



2004-05
Certificación número 64

Yo, Sylvia Tubéns Castillo, Secretaria Ejecutiva del Senado Académico de la Universidad de Puerto Rico en Cayey, CERTIFICO:

Que el Senado Académico, en su reunión ordinaria del martes 15 de marzo de 2005, tuvo ante su consideración una moción del Departamento de Humanidades en la que se recomienda a **Don Ricardo Alegría** y a **Noam Chomsky** como **candidatos para dictar una próxima Lección Magistral**. Se incluyó el curriculum vitae de Noam Chomsky.

Luego de la exposición de rigor, el Senado aprobó por unanimidad la siguiente

CERTIFICACIÓN:

El Senado Académico determinó remitir este asunto a la consideración de la Comisión de Asuntos Claustrales.

Y, PARA QUE ASÍ CONSTE, expido la presente Certificación en Cayey, Puerto Rico, el día dieciocho de marzo de dos mil cinco.

Sylvia Tubéns Castillo
Secretaria Ejecutiva

Vo. Bo.

Rafael Aragunde
Rector y Presidente
Senado Académico



Noam Chomsky

Major Twentieth Century Writers, 1991

NAME: Avram Noam CHOMSKY

PERSONAL: Born December 7, 1928, in Philadelphia, Pa.; son of William (a Hebrew scholar) and Elsie (Simonofsky) Chomsky; married Carol Schatz (a linguist and specialist in educational technology), December 24, 1949; children: Aviva, Diane, Harry Alan.

ADDRESSES: Home--15 Suzanne Rd., Lexington, Mass. 02173. Office--Department of Linguistics and Philosophy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Room 20D-219, 77 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

EDUCATION: University of Pennsylvania, B.A., 1949, M.A., 1951, Ph.D., 1955.

CAREER: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, assistant professor, 1955-58, associate professor, 1958-62, professor, 1962-65, Ferrari P. Ward Professor of Modern Languages and Linguistics, 1966-76, Institute Professor, 1976--. Visiting professor of linguistics, Columbia University, 1957-58, University of California, Los Angeles, 1966, University of California, Berkeley, 1966-67, and Syracuse University, 1982. Member, Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton University, 1958-59. John Locke lecturer, Oxford University, 1969; Bertrand Russell Memorial Lecturer, Cambridge University, 1971; Nehru Memorial Lecturer, University of New Delhi, 1972; Huizinga Lecturer, University of Leiden, 1977; Woodbridge Lecturer, Columbia University, 1978; Kant Lecturer, Stanford University, 1979.

POLITICS: Libertarian socialist.

MEMBERSHIPS: National Academy of Sciences, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Linguistic Society of America, American Philosophical Association, American Association for the Advancement of Science, British Academy (corresponding fellow), British Psychological Society (honorary member), Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina, Utrecht Society of Arts and Sciences.

AWARDS: Junior fellow, Harvard Society of Fellows, 1951-55; research fellow at Harvard Cognitive Studies Center, 1964-67; named one of the "makers of the twentieth century" by the London Times, 1970; Guggenheim fellowship, 1971-72; distinguished scientific contribution from American Psychological Association, 1984; Gustavus Myers Center Award, 1986 and 1988; George Orwell Award, National Council of Teachers of English, 1987; Kyoto Prize in Basic Sciences, 1988. Honorary degrees include D.H.L. from University of Chicago, 1967, Loyola University of Chicago and Swarthmore College, 1970, Bard College, 1971, University of Massachusetts, 1973, and University of Pennsylvania, 1984; and D.Litt. from University of London, 1967, Delhi University, 1972, Visva-Bharati University (West Bengal), 1980.

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The Culture of Terrorism, South End, 1988.

(With Edward S. Herman) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Pantheon, 1988.

Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in a Democratic Society, South End, 1989.

Language and Politics, edited by Carlos P. Otero, Black Rose Books, 1989.

Contributor of numerous articles to scholarly and general periodicals.

