occupy movements without planning just kind of broke out of that. People naturally interact if they have an opportunity. When people converged in Zuccotti Park in New York or Dewey Plaza in Boston or wherever it might be, they quickly formed communities of mutual support and solidarity in helping one another.

It's kind of striking, when New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, sent the troops in to break it up. One of the first things they did was destroy

the library. In fact, they destroyed thousands of books—and I think that it was more than symbolic. They didn't have to destroy the books. It was essentially telling people you can't do anything by yourself; if you want a library we're going to run it for you. The same with the health services, community kitchens and everything else. Having community members take charge of these things is really threatening because it helps people break out of isolation and realize that you don't have to accept subordination.

Going back to the women's movement again, that's pretty much the way it started. It started with very small consciousness raising groups, small groups of people who just talked to each other about oppression that everybody felt, but they didn't regard it as anything other than normal life. You know, that's what life is. When you can talk to other people and see that's not the way things have to be and that we can actually do something about it, pretty soon change can spread very quickly. The Civil Rights Movement is kind of the same. Of course it goes back centuries and has deep roots, but in the really modern period, say since the 60s, it started with small individual acts, such as with a couple of kids sitting at a lunch counter in Greensboro getting arrested and hauled off. Next day a larger group came in, and pretty soon you had Freedom Riders followed by the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Pretty soon you had a big popular movement.

Noam Chomsky on Social Justice

Steele: Where do you get your personal drive for your creativity, social justice, and to bring awareness?

Chomsky: I don't think that's the right question. I think the question is "why doesn't everybody do it?" I think people would just do it naturally. You look around. You drive to work. There's a homeless person asking for money. Somebody else reports, "This guy doesn't have a job." There's poverty everywhere. You go past a hospital with people crowding to the emergency room because they can't see a doctor. You look at the rest of the world, not just rich areas like the United States, and it's shocking. As soon as people are exposed to this, I think it's just

automatic. I happened to be exposed to such realities as a child. I grew up in the depression and saw people knocking on the door trying to sell rags and witnessed other struggles.

What Can We Do?

Steele: In your essay, "The Responsibility of Intellectuals," you posed the question "What can we do?"

Chomsky: Well, the fact of the matter is we can do just about anything. People like us, let's say, wouldn't be here without being pretty privileged. We have the kind of privilege that few people throughout history have ever had. If you have privilege you have opportunity and the opportunities are almost boundless, thanks to the struggles of the past. It hasn't always been like this but thanks to such struggles we have a tremendous amount of freedom.

The state may try to repress you, but they can't do a lot. They can pass the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) let's say [that under certain circumstances codifies for the U.S.A. indefinite military detention without charge or trial¹⁶], but they can't really implement it against the will of the population. I think there is a lot of excessive concern in activist groups about state repression. I mean it's not that it's not there, and sure they'd like to do it. First of all, it's always been there. It's just kind of inherent that states know their power systems but they are much weaker than they used to be. There's paranoia about concentration camps ("They're going to lock us up"), and now NDAA says they can detain us indefinitely. Concentration camps have existed in the United States since the Fifties. Back then, the liberal democrats, Humphrey and Layman, introduced legislation to set up internment camps in case people got out of control. I never followed up to see what happened but I know the legislation was passed but to my knowledge the legislation was never acted upon. Take, for example, the matter of security systems. Such systems should not be tolerated where everything you say gets sent to a massive central super computer in Utah where they do this and that with the data. But even if they have such capabilities, what are they going to do with it? Nothing. In fact, there were experiences with the

FBI from resistance days; they can't do anything with this kind of surveillance. And if they try, they'll arouse a popular reaction. So power really is in the hands of the governed, if they're willing to use it. So what can we do? Given that we're people with privilege, we have an enormous number of things we can do. There may be efforts to shut you up, but you're not going to be sent to have your brains blown out. It's not like El Salvador.

