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>> ALAN: Hey, there, and welcome to episode five of the Talks at Google podcast, where great minds meet. Talks at Google brings the world's most influential thinkers, creators, makers, and doers, all to one place. Every episode is taken from a video that can be seen at youtube.com/talksatgoogle. I'm Alan, and I'll be with you during this episode with the one and only, Noam Chomsky. For the past 40 years, Noam's writings on politics and language have established him as a preeminent public intellectual, and is one of the most original and wide-ranging political and social critics of our time. Among the seminal figures in linguistic theory over the past century, Chomsky has also secured a place as perhaps the leading dissident voice in the United States since the 1960s. In conversation with Googler Hassan Khalil, Professor Chomsky discusses wide ranging topics from the development of his personal political views to the control of information in media.

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And now, here is Noam Chomsky.
>> KHALIL: I wanted to ask you about your academic focus having been linguistics. You obviously know a whole lot about a whole lot of other things. And I wonder what makes something interesting to you.
>> CHOMSKY: Well, several factors. First of all, it has to be a--an intellectual challenge. Secondly, it has to be of some significance, and there are many different dimensions of significance. So, for example, things that have an impact on human life, and in-in fact, survival are of course, significant, even if they don't pose much of an intellectual challenge. On the other hand, things that pose a very serious intellectual challenge, like how is it possible that human beings can do what you and I are now doing, which is beyond the capacity of any other organism.

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That poses a-a very significant intellectual challenge. It's human significance when you really look into the details of the debate. So there's different dimensions, different factors. That's essentially the same as what a four-year-old finds interesting. You wanna understand something about the world, you wanna do something important.
>> KHALIL: I think that many of us lose the four-year-old curiosity over the years. What has-what has kept you curious in that way? You've obviously branched out so much throughout your life. From your focus on linguistics, you've-you've branched out quite a lot from there. Is it-is it simply, this is something interesting to--for, you know, understanding humanity, or is it--or there something else in it?
>> CHOMSKY: Just--not that it matters much, but in fact, it's the other way around. I was very much engaged in political life, social issues, long before I ever heard of linguistics.
>> KHALIL: So tell us about that. You-you took part in a lot of political activism, sort of earlier on, and then, over the course of your life.

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How did you get started with that? What was the drive for that, and-and what drew you to it?
>> CHOMSKY: Well, I grew up in the 1930s, which was quite an-an interesting period. In some ways, a little bit like today, in other ways,

quite different. Objectively, it was much harsher than today. So conditions during the-the Depression here in the United States were much worse than they are today. Subjectively, it was a much more optimistic period. You know, today, it's kind of striking to see the anger, hopelessness. I get a dozen letters every night from mostly young people, saying, "The world's awful, what can I do? It's hopeless." Then, it was pretty different. Not-not over the whole country. If you were an agricultural worker, or fleeing the-the Dust Bowl, it was pretty awful.

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But in the circles that were my own milieu, which was mostly first-first generation immigrants, working class, at the time, mostly unemployed, part of the very lively activist, militant, working class culture of the time, it was pretty hopeful. There was a sense, somehow we can get out of all this through solidarity through, you know, working together. There was an educated community, and people who had never gone--just couple of years of elementary school, but discussing the latest varieties of Freudian psychoanalysis, you know, the last concert of the Budapest String Quartet, and so on. There was a worker education that took place, a lot of it through the unions. It was just a--there-there was a sense of hopefulness, expectation, solidarity, we can do things.

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It was a moderately sympathetic administration, very unlike today. And it was possible to have some achievements, which didn't end the Depression, but softened the edges, and made it look as if we can create a better future. So objectively, much worse, but subjectively, much better. And then, of course, in the background was what was happening in Europe, you know, the spread of fascism, which was very frightening. I'm old enough to remember, listening on the radio, to the Nuremberg Rallies, and Hitler's speeches, I didn't understand the words, but there was no mistaking what it meant. And, of course, after the first--it's kind of ironic, I guess, but my wife and I happened to be in Barcelona at the time of the November-November 8th election.

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And the attitude in Europe was the roof is falling in, you know, it-it-it was--this is the end of the world, you know. And it happens that when the first article that I wrote, that I remember at least, was about the fall of Barcelona. You know, so I can easily date it, February 1939. I'm-and I hope the article has disappeared. I'm sure it's not very memorable. I was the fourth editor of the fourth grade newspaper. And-and probably the only reader, except maybe my mother, I don't know. But the-but the article, I remember, was about--essentially, about the rise of fascism, you know, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Toledo, Barcelona. It looked inexorable. This monstrous shadow spreading all over the world with--and this is long before the Holocaust. You know, so-so that's the background. On the other hand, there was what was happening more within reach.

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By the time I was about 12 years old, we-we lived in Philadelphia about a hundred miles from New York. When I was 11 or 12, my parents would let me go to New York by myself on the train, stay with relatives, and hang around anarchist bookstores in Union Square, and...