SIDELITES: "Judged in terms of the power, range, novelty and influence of his thought, Noam Chomsky is arguably the most important intellectual alive today," writes Paul Robinson in the *New York Times Book Review*. Chomsky, a professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has attracted worldwide attention with his ground-breaking research into the nature of human language and communication. As the founder of the "Chomskyan Revolution," the scholar has become the center of a debate that transcends formal linguistics to embrace psychology, philosophy, and even genetics. *New York Times Magazine* contributor Daniel Yergin maintains that Chomsky's "formulation of 'transformational grammar' has been acclaimed as one of the major achievements of the century. Where others heard only a Babel of fragments, he found a linguistic order. His work has been compared to the unraveling of the genetic code of the DNA molecule." Yergin further contends that Chomsky's discoveries have had an impact "on everything from the way children are taught foreign languages to what it means when we say that we are human." Chomsky is also an impassioned critic of American foreign policy, especially as it affects ordinary citizens of Third World nations. Many of his books since 1969 concern themselves with "the perfidy of American influence overseas," to quote Atlantic essayist James Fallows. In America, Kenneth J. Gavin finds a unifying strain in all of Chomsky's various writings. The author's goal, says Gavin, is "to highlight principles of human knowledge and indicate the priority of these principles in the reconstruction of a society. His efforts leave us with more than enough to think about."

Chomsky was born in Philadelphia on December 7, 1928. His father was a Hebrew scholar of considerable repute, so even as a youngster Chomsky "picked up a body of informal knowledge about the structure and history of the Semitic languages," according to David Cohen in *Psychologists on Psychology*. While still in high school Chomsky proofread the manuscript of his father's edition of a medieval Hebrew grammar. Yergin notes: "This backdoor introduction to

'historical linguistics' had considerable impact in the future; it helped fuel his later conviction that the explanation of how language worked, rather than categories and description, was the business of linguistic study." The young Chomsky was more interested in politics than grammar, however. He was especially passionate about the rebirth of a Jewish culture and society in what later became the state of Israel, and for a time he entertained the idea of moving there. In 1945 he enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania, where he came under the influence of Zellig Harris, a noted professor of linguistics. John Lyons observes in *Noam Chomsky* that it was the student's "sympathies with Harris's political views that led him to work as an undergraduate in linguistics. There is a sense, therefore, in which politics brought him into linguistics."

The school of linguistics in which Chomsky took his collegiate training held as its goal the formal and autonomous description of languages without wide reference to the meaning--or semantics--of utterances. Lyons elaborates: "Semantic considerations were strictly subordinated to the task of identifying the units of phonology and syntax and were not involved at all in the specification of the rules or principles governing their permissible combinations. This part of the grammar was to be a purely formal study, independent of semantics." Chomsky questioned this approach in his early work in generative grammar as a student at the University of Pennsylvania and broke with it more radically while in the Harvard Society of Fellows from 1951. There he was immersed in new developments in mathematical logic, the abstract theory of thinking machines, and the latest psychological and philosophical debates. These ideas led him to develop further his earlier work on generative grammar and to ask "precise and formal questions about linguistics and language," to quote Justin Leiber in his work *Noam Chomsky: A Philosophical Overview*. Leiber adds: "His results led him to criticize and discard the prevailing views in linguistics."

What Chomsky began to develop in the 1950s was a mathematically precise description of some of human language's most striking features. Yergin contends that the scholar was "particularly fascinated by 'generative systems'--the procedures by which a mathematician, starting with postulates and utilizing principles and inferences, can generate an infinite number of proofs. He thought that perhaps language was 'generated' from a few principles as well." Yergin claims that this line of reasoning led Chomsky to another salient question, namely: "How is it possible that, if language is only a learned habit, one can be continually creative and innovative in its use?" This question--and its explication--would provide a novel and compelling critique of two established fields, traditional structural linguistics and

behavioral psychology. Leiber concludes that Chomsky's new theory "explained many features of language that were beyond structuralist linguistics and placed the specific data, and many lower-level generalizations, of the structuralists within a richer theory."

Many of Chomsky's novel ideas saw print in his first book, *Syntactic Structures*, published in 1957. Yergin calls the work "the pale blue book ... which heralded the Chomskyan Revolution." He adds that the volume "demonstrated that important facts about language could not be explained by either structural linguistics or by computer theory, which was then becoming fashionable in the field. In *Syntactic Structures*, Chomsky departed from his mentors in stressing the importance of explaining creativity in language and introduces his own transformational grammar as a more 'powerful' explanation of how we make sentences." Webster Schott offers a similar assessment in the *Washington Post Book World*. In *Syntactic Structures*, writes Schott, "Chomsky (presents) and (seems) to demonstrate the proposition that every human being has an innate ability to acquire language, and this ability to learn language is called into use when one hears, at the right age, language for the first time. He also (offers) a concept--it came to be known as 'generative' or 'transformational-generative' grammar--which (has) made it possible to predict ('generate') the sentence combinations in a language and to describe their structure." Lyons states that the short and relatively nontechnical *Syntactic Structures* "revolutionized the scientific study of language."