Steele: Thank you for your insights and perspectives on current movements of social change and for the historical perspectives.

Assessment and Application

Noam Chomsky has been considered a scholar of national and international significance since the release of his first book, *Syntactic Structures*, in 1957.¹⁷ Vivian Cook from Newcastle University stated that Chomsky's impact on linguistics has "been as earth-shattering as that of Einstein in physics."¹⁸ In a critique by writer for Maclean's (Canada's noted weekly news magazine), Victor Dwyer stated, "Chomsky repeatedly, and often quite persuasively, drives home a central point: that in American society the role of the mass media, overwhelmingly controlled by large corporations, is to manufacture the majority's consent for the continuing rule of the rich and the powerful."¹⁹ Professor and author Chris Hedges considers Chomsky as America's greatest intellectual declaring, "Chomsky reserves his fiercest venom for the liberal elite in the press, the universities and the political system who serve as a smoke screen for the cruelty of unchecked capitalism and imperial war."²⁰

By reviewing Chomsky's literature it is evident he makes a valuable contribution to an understanding of social movements, cultural resistance, and an alternative viewpoint of the mass media. Following from his findings in social research he issues a call to action in the interest of activism, civil disobedience, community development, and social justice.

As a scholar and employee in the Jesuit tradition, I see the insights of Chomsky enhancing the

Educational Praxis

My conversation with Chomsky caused me to consider ways in which professors and students in Jesuit institutions of higher learning, sharing with Chomsky common values and interests, might use his thought generally, and in particular the various segments of this interview, to provoke greater critical thought on these deep issues at play today in American society and elsewhere. Some possibilities come to mind; you may have others.

1. Each segment of the interview could be used to spark free-flowing class discussions. For this, with an internet connection display the article for the class and click video links for each part of the interview, as needed. The focus of the discussion could be on Chomsky as a noted intellectual in the world today, or on the radical nature of his critique. Permissions for classroom use of this interview through the *Jesuit Higher Education* website have already been obtained from Chomsky.
2. In advance of a class, students could be asked to research briefly one of the social movements referenced by Chomsky and report back to class on their findings. The appropriate video clip could then be played for the class and Chomsky's analysis could be discussed and critiqued. Topics include:
 - a. Vietnam War protests of the '60s
 - b. Anti-nuclear protests of the '80s
 - c. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Memphis protest in 1968
 - d. Resurrection City
 - e. Conspiracy theories of World Trade Center attacks
 - f. Social Activism of Abbie Hoffman
3. Use the video (all or in part) to spark class discussion on the ethics of protest and social activism. Are there times when protest and activism cross ethical and moral boundaries?
4. View the clips, "The Youth and Manufactured Consent" and "Occupy Wall Street Public Policy, and Public Opinion." Raise questions of student's own experiences of encountering "manufactured consent." Encourage class discussion as to what it is and what it is not. Raise further questions concerning suppression in your community, your society, your culture—what areas does it cover and how is it manifested?
5. Call on students to use Chomsky's insights and perspective to critique Catholic professors and students who protest the CIA involvement in Central America. In light of Chomsky, what does this protest, called "School of the Americas Watch" do right? What does it do poorly? Is it really a worthy cause and does it make a difference?

educational experience of discernment, *cura personalis* (care for the person), and contemplatives in action.

Discernment

For a compelling discussion of the role of discernment in the educational process, see the article by Abigail Gosselin in the inaugural issue of *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal*.²¹ Gosselin suggests that guiding students in the practice of discernment should involve “giving conscious attention to what we value, how we make choices, and what are our responsibilities”²² It involves promoting human agency and intentionally charting a course of how we should “be” in the world. Chomsky helps us ask the questions that stop us in our tracks and cause us to think again about the way things are and the way things can be different, be better.