>> KHALIL: I wonder how many parents in the audience are thinking about sending their 12-year-old on a train from Philly to New York by themselves.
>> CHOMSKY: It was-it was a much more peaceful time. It's pretty dramatic. I mean, in those days, you could--in New York, you could walk along, let's say, the-the river, Riverside Drive or Central Park, at-at night without any concern. You know, it's just--a-a lot of things changed after the Second World War, and don't know exactly why, but the cities became a much more dangerous, hostile places. There was plenty of conflict. You know, there were--you didn't--if you were Irish, you didn't go into the Italian neighborhoods, and that sort of thing.

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>> But you weren't gonna get killed. You might get, you know, chased there. I spent a lot of my childhood running away from Irish Catholic kids because they were too scary, but-but you weren't gonna get shot, you know, or knifed, or anything like that. That all changed for some reason after the Second World War, I don't understand why. All over the world, incidentally, here, strikingly.
>> KHALIL: So you talk about this general sentiment though of-of people being--the public being very hopeful, and around certain--
>> CHOMSKY: Parts of the public.
>> KHALIL: At-at least parts of it then, you know.
>> CHOMSKY: As I said, not-not the people John Steinbeck was writing about.
>> KHALIL: And you talk about an administration at that time that was maybe more sympathetic than the one that we have now. Leaving aside the administration part of that for the moment, do you feel that that hope has evaporated? Do you feel that we have been able to re-harness that in times of need? You talk about it as though it's--you know, this is very much in the past tense.

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Is that intentional?
>> CHOMSKY: No, I think it's still there. In fact, you know, take a look at the last election, November election. It was pretty--there were two striking aspects of it. One of them, not very startling, namely in the Republican primary, a person who was hated by the establishment, but who happens to be a billionaire, you know, won the nomination. Okay. It's kind of a surprise, but not startling that a billionaire con-man should win the nomination. What happened in the Democratic side is much more dramatic. The--you know, somebody arose who was unknown. Nobody ever heard him. He had no support from any of the sources of wealth and power, no corporate support, no funding from the wealthy. He-he even used the scare word, socialist, which means, "Mildly social democratic." In fact, his policies wouldn't surprise Eisenhower very much. That's a sign of the sharp shift to the right in the whole spectrum. But from the point of view of the existing spectrum, he seemed way on the outside. He would have won the Democratic Party nomination, if it hadn't been for the machinations of the Obama-Clinton party managers. That's a break from over a hundred years of American political history. I mean American elections are pretty much bought. You can literally pretty well predict electability, just on the basis of simple variables, like campaign spending.

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It's remarkable. Not just president. There's a recent interesting study by Tom Ferguson, who's done the main work on this, over at the UMass political science department. He and some colleagues came out last year with a study of congressional elections from about 1980 up until the present, and simply asking, "What's the relation between campaign funding and electability, which, of course, means policy." It's practically a straight line. You just don't get results in--like that in the social sciences. It's-it's startling. And the same is true of the presidential elections. And it's been known for a long time. You go back to the 1890s. There was a very famous campaign manager, Mark Hanna, who was a star of campaign management. He was asked once, "What does it take to win an election?"

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And he said, "It takes two things. You know, the first one is money." And I've forgotten what the second one is. That was 1895, way before Citizens United or any of this stuff. Here comes Sanders, and he just broke the pattern of over a hundred years. It's astonishing. And what's more, thanks to Fox News, we know that he's the most popular political figure in the country, a poll that they ran, by a huge margin, and among young people, enormous. Well, what does that mean? It means there's real signs of hope. It's out of the--you know, these two non-establishment figures that won the public, of course, not--the establishment assures itself that it controls the political system, and the decisions.

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So Trump could rail against Wall Street and Goldman Sachs on the campaign trail, but take a look at his cabinet. Okay? So they make sure they basically run the show, but they're losing the population. And the same is happening in Europe. The-the French election was a good example, two candidates from outside the two political parties, although the--you know, the thrust of policy will remain not all that different, you know, but that's a sign of potential changes. If we can ever go back to having functioning--you know, go back to partially create functioning democratic societies, that could be quite different.
>> KHALIL: So, stepping back a moment then to the-the political activism in your life. What do you remember out of your, you know, career, let's say, in political activism, as being some of the, "These are the moments that were defining for me."
>> CHOMSKY: Well, what was defining for me was things like--for those of you who know New York City.

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In those days, Union Square used to be a kind of a center of radical offices, Freie Arbeiter Stimme, for example, the Yiddish anarchist movement had its offices there, and others. And if you went down 4th Avenue, which is now all gentrified, you know, there were small bookstores with a-a-a lot of them run by European emigres. And a number of the ones that I kind of would gravitated towards were refugees from Spain, people who fled from--after the crushing of the anarchist revolution in 1937. And I-I picked up all kind of, you know, pamphlets understanding, I learned a lot of things, which are just barely getting

into the news now. For example, you can read books now which point out, if somewhat misleadingly, that in the 1930s, theoretically.