The proofs Chomsky uses for his theories are complex, but his conclusions are readily accessible. Robinson observes that, put as simply as possible, Chomsky's view holds that "the ability to speak and understand a language cannot be explained in purely empirical terms--that is, purely by induction. When we 'learn' a language, he says, we are able to formulate and understand all sorts of sentences that we've never heard before. What we 'know,' therefore, must be something deeper--a grammar--that makes an infinite variety of sentences possible. Chomsky believes that the capacity to master grammatical structures is innate: It is genetically determined, a product of the evolutionary process, just as the organic structures of our bodies are." A strict "stimulus-response" mechanism cannot adequately account for the way young children master language during the first four years of life; the child, to quote Cohen, "learns ... to extract the more complex rules of grammar needed for speech." Leiber explains that for Chomsky, then, the primary interest of the linguist should be with specifying the "device of some sort" that generates an infinite variety of grammatically-correct sentences. "This device will specify what is somehow 'internalized' in the competent

speaker-hearer of the language," Leiber writes. "Though the most usual label for Chomsky's general sort of linguistics is 'transformational-generative linguistics,' the most crucial word is 'generative'--as opposed to 'taxonomical'--since the primary concern is with the 'principles and processes by which sentences are constructed in particular languages,' not with the identification and classification of items found in the surface end product of these principles and processes."

One of the mechanisms Chomsky proposes for sentence generation is the "deep structure-surface structure" scenario. According to Yergin, the surface structure "'faces out' on the world and, by certain phonological rules, is converted into the sounds we hear; it corresponds to the parsing of sentences which we all learned from our indefatigable junior high English teachers. The deep structure 'faces inward' toward the hazy region of conceptualization, is more abstract and related to meaning. It expresses the basic logical relations between nouns and verbs." Transformational grammar therefore "consists of a limited series of rules, expressed in mathematical notation, which transform deep structures into well-formed surface structures. The transformational grammar thus relates meaning and sound." Cohen discusses the applications of this concept. "Chomsky has analysed the necessary constituents of the deep structure and the transformations through which this deep structure is turned into the surface structure we recognize and use as sentences. He has, of course, extended his theory from this point into the implications for our knowledge of man that comes from the fact that our knowledge of language is based upon this deep structure, a structure that we cannot guess or divine just from speaking, and upon the necessary transformations."

Chomsky has argued that all natural human languages possess deep and surface structures and cycles of transformations between them. In the Nation, Gilbert Harman writes: "These built-in aspects of grammar will be parts of the grammar of every language. They are, in other words, aspects of 'universal grammar.' We must therefore suppose that people have a specific faculty of language, a kind of 'mental organ' which develops in the appropriate way, given appropriate experience, yielding a knowledge of whatever language is spoken in their community." John Sturrock elaborates in the New York Times Book Review: "Chomskyism starts with grammar and finishes in genetics. Drill deep enough into the structure of our sentences, he maintains, and you will come to those ultimate abstractions with which we were born, the grammar of any given language being originally determined by the fairly restricted grammatical possibilities programmed in the brain.... DNA sets up to master a syntax, the accident of birth determines which one." Needless to say, not everyone agrees with Chomsky's view. Psychology Today contributor

Howard Gardner calls the human being in Chomsky's formulation "a totally preprogrammed computer, one that needs merely to be plugged into the appropriate outlet." Lyons, conversely, states that Chomsky "was surely right to challenge 'the belief that the mind must be simpler in its structure than any known physical organ and that the most primitive of assumptions must be adequate to explain whatever phenomena can be observed.'"

