

The responsibility of intellectuals (redux)

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



Noam Chomsky sets out to discuss the responsibilities of intellectuals in the political and social arena of current times in the face of a myriad of issues. Prominent in his discussion, are terrorism, human rights international warfare today and in retrospect as well as issues historical injustices occasioned by some of the above. He commenced his discourse by discussing what he alleges to have been the murder of September 2001's main suspect, Osama bin Laden by American forces describing him as having been unarmed hence could have been as easily captured. He juxtaposes the action with Lincoln's sentiments of the issue that he vilified as immoral and criminal.

Chomsky delves into the historical concept of intellectuals in reference to several scholars including Dreyfusards', whose stance depicted they were defenders of justice and integrity although by then they were not seen as such and Zola who was jailed for his liberal views. These lead to the timeless question; what is the responsibility of intellectuals? He proposes a solution for that in that the intellectuals in their individuality stood behind their respective armies in World War One. According to Chomsky, they were not actually representing any valid intellectual positions, but they were victims of misinformation, and war propaganda. However, the results were seen as evidence of the fact that intellectuals can handle and control human affairs effectively. Nonetheless, it was evident that those who did not support the government's actions such as Bertrand Russell, Eugene Debs, and others were punished showing that it was not about the intellectuals proposing what needed to be done, but the government using them for support and opposition led to suffering.

The article goes ahead to illustrate a connection between intellectuals and governing power, according to Chomsky, since power often prevails; intellectuals who support governments appear responsible since the government's success is often attributed to them. The selective treatment of intellectuals who oppose governments is explored in depth. In the cold war era for instance, value oriented intellectuals were honored while commissars were viewed with contempt, the height of the irony an example of Mandela who was considered a terrorist by the American government up to 2008. However, intellectuals in Latin America who called for peace and justice did not make it on the honored list of dissidents. That is likely because the American government was part of the injustice they were fighting, he cites a case where Jesuits priest were executed by America trained soldiers. The priests, had they been in another country maybe in china or Eastern Europe might have been considered dissidents, but when their activities are in that geographical area, the issue