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The United States, the Roosevelt administration, was following a policy of neutrality. They don't support either side the fascists or the republic. In fact, they were supporting the fascists. I learned it in 1939, you know, from reading pamphlets and left wing literature, and others, which exposed the fact that the Texaco Oil Company, which was run by an outright Nazi, didn't even hide it, had contracts with the Republic to supply oil. In the middle of the conflict, he shifted. He started supplying oil to the fascist forces, Franco. There were questions asked. The State Department denied it. It turned out to be true. It was reported in the left wing press. And oil was the one thing that the Germans and the Italians, the fascist countries, couldn't supply the--to Franco's forces.

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They didn't have it, so they needed it. And Roosevelt and the State Department pretended they didn't see it. Only the small left wing press saw it. It was later kind of conceded. It's now kind of pretty much--you know, in scholarship, at least, it's sort of acknowledged a few years later. But I-I knew that in 1939, just from hanging around the left wing offices. That-that--and you could see what was going on, I mean, the, you know, the administration, Roosevelt, was very bitter and angry when they found a-a Mexican--an American businessman who had sold a couple of pistols to the Republic, you know, violating the Neutrality Act, big condemnation. And meanwhile, the-the major oil company was breaking its contracts with the Republic, and shifting them to, you know, the fascists.

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Well, that's an educational experience. I also learned things about the-the Civil--the-the war in Spain. It wasn't just the Republicans versus the fascists. There was a popular revolution in 1936, libertarian revolution, which was pretty successful. And it was crushed. It was crushed by the joint efforts of the fascists, the communists, and the liberal democracies. You know, they had a lot of differences. But there was one thing they agreed on. You can't have a free society. You can't have a libertarian society. So they cooperated on that. Actually, the attack was led by the communists, who were the party of the police force, and the petty bourgeoisie, and very opposed to any form of, you know, socialist or left activism. And, I mean, those are things you learn if you pay attention.

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And it was reinforced by other parts of my-of my family environment, as time in New York, you could--I mean, it was a very lively political scene. Every variety of left wing politics you can imagine was debated hotly. In fact, there was a friend of mine, who's a philosopher at Columbia, who told me recently that he and his wife got a place up in the Catskills to hang out in the summer. Turns out, these retirement communities there, where he said the people in the retirement communities are still debating which brand of Trotskyism was right. The same

arguments they were having in the 1930s. It's worth remembering that working class education was a very serious phenomenon then. It goes way back. I mean, you go back to the late 19th century here.

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The early Industrial Revolution, if an Irish blacksmith could get enough money, he'd hire a boy to read to him while he's working. And reading meant what we now call classics, modern contemporary literature. There were young women from the farms called factory girls, who were kind of compelled to get into the textile factories in Eastern New England. And they had their own publications. You read them. They bitterly condemn the fact that the industrial system was depriving them of their culture, of their dignity, their independence. You are selling yourself, not what you produce, you know, it's quite different. And part of it was an attack on the culture, same in England. There's a massive study, an interesting study, by a guy named Jonathan Rose of the reading habits of the English working class.

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And it turns out, his own conclusion is they were better educated than the aristocrats. And they didn't go to--I mean, have gone to school. They certainly didn't go to Oxford, but the-the-the working class, the rising working class, had its own institutions of education and culture, which was significant. And a lot of that has been destroyed, it's--in all kinds of ways. Google doesn't help. But there is another story, yeah.
>> KHALIL: Happy to do our part. So I asked you about political activism, and you talk about learning a lot. What part of that is--what part of activism did you take part in, and that was defining from--
>> CHOMSKY: I was-I was 12 years old, you know, not a lot of activism. But actually, the kind of activism I was involved in mostly in those years was within what was--what was--it's now called anti-Zionist, at that time, it was Zionist.

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You know, there was a--I was--my parents and my immediate milieu were deeply embedded in the whole revival of Hebrew revival of Jewish culture, connections to Palestine. And so--and I kind of grew up with that. And my own actual, mostly activism, was internal to that system. It was what is now called anti-Zionist. It was strongly opposed to a Jewish state in support of Arab-Jewish working class cooperation in Palestine, with all kinds of ideas about how to create a society, based on the cooperatives and so on. That kind of died in 1948. But that--at the time, it was alive, something you could be part of. And it extended to other things like--you know, there wasn't much in the way of activism, but when the British conquered Greece in 1944.