Obviously, Chomsky's theory has as much to do with psychology and philosophy as it does with linguistics. For instance, the very premises of the scholar's work have made him one of the most devastating critics of behaviorism, the view that suggests all human responses are learned through conditioning. Sturrock notes: "Chomsky's case is that ... that fanatical core known as behaviorism, has a theory of learning, all rote and Pavlovian reinforcement, which is deficient and, in the end, degrading.... (Behaviorists), given their sinister theory of learning, must be proponents of the view that human nature is not nature at all, but a social product conditioned from outside. Chomsky finds hope and a decisive guarantee of intellectual freedom in the cognitive structures which sit incorruptibly in the fastness of our brains." Chomsky's work reinforces the philosophical tradition of "rationalism," the contention that the mind, or "reason," contributes to human knowledge beyond what is gained by experience. He is opposed by the "empiricists," who claim that all knowledge derives from external stimuli, including language. In the Nation, Edward Marcotte declares: "What started as purely linguistic research ... has led, through involvement in political causes and an identification with an older philosophic tradition, to no less than an attempt to formulate an overall theory of man. The roots of this are manifest in the linguistic theory.... The discovery of cognitive structures common to the human race but only to humans (species specific), leads quite easily to thinking of unalienable human attributes." Leiber concludes: "Mind is the software of human psychology, and thought is individuated as instances of the mind's operations. The behaviorist is seen to be insisting ... on a very minimal sort of software; the rationalist is out to show that much more powerful and abstract, perhaps in good measure innate, software has to be involved. One can feel unhappy with Chomsky's particular way of putting, or productively narrowing, the issue, but it is not an unreasonable viewpoint. Chomsky has an interesting and important sense of know at hand. He is looking at men in a way that has an established and well-defined sense when applied to thinking devices."

While establishing his academic reputation, Chomsky continued to be concerned about the direction of American politics and ideology. His moral indignation rose in the 1960s until he became "one of the most articulate spokesmen

of the resistance against the Vietnam war," to quote Jan G. Deutsche in the New York Times Book Review. Chomsky attacked the war in articles, in books, and from the podium; in the process he became better known for his political views than for his linguistic scholarship. In a New York Times piece written during that era, Thomas Lask observes: "Unlike many others, even those who oppose the war, Noam Chomsky can't stand it and his hatred of what we are doing there and his shame, as well as his loathing for the men who defend and give it countenance are tangible enough to touch." Nation essayist Brian Morton finds "nothing exotic about his critique of the U.S. role in Vietnam: He attempted no analysis of arcane economic or political structures. All he did was evaluate our government's actions by the same standards that we apply when we evaluate the actions of other governments."

Chomsky's first book-length work on Vietnam, *American Power and the New Mandarins*, offers "a searing criticism of the system of values and decision-making that drove the United States to the jungles of Southeast Asia," according to Michael R. Beschloss in the Washington Post Book World. The book's strongest vitriol is directed toward those so-called "New Mandarins"--the technocrats, bureaucrats, and university-trained scholars who defend America's right to dominate the globe. Deutsch states that Chomsky's concern "is not simply that social scientists have participated widely in designing and executing war-related projects. What he finds disturbing are the consequences of access to power by intellectuals; the difficulties involved in retaining a critical stance toward a society that makes the reward of power available as well as the need to be 'constructive,' the recognition as problems of only those difficulties that are soluble by the means at hand." Inevitably, Chomsky's volume has drawn scathing criticism from those who oppose his views and high praise from those who agree with him. Chicago Tribune Book World reviewer Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., claims: "Judging by *American Power and the New Mandarins*, one can only conclude that Chomsky's idea of the responsibility of an intellectual is to forswear reasoned analysis, indulge in moralistic declamation, fabricate evidence when necessary and shout always at the top of one's voice. It need hardly be said that, should the intellectual community follow the Chomsky example, it would betray its own traditions and hasten society along the road to unreason and disaster." In the Nation, Robert Sklar feels otherwise about the work. The critic contends: "The importance of *American Power and the New Mandarins* lies in its power to free our minds from old perspectives, to stimulate new efforts at historical, political and social thought."

Subsequent Chomsky books on American foreign policy have explored other political hotbeds around the world,

drawing the conclusion that U.S. interests in human rights, justice, and morality are inevitably subordinated to big business profit-taking. As Beschloss notes, Chomsky's "is a portrait of corporate executives manipulating foreign policy for profit motives, of Third World peoples devastated for drifting away from the American 'grand area' of influence; of hand-aided journalists, politicians, and intellectuals shrouding the darker realities of American statecraft under platitudes about idealism and goodwill with an eye toward their flow of rewards from the Establishment." Times Literary Supplement correspondent Charles Townshend observes that Chomsky "sees a 'totalitarian mentality' arising out of the mainstream American belief in the fundamental righteousness and benevolence of the United States, the sanctity and nobility of its aims. The publicly tolerated 'spectrum of discussion' of these aims is narrow." Chomsky himself transcends that narrow spectrum, adducing "example after example to illuminate how American policies have led knowingly to large scale human suffering," to quote Beschloss. In the New York Times Book Review, Sheldon S. Wolin suggests that the author "is relentless in tracking down official lies and exposing hypocrisy and moral indifference in the high places.... Yet the passion of Chomsky's indictment is always controlled, and while he is harsh toward his opponents, he is never unfair or arrogant."

