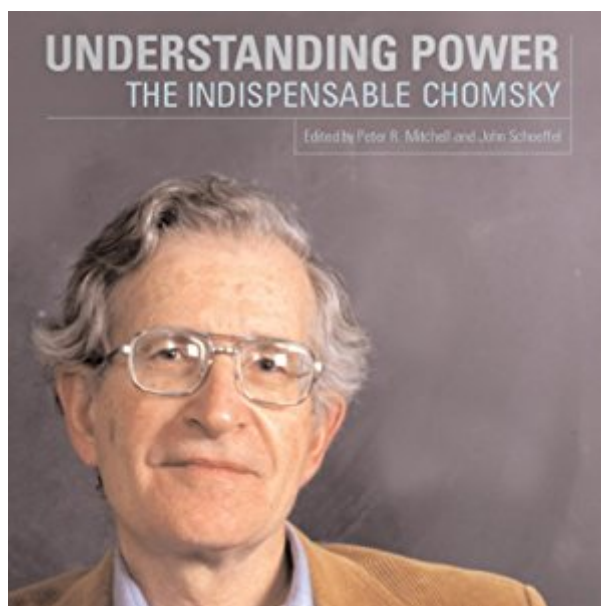


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Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky



Synopsis

A major new collection from "arguably the most important intellectual alive" (The New York Times). Noam Chomsky is universally accepted as one of the preeminent public intellectuals of the modern era. Over the past thirty years, broadly diverse audiences have gathered to attend his sold-out lectures. Now, in *Understanding Power*, Peter Mitchell and John Schoeffel have assembled the best of Chomsky's recent talks on the past, present, and future of the politics of power. In a series of enlightening and wide-ranging discussions, all published here for the first time, Chomsky radically reinterprets the events of the past three decades, covering topics from foreign policy during Vietnam to the decline of welfare under the Clinton administration. And as he elucidates the connection between America's imperialistic foreign policy and the decline of domestic social services, Chomsky also discerns the necessary steps to take toward social change. With an eye to political activism and the media's role in popular struggle, as well as U.S. foreign and domestic policy, *Understanding Power* offers a sweeping critique of the world around us and is definitive Chomsky. Characterized by Chomsky's accessible and informative style, this is the ideal book for those new to his work as well as for those who have been listening for years.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I just bought this book and I am immensely pleased with it. I own other Chomsky books -- *Manufacturing Consent*, *Fateful Triangle*, and the short interview-based books from Common

Courage Press, among others -- and I have to say that this is far and away my favorite of the lot. The more scholarly books, like *Manufacturing Consent* and *The Fateful Triangle*, are thick with documentation but rather dry -- this doesn't bother me personally, but it's difficult to introduce them to someone else. On the other hand, the more accessible works, *What Uncle Sam Really Wants*, for example, come off to the layperson as the radical ravings of a lunatic, and unless the reader already has similar sympathies or suspicions, they are far from persuasive. This is exacerbated by the fact that in these Chomsky offers little in the way of proof, and this is why I shy away from recommending these volumes to Chomsky newcomers; as Chomsky himself would say, he sounds like he's coming from Mars. *Understanding Power* is a very welcome addition to the canon in large part because it addresses the aforementioned problems. For one, the questions he responds to aren't the softballs David Barsamian usually pitches him -- his interlocutors occasionally ask the very questions a skeptical or simply curious reader might be thinking to himself -- and his responses reflect this: they're less "crazy" and alien, and more thoughtful, informative, and generally convincing. A second reason *Understanding Power* deserves heaps of praise is the footnotes. ... The footnotes are incredible, absolutely incredible, and it's easy to see why they aren't included in the book. ...

Required reading. It is pretty much a given that Chomsky's ideas are compelling, whether you agree or not. The extraordinary value-add in this book is the editing job. It is obvious and gigantic. The authors have organized Chomsky's talks into logically flowing, highly documented, and parallel-structured snippets of one to three pages each - and there are a couple of hundred of them. Most of them open with an audience question, and a quick retort by Chomsky. This is followed by a key word: Look, Actually, or See, after which Chomsky goes into huge depth and detail, never straying from the focus. Again, the editing is what makes it all compelling, useful, and evenly paced. The amount of work that went into tearing apart years of talks, conversations and lectures, and then organizing them in complementary sections, making them fit a format that allows the reader to breeze through (well relatively breeze through) the densely packed insights of Noam Chomsky deserves some sort of award. The footnotes are the most useful and detailed I have ever seen. They are a monumental standalone work in and of themselves. I only wish THEY were indexed like the book is - after all, there are 449 pages of them, compared to 401 pages in the book. While Chomsky comes off as extraordinarily insightful, there are weaknesses - holes you could really exploit if you ever had the privilege of arguing with him. His knowledge of financial markets and foreign currency exchange, hedge funds and such is not only superficial, but sometimes just plain wrong. Sometimes

he generalizes immense conclusions from a few superficial and specifically chosen facts that ignore the complexity of the situation.

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