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And carried out brutal repression of the anti-fascist forces at Greece, you know, there were a couple of us who tried to protest, whatever it meant, when-when you're 15 years old, you know.
>> KHALIL: And you got very physically involved.
>> CHOMSKY: Well, there wasn't much you could do. It was right in the middle of a war. And there was a lot of patriotism, you know, dedication to the war effort. Bringing up these things was--by the-by the time the

war started, the political ferment declined because of commitment to the war effort, and it was just--it overwhelmed everything else. It was still around. Like, I was in high school in the early '40s, and it happened at the high school I was in, was right next to a prisoner of war camp where mostly German prisoners, and in those days, security meant a wire fence, so no-no big deal, and we could--and a lot of the students were in kind of ridiculing, and mocking, and screaming at the German POWs.

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And a couple of us were strongly opposed to that, and tried to, you know, tried to get them to understand that they--and there were--you know, there could be sort of--like I said, it's not violent the way it is today.
>> KHALIL: Sure.
>> CHOMSKY: It's the kind of thing that young boys do, you know. It was boys, of course, it was segregated, but we tried--a couple of us, maybe two or three of us, to try to change the mood of the students to understand that these guys on the other side of the fence are not criminals.
>> KHALIL: So that's fascinating. What do you mean by, "We tried to change the mood." Was that discourse?
>> CHOMSKY: To talk to people, it's education.
>> KHALIL: And these are high school students--
>> CHOMSKY: Yeah.
>> --having intellectual discourse about a prisoner of war camp right next door to the high school.

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>> CHOMSKY: It's probably easier for high school students than the Harvard faculty.
>> KHALIL: Oh, I-I imagine that. You'll forgive me for being a product of my own time, where I just can't even imagine a high school next to a prison of war camp.
>> CHOMSKY: Well, and separated by a wire fence.
>> KHALIL: Right.
>> CHOMSKY: Yeah.
>> KHALIL: All right. You-you became a little bit more perhaps politically active later on in your life then. At least not--
>> CHOMSKY: More publicly articulate, but the political activism never changed. Actually, it declined in the '50s. The '50s were a pretty quiescent period. Political activism was pretty individual. There was not a lot going on. It was--there were things in the background, but it was a pretty quiet, conformist period.
>> KHALIL: But then, you know, the '60s--
>> CHOMSKY: Early '60s, everything changed.
>> KHALIL: Everything changed. And you became then very active.
>> CHOMSKY: Publicly active. But it wasn't that much of a change for me, you know, personally, I'm just a different sphere, you know.

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>> KHALIL: I see. I see. So, what drove you to become more publicly active?
>> CHOMSKY: Well, John F. Kennedy. Though it's-it's still kind of, like off the agenda in 1961 and '62, that Kennedy very sharply escalated the

Vietnam War. It was already pretty awful. The--maybe 60,000 or 70,000 South Vietnamese had already been killed by the regime that the US have imposed in the 1950s, but it was kind of under the radar, like you weren't seen--you can find out about it, but you weren't seen much. But by '61 and '62, the repression of the South Vietnamese regime, we'd installed in violation of the Geneva Accords, had become so harsh, that a popular rebellion sprang up.

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The-the-the north actually opposed it. They didn't wanna--they wanted to build the country, not get involved in a conflict with the US. But the National Liberation Front, what propaganda calls the Viet Cong, were beginning to cause--beginning to develop and become active in the late '50s. And the regime couldn't contain them. So, there was a crisis. The Kennedy--Kennedy decided to escalate the war. The US Air Force began to bomb South Vietnamese targets under South Vietnamese markings. Like the planes had South Vietnamese markings, but nobody's fooled. I learned about it myself in a small item, maybe 10 lines in a back page of the New York Times, which just happened to mention casually that the-the US Air Force is bombing South Vietnamese targets.

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And they-they authorized Napalm, they started the chemical warfare, serious chemical warfare, to try to destroy crops and livestock, to starve out the population. They began to--programs to drive people into what amounted to concentration camps. They were called strategic hamlets, where peasants were driven off the land, driven into these places, into urban slums. And the-the official rhetoric was to protect them from the guerrillas, which, in fact, the government knew very well that they were supporting. It wasn't widely reported, but if you looked carefully. And from my own experience back in the late '30s, early '40s, I knew that you really had to look carefully, you know, take a look at the headlines, if they--put together what's lying behind them, like the Texaco story. And it was pretty clear that there was a sharp escalation of the war going on.

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So--and I did try to become active. What being active at that time meant giving a talk to some--couple of people in somebody's living room, or maybe in a church, where there were, you know, four people, you know, the-the minister, who was mildly sympathetic, some drunk who walked in from the street, another guy who wanted to kill you, and maybe one person who was certainly--
>> KHALIL: Sounds like a great way to start a movement.
>> CHOMSKY: Yeah, yeah, that's what it was like. But later it changed, but it took years. I mean, it wasn't until right here in Boston, if those of you who are old enough, and they remember, but in Boston, which is a pretty liberal city, the first public demonstration against the war was in October 1965. Internationally, that was an international day of protest was called.