Cura Personalis

This Latin phrase translates as “care for the [individual] person,” and as applied to education it expresses the value of a meaningful relationship between teacher and student that promotes “personal initiative and responsibility for learning.”²³ Chomsky’s analysis of society, social movement and community transformation in the interest of human development helps a student understand a society and culture and promotes responsible action within a given context.

Contemplatives in Action

As Ronald Modras suggests, a distinctive feature of Ignatian spirituality, ‘contemplative in action,’ has become a slogan in Ignatian circles.”²⁴ Jesuit higher education aims to encourage students to develop the habit of contemplation where images and imagination spark creative thinking and draw on one’s ability in discernment to envision the future. Again, Chomsky’s radical critique of society also promotes creative contemplation where a better ways of living can be imagined and perhaps helps us all to be more effective contemplatives in action.

Chomsky throughout his career has deeply criticized warfare, denouncing the Vietnam War, U.S. Central American Policy, and the war on terrorism. It is obvious Chomsky cares for

people; he is a supporter of the World Social Forum and has visited and wrote about people’s struggles from Palestine to Colombia. In 1969 Chomsky shared a jail cell with Norman Mailer at the Pentagon protest. In addition to his activism, Chomsky’s countless published books, articles and broadcast speeches are evidence that he takes direct action to confront social problems. In the spirit of the Catholic anarchist Ammon Hennacy, Noam Chomsky is truly a one-man revolution for advancing the common good.

Through a process of direct and pointed engagement with students, it is my expectation that not only will their encounter with Chomsky spark deeper and broader thinking about significant issues of today, but it will also introduce students of a new generation to one who, as philosopher Hilary Putman suggests, represents a “great intellectual power . . . an extraordinary mind . . . whose virtues include ‘originality and scorn for the faddish and superficial.’”²⁵

Notes

¹ Many documents related to Jesuit education bear this out. Article #2 from *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (1995)*, states, “This apostolic activity [of touching the lives of more than a half a million students] not only has an influence on the lives of students; it goes beyond the immediate university milieu. We recognize that universities remain crucial institutional setting in society. For the poor they serve as major channels for social advancement. In and through universities, important debates take place about ethics, future directions for economics and politics, and the very meaning of human existence, debates that shape our culture. Neither the university as an institution and as a value for humanity nor the still urgent imperative for an unflagging Jesuit commitment to our tradition of fostering university life stands in need of any fresh defense.” George W. Traub, S.J., ed. *A Jesuit Education Reader* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 133-134. See also the array of real life engagement documented in the *Jesuits Yearbook of the Society of Jesus, 2011*. Giuseppe Bellucci, ed. (Rome: General Curia of the Society of Jesus, 2010).

² The Arab Spring began on December 17, 2010, with protests breaking out in Tunisia. Following Tunisia, upheaval spread throughout the Middle East sparking protests in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, and many other countries in the region. One of the most notable events of the Arab Spring was the regime change in Egypt when Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak resigned and gave power to the military after protests intensified. Garry Blight, Sheila Pulham and Paul Torpey, “Arab Spring: An Interactive Timeline of Middle East Protests,” *The*

Guardian, accessed August 24, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline>.

³ The Tea Party (“Taxed Enough Already” being the acronym’s phrase) began to surface in April of 2009 when the first national Tea Party event took place. Tax-day protests drew an estimated 500,000 throughout 200 cities in the U.S. The Tea Party movement denounced health care legislation, big government, and high taxes. “The Tea Party’s Road to Legitimacy: A Timeline,” *The Week*, accessed August 24, 2012, <http://theweek.com/article/index/201903/the-tea-partys-road-to-legitimacy-a-timeline>.

⁴ The Occupy Wall Street Movement received worldwide attention on September 17, 2011, when protesters set up a makeshift city in Manhattan’s Zuccotti Park. Occupy Wall Street protested corporate greed and economic inequality. The grassroots slogan, “We are the 99%,” went worldwide, igniting Occupy protests around the globe. On October 15, 2011, Occupy Wall Street inspired protests took place in 951 cities in 82 countries. National Public Radio, “Occupy Wall Street: From a Blog Post to a Movement,” *NPR*, accessed August 24, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2011/10/20/141530025/occupy-wall-street-from-a-blog-post-to-a-movement>.