Other critics have been less sanguine about Chomsky's political views; in fact, some have actually labeled him a pariah and attempted to discredit him on a number of grounds. "It has been Chomsky's singular fate to have been banished to the margins of political debate," writes Steve Wasserman in the Los Angeles Times Book Review. "His opinions have been deemed so kooky--and his personality so cranky--that his writings no longer appear in the forums ... in which he was once so welcome." Wolin offers one dissenting view: "Chomsky's political writings are curiously untheoretical, which is surprising in a writer renowned for his contributions to linguistic theory. His apparent assumption is that politics is not a theoretical subject.... One gets the impression from reading Chomsky that if it were not urgently necessary to expose lies, immorality and the abuse of power, politics would have no serious claim upon the theoretical mind." New York Times Book Review contributor Paul Robinson notes that in Chomsky's case, "the popular or accessible (political) works often seem to belie the intellectual powers unambiguously established in the professional works.... Indeed, one might argue that the discrepancy is more extreme in his work than in that of any other important intellectual." Morton feels that the attacks on Chomsky's historical/political scholarship--and more recently the tendency to ignore his work--have affected his level of stridency. The critic observes, for instance, that "his later tone is that of a man who doesn't expect anything to change.... Chomsky is savagely indignant because the

values he cherishes are being strangled. But increasingly, the reasons for his indignation--the values he cherishes--are hard to see in his work. Only the indignation is clear."

Chomsky has his champions, however. Leiber, for one, finds an overriding commitment to freedom in the author's work--"the freedom of the individual to produce and create as he will without the goad of external force, economic competition for survival, or legal and economic restraint on social, intellectual, or artistic experiment; and the freedom of ethnic and national groups to work out their own destinies without the intervention of one or another Big Brother." "From his earliest writings to his latest, Chomsky has looked with astonishment at what the powerful do to the powerless," Morton declares. "He has never let his sense of outrage become dulled. If his voice has grown hoarse over twenty years, who can blame him? And who can feel superior? No one has given himself more deeply to the struggle against the horrors of our time. His hoarseness is a better thing than our suavity." Deutsch writes: "The most convincing indication of the extent to which Chomsky's wide ranging indictment of United States society and policy must be taken seriously is that a man possessed of these sensibilities should have felt compelled to undertake it." Morton offers a compelling conclusion. "Americans are no longer convinced that our government has the right to destroy any country it wants to," the essayist states. "And to the extent that this is true, Chomsky, along with others like him, deserves much of the credit. He did his job well."

In 1970, the London Times named Chomsky one of the thousand "makers of the twentieth century." According to Yergin, his theory "remains the foundation of linguistics today," and "his vision of a complex universe within the mind, governed by myriad rules and prohibitions and yet infinite in its creative potential, opens up vistas possibly as important as Einstein's theories." Yergin adds: "The impact of Chomsky's work may not be felt for years.... Yet this beginning has revolutionized the study of language and has redirected and redefined the broad inquiry into intelligence and how it works." Robinson calls the scholar's work "a prolonged celebration of the enormous gulf that separates man from the rest of nature. He seems overwhelmed by the intellectual powers that man contains within himself. Certainly nobody ever stated the case for those powers more emphatically, nor exemplified them more impressively in his own work. Reading Chomsky on linguistics, one repeatedly has the impression of attending to one of the more powerful thinkers who ever lived."

Chomsky has also earned a place in history for his political writings. According to Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in the New York Times, Chomsky "continues to challenge our assumptions long after other critics have gone to bed. He has become the foremost gadfly of our national conscience." New Statesman correspondent Francis Hope praises Chomsky for "a proud defensive independence, a good plain writer's hatred of expert mystification, a doctrine of resistance which runs against the melioristic and participatory current of most contemporary intellectual life." Hope concludes: "Such men are dangerous; the lack of them is disastrous."

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