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So we decided we'll take part in it, and there was a march from Harvard Square to the Boston Common, and supposed to be a demonstration there. I

was supposed to be one of the speakers. It was violently broken up by counterdemonstrators, a lot of them students. There were a lot of state police, which is the only reason we didn't get killed. Nobody could hear the speakers. It was impossible. Take a look at the Boston Globe the next day. It praised the counterdemonstrators, denounced the demonstrators for, you know, daring to question our great country, and what it's doing, and so on. March 1966 was the next international day of protest, and we realized we couldn't have a public demonstration. So we had a meeting at the Arlington Street Church. The church was attacked. Again, tomatoes, you know, cans, and so on.

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And at that time, there were already a couple 100,000 American troops rampaging in South Vietnam. It took a long time, and the country was practically destroyed. I mean, by--at that time, Bernard Fall, who was actually a Hawk, but was a highly respected and serious military historian, and Vietnam specialist, and-and by the US government, he was the one non-government specialist who was respected, rightly. He-he was a Hawk, but he cared about the Vietnamese people. And he was writing at the time,'66, '67, that he wasn't sure that Vietnam could survive as a cultural and historic entity under the most savage attack that any region that size had ever suffered. At that point, you're just barely beginning to get some visible protest. It's changed a lot.

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The country's become much more civilized since then. And by now, the opposition to aggression and violence is far more widespread. Governments just can't do what--like, say, the invasion of Iraq, it's the first time in the-the entire history of imperialism that there was massive protest on the--before the invasion actually took place. And the--they--it was pretty horrible what happened, you know, not to go into it, but the Bush administration could never contemplate what the Kennedy administration just did without any second thought. Public has just changed too much.
>> KHALIL: So, over your extensive career in being an activist in many different veins, obviously you've learned a lot along the way. And it's useful to share information with the world as you do, you know, you don't wanna--
>> CHOMSKY: I'll give you one example, which is kind of interesting. Maybe 30 years from now, it'll enter awareness.

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But take the Texaco Oil Company and the Spanish Civil War. That-that was repeated under the Clinton administration. Virtually the same thing. Under the Clinton, there was in Haiti, for the first time in its history, there was a free election in 1990. And it was won by a-a priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had nobody paid any attention to. He was supported by the people who were considered not worth looking at, urban slums, rural areas, a lot of grassroots activism. And to everyone's surprise, he won the election. They expected the US candidate would win, Marc Bazin, the World Bank guy, who--but Aristide won the election, and then, he-he instituted--the-the main question is, when will the military coup take place?

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Turned about seven-seven months later. It's quite interesting what had happened, but the military coup took place, a vicious brutal terror began. The US actually tacitly supported it in many ways. In 1994, the Clinton administration decided, "Okay, enough terror had taken place, so that the population subdued. We can now allow the president to return." The eve of the-the--there was a marine landing in 1994. Everyone paying attention to it. It was quite public. At the time, I happened to be-- there was a guy at MIT who was working on a project of experimenting to allow people to have access to the AP wires, which is pretty interesting, because what you get when you look at the AP wires is just raw news, you know, stuff pouring out constantly.

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The AP wires feature a story every day, keeps repeating, you know, to editors, "Here's the big story." The day before the marine invasion of Haiti, the big story was the Treasury Department concedes that the Texaco Oil Company has been providing oil to the military junta, while the CIA and the Clinton administration were denying that any oil was going to them. Well, I was gonna write an article about it, but the article that I would write would come out two months later, so I figure, it's not even worth mentioning this. It'll be public news. It's still not been reported--
>> KHALIL: Hmm.
>> CHOMSKY: --you know. Those are the things that happened in the world, if you pay attention.
>> KHALIL: So you've obviously been very successful in, sort of, reporting on these types of things and raising awareness. And-and that has been one avenue for your activism. I wonder, is this intrinsic to who you are or how you approach knowledge? Why aren't there more Noam Chomsky's in the world?
>> CHOMSKY: Well, I think there are plenty of them. For example, why is Bernie Sanders the most popular figure in the United States, political figure in the United States by a huge margin? Who's--where is the--where are those people who pick him as the most popular person? I mean, they may not be well known, but they're there.
>> KHALIL: I should think that as a percentage of the rest of--sort of the people out there who are active in the same way, very few of them are as educated as you have made yourself.

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>> CHOMSKY: You'd be surprised. I mean, actually, we have--I mean, people may not know things about the whole world, but they know things about their lives, and the situation that they're in. You know, take a look at polls. Why--for many--an issue that's right in the main--on the headlines, health care. Yeah, what do people think about health care? Well, it turns out that over a long period, most of the population has supported a national health care system, the kind that other countries have. That doesn't--which is pretty remarkable, because nobody publicly advocates it. When Obama put through the Affordable Care Act, at the time, initially, there was what was called a public option, which means you could choose to have essentially Medicare, you know, national health care.

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Almost two thirds of the population favored it, even though there was no public articulate support for it. It was dropped, of course, without comment. Then you go back a little further, in say, late Reagan years, it turned out that about 70% of the population had thought that guaranteed health care should be in the Constitution, because it's just an obvious right. And about 40% thought it already was in the Constitution. The-the Constitution is just some holy writ, which has everything good in it. So it must have had guaranteed health care, because it's so obvious. That's the public. Of course, it's not the elites. It's not the media. It's not the-the-the elite discourse. In fact, whenever the-the possibility is mentioned, it's called politically impossible, or lacking political support, which is accurate, if by political support, you mean the pharmaceutical corporations, and the insurance companies, and so on.

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Yeah, they don't support it. And the way our democracy works, that's political support. But the public is there. And is it-is it educated? I mean, you know, where do people get these ideas from? Take, say, the Vietnam War. That's a very, very interesting, revealing situation at the end of the Vietnam War. When the Vietnam War ended in 1975, every famous person had to make a statement about it, you know, so there's a ton of material about looking back at the Vietnam War, and what did it mean, and so on. And there was a spectrum, I've written about it, went through it. There's a spectrum. At-at one end, it's said it was a noble cause, if we'd fought harder, we could have won, you know, and we have to honor the effort. Actually, Obama agrees with this. That's the hawkish end. Then you go over to the--kind of what's called the left, you know, the critical end.

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And people, like, say, Anthony Lewis, who was one of the most harshest critics of the war, way out on the left. He wrote an article in which he said, "The war--" I'm quoting it, "The war began with blundering efforts to do good." Notice that that's an axiom. But you don't have to give evidence for that. If we did it, it was efforts to do good, by definition, on the left, what's called the left. Blundering, because it didn't work. So it began with blundering efforts to do good. But by 1969, it had become clear that it was a disaster. We couldn't bring democracy to Vietnam at a cost acceptable to ourselves. That's the critical end, okay? You don't have to give an argument to say we're trying to bring democracy. That's also an axiom, which kind of a principle you don't question, it's, like, 2 plus 2 equals 4.

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Well, at the very same time, there were polls taken among the public. And what did they find? They found that around 70% of the public said the war was not a mistake, it was fundamentally and morally wrong. And that went on as long as the polls were taken until the early '80s. Now the guy--the people who were running the polls, liberal, academic, political scientists, he did comment on these results. And he said, "Well, what it means is that people were opposed to American soldiers dying." Okay, maybe that's what it meant. Maybe it meant--they thought it was fundamentally wrong and immoral as they said. But that concept is--it's just kind of inconceivable, you know, so it's--but that's the public.

Were they educated? All right. I'd say that we're more educated than the elites who were writing--the educated elites who were writing the articles.

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>> KHALIL: So, switching gears for a moment, it's easy to find a lot of material on you speaking, either online, or-or, you know, articles that you've written about egregious wrongs in the world, and, you know, the-the-the historical background for these types of things. You have a lot of context for that. I wonder, how do you stay sane knowing how much room for improvement there is? Where's the levity in your life? And can you tell us a joke? I've-I've looked--I've--
>> CHOMSKY: The what? I already you a joke, Mark Hanna.
>> KHALIL: But I've looked for-for quite some time for a video of you telling a joke. It just doesn't seem to exist.
>> CHOMSKY: That's the people who make the videos, it's their problem.
>> KHALIL: I-I was also curious about, you--you're-you're--you're obviously very effective at sort of assimilating new information, and-and sort of digesting that in a-in a comprehensive way.

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I wonder about the tools, technology, and routines that help make your per day productive. How do you work?
>> CHOMSKY: It's pretty straightforward. How did 19th century working class people gain an education that was superior to that of the aristocrats in England? Did they use the internet? They read, you know. You look at what's going on around you, you talk to other people, you have interactions, you read, you learn about things. It's not quantum physics. It was understood that all this pretty much on the surface in these domains. It's just a matter of work--it's a little easier now. It used to be the case that if, you know, you want to look into, say, you know, the-the-the background. And you wanted to see what-what was the press saying about some topic in the 1970s.

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Okay. You have to go to the library, look up the microfilm, it's bit of a nuisance. But now, you can get it on the internet. Thanks to what we call the free market, which means that the taxpayer, putting huge amounts of subsidies into developing the high tech system of the next generation, which is handed over to private corporations for marketing and profit. So that's the internet, and computers, and so on and so forth. So now, it's a lot easier than going to the library, and looking up the microfilms, but not that different. I mean, the change from no libraries to libraries was a much bigger change than from libraries to the internet. In fact, similarly, the--you know, the change from sailing ships to telegraph was a much bigger change than speeding up the communication by a couple of milliseconds with some new technique, you know.

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So it's-it's a little easier, you know, but not fundamentally different.
>> KHALIL: So, this next question came in from Rakesh Sah, I apologize about my pronunciation there, from India. In an interview on 2012, you mentioned that artificial intelligence is going in the wrong direction by putting more emphasis on statistical techniques to mine data. Where do

you think it's heading now? And what steps should we take to make it sort of more meaningful to society?
>> CHOMSKY: Well, I-I don't know exactly what that quote is from. But--I mean artificial intelligence--what's called artificial intelligence, which is just part of cognitive science. It can, like any part of science, can go in two different directions, it can be--it can direct itself towards some engineering application, which may or may not be useful. Or it can go into trying to understand something about the world.

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Those are the choices. So take, say--you know, the work that happens to interest me most on language. One thrust is trying to understand how it is that we can, for example, do what we're now doing. Okay. What lies behind that? What's--what are the mental operations, or what are the principles? How's it acquired, and so on? Okay, that's one domain. Another domain is, how can we get something that's useful to give kind of a rough translation of an article in French into English, the Google Translator. That's okay, I mean, I use it, it's fine. It's--but it's a brute force engineering achievement. It doesn't tell you anything about how the world is working. It just says here's something useful, like a bulldozer. I don't have anything against bulldozers.

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I think they're great, you know. A lot easier than digging with a shovel. But-but it's not--intellectually, it's not an intellectually interesting achievement. It's useful. Okay.
>> KHALIL: Have you driven a bulldozer? I mean, I haven't, but I dream to someday.
>> CHOMSKY: I'd be-I'd be scared. But I have a shovel.
>> KHALIL: Why is that? Okay. Well we have a base context then, and a shared experience with that. That's good. So-so, yeah, I-I think that this is-this is an interesting thing that I think you've talked about in the past. The-the interview, by the way, was in 2012, with The Atlantic. I'd-I'd love to unpack that a little bit. Where would you like to see--how would you like to see AI research tackle these types of deeper understanding problems?
>> CHOMSKY: Whenever you learn something in the sciences, what immediately happens is you discover there's a mass of new things, which I never noticed before that I don't understand.

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I mean scientific research is kind of like mountain climbing. You think that that peak over there is the top, but when you get there, you find, wait a minute, turns out, there's other peaks that you didn't notice before. Well, that's where scientific research had gone. That take--I mean, what perhaps interest me is the human cognitive capacity, which is an astonishing fact, that humans are absolutely unique in the organic world, in an enormous number of respects. Humans are not that old in evolutionary terms, about 200,000 years. So something happened around 200,000 years ago, you know, plus or minus, in which created an entirely new organism, which has what we call higher intelligence, that which it is now using incidentally to create something that should be headlines in every newspaper.

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They were using human intelligence to create a perfect storm. Since the Second World War, human intelligence has created means of suicide, self-destruction. The first is nuclear weapons. The Second World War ended with the nuclear age. It was obvious right at the time, I can tell you, personal experiences, that we had now--human intelligence had now devised the means to destroy everything. You know, that's the nuclear age. We've barely survived it. It wasn't known then, but it's now known, that at the same time, end of the Second World War, we'd entered a new geological epoch, in what's called the Anthropocene, where human activities are having a severely destructive impact in the environment. Geologists have kind of debated its inception. But they have now more or less agreed--world--geological organizations have agreed on end of the Second World War.

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So here, we created two huge sledgehammers, which are able to destroy us. In the 1970's, human intelligence took the next step. Let's destroy the means to protect ourselves. That's pretty much what happened as the new--as the period of what was called regimented capitalism shifted to the Neoliberal era. The Neoliberal era of the last generation is dedicated in principle to destroying the only means to defend ourselves from destruction. It's not called that. What it's called is shifting decision making from public institutions, which, at least, in principle, are under public influence, to private institutions, which are immune from public control, in principle. You know, that's called a shifting to the market. It's under the rhetoric of freedom, but it just means servitude. It means servitude to unaccountable private institutions. The rhetoric, for those of you who remember Margaret Thatcher, "There is no society, just individuals."

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An ideal, not a description. But she may not have known it, but she was paraphrasing Karl Marx, who, at the period of the severe French repression, had said the French repression is turning society into a sack of potatoes, amorphous class of individuals, who can't work together, who are separated and atomized. That's the ideal of Neoliberalism. Let's turn society into a sack of potatoes. Let's eliminate the institutions that might--in which engaged, and that the people might get together to try to deal constructively with their problems. Let's transfer it into the hands of unaccountable private institutions, which are devoted in principle to profit maximization and power maximization. Of course, that means undermining democracy. That's what's happened.

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That's why we see what's called--it's a bad term, it's called the populist uprising. Nothing populist about it. It means an anger, fear, hatred, discontent, contempt for institutions, a collapse of institutions, a direct consequence of the Neoliberal economic policies, which have also led to stagnation or decline for the majority. Real wages have actually declined since 1979 when the program began. All of this is together, and put it together, what you have is human intelligence has created two means of destroying yourself, and it has also been actively engaged in trying to eliminate the only protection we have against them.

So it's a kind of perfect storm, you know, that's what humans have done. How did this happen? How did we get this way?

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How did we develop creative capacities of a unique kind, which have led to extraordinary achievements? Okay, these are things we have to try to understand, all of them. And do something about, not just understand.
>> KHALIL: Another question from Oleg Sushkov from Australia, asks, "How do you think Google can and should handle the fake news problem?" We have a big hammer. We're looking for nails.
>> CHOMSKY: Well, by not contributing to it. So, for example, you know, the internet is actually slowing down in some respects. And one of the reasons it's slowing down is because if you pick up, you want to say access, say, The New York Times, the first thing that gets loaded is a ton of ads, which slow everything down. Now all of this is going on all the time.

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It's contributing to the narrowness of coverage, and even to the kind of coverage, because it's influenced by, of course, the choice, the funding, the institutions, of course, it's influenced by its funders, mostly advertisers. So all of that's happening. And it's--you know, it's not what people call fake news, but it's a distortion of the world in ways that shouldn't be happening. So, the actual news, I think, should be what we've just been talking about. Like, why are we--why, for the last generation, have we constructed socioeconomic policies and political policies which are developing a perfect storm which could destroy us? That's what we--
>> KHALIL: So if we can devise a way for--I mean obviously advertising monetization is the way that a lot of publications exist. And perhaps without it, many of those publications would be without the funding required to continue.

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>> CHOMSKY: That's not true. The period of the freest, most lively press in the United States was probably in the 19th century, when you had a proliferation of all kinds of newspapers, ethnic, working class. I mentioned the factory girls. There were others. What happened in the late 19th century is--in England and the United States, which also saw a similar shift towards capital concentration and advertiser reliance, and that has very sharply narrowed and changed the-the-the nature of media. So, say in England, as late as the 1960s, the most popular widely read newspaper was "The Daily Herald", which was kind of social-democratic.

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Now, the tabloids in England, which are now monstrous, were labor-based newspapers, and pretty interesting. They succumbed to the consequences of capital concentration, and advertiser reliance, and became quite different. Similar here. When I was a kid growing up, there were several newspapers delivered, local newspapers, delivered every day. They were not--there was a certain variety. Now they're--in the Boston, now there isn't even one. "The Boston Globe" used to be a pretty decent newspaper, you know, problems, but a lot of--they had bureaus all over the world, they have very good reporters. And-and take a look at it now. It-it

basically doesn't exist. It's--it has some local news, and the rest, it picks up "The New York Times", "Washington Post", AP. That's happened all over the country. It's-it's--it has a lot of reasons behind it.

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But it's--the large part of it is that, it's been going on for over a century, it's just continuing, the large part is the effect of capital concentration and advertiser reliance, which affects the content of the-the media reporting as well.
>> KHALIL: In that case, we'll cancel our advertising programs.
>> CHOMSKY: See, advertising is a very interesting phenomenon. Any of you that have taken an economics course know that the-the-the-the-the beauty, beauty, the marvels of the market that we're supposed to admire and worship are because the market is based on informed consumers making rational choices. Then you prove all sorts of theorems about how wonderful it is. Turn on your television set. Do you see efforts by corporations to create informed consumers making rational choices? Is that what you see when you see an ad for cars?

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I mean, if we had a market system, what you would see is when General Motors is advertising a car, what you would see is a list of the characteristics of the car, along with a report by "Consumers Report", saying what's wrong with it, and so on. That would create informed consumers that could make rational choices. But you don't see that. What you see is an effort to delude, you know, a-a movie star, or a football player, or a car shooting up into the stratosphere, or wherever it may be. Huge amounts of capital are expended every year to try to undermine markets, undermine markets by creating uninformed consumers making irrational choices, and driving them to consumerism, which atomizes rather than serious things. Now that's what ought to be taught in economics courses.

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Massive efforts by the business community to undermine markets. It's-it's not deep. We all know it, you know? We just somehow don't think about it. And that--just as we don't think about the fact that the--you know, the-the marvels of free enterprise, like computers, the internet, and so on, were created by the taxpayer at public expense, in places like MIT, right across the street. Thank you. Uh-hmm.
>> KHALIL: So I wish we could go on forever. I'm riveted, but unfortunately, we're out of time. Thank you so much for coming, but one thing I will say, though, is that it's not every day that a non-Googler gets to sit in a room full of people who work at Google, and are software engineers, and are advertising experts, and are, you know, market experts in different fields. Do you have anything that you'd like to ask us?
>> CHOMSKY: Why not do some of the serious things?
>> KHALIL: Okay. Something that we will answer.

[01:00:07]
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