⁵ The Catholic Worker Movement was created in 1933 by French social philosopher Peter Maurin and American social activist Dorothy Day. The Catholic Worker Movement criticized racism, social inequity and war, and promoted urban housing for the homeless. *The Catholic Worker* monthly paper was also conceived in 1933, with Dorothy Day as editor. *The Catholic Worker* newspaper was based on nonviolence and love. Louise Zwick and Mark Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005).

⁶ Former Superior General of the Society of Jesus Peter Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. stated that one facet of the Jesuit mission was the “preferential option for the poor and oppressed.” See: Roshan Ahuja, “Marketing to the Poor” in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, George W. Traub, ed. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 366.

⁷ David Herman, “Global Intellectual Poll Results,” *Prospect*, October 20, 2005, LexisNexis Academic.

⁸ “Most Cited Authors of Books in the Humanities, 2007,” *Times Higher Education*, accessed August 24, 2012, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=405956>.

⁹ Greg Grandin, “Turning the Tide Revisited: An Interview With Noam Chomsky,” *NACLA Report On The Americas* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 32-34, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

¹⁰ Noam Chomsky, “The Responsibility of Intellectuals,” *The New York Review of Books* 8, no. 3 (1967): 2.

¹¹ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

¹² Gary Marx, “External Efforts to Damage or Facilitate Social Movements: Some Patterns, Explanations, Outcomes, and Complications,” in *The Dynamics of Social Movements*, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Nald, eds. (Cambridge: Winthrop, 1979); Gary Marx, “Of Double Agents and Revolving Doors,” *New Republic* 173, no. 16 (October 18, 1975): 8-13, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost; Gary Marx, *Undercover: Police Surveillance in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Gary Marx, “Who Really Gets Stung? Some Issues Raised by the New Police Undercover Work,” *Crime & Delinquency* 28, no. 2 (April 1982): 165, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

¹³ *At the River I Stand*, directed by David Appleby, Allison Graham, Steven John Ross (1993; San Francisco, California Newsreel, 2004), DVD.

¹⁴ Susie Day and Laura Whitehorn, “Human Rights in the United States: The Unfinished Story of Political Prisoners and COINTELPRO,” *New Political Science* 23, no. 2 (June 2001): 285-297, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

¹⁵ David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, Eugene F. Miller, ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1987).

¹⁶ See <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112hr1540enr/pdf/BILLS-112hr1540enr.pdf>, particularly Section 1021.

¹⁷ John R. Searle, “A Special Supplement: Chomsky’s Revolution in Linguistics,” *The New York Review of Books* 18, no. 12 (1972).

¹⁸ Vivian Cook, “Chomsky’s Syntactic Structures Fifty Years On,” *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 17, no. 1 (March 2007): 120-131, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

¹⁹ Victor Dwyer, “Against the Grain,” *Maclean’s* 106, no. 12 (March 22, 1993): 48, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

²⁰ Chris Hedges, “Noam Chomsky Has ‘Never Seen Anything Like This,’” *Truthdig*, accessed August 25, 2012, http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/noam_chomsky_has_never_seen_anything_like_this_20100419/.

²¹ Abigail Gosselin, “Cultivating Discernment,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 16-30.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

²³ George W. Traub, “Do you Speak Ignatian? A Glossary of Terms Used in Ignatian and Jesuit Circles” in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, George W. Traub, ed. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 391.

²⁴ Ronald Modras, *Ignatian Humanism: A Dynamic Spirituality for the 21st Century* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004), 45-49.

²⁵ Hilary Putnam, as cited in Maya Jaggi, "The Guardian Profile: Noam Chomsky: Conscience of a Nation," see: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/jan/20/society.politics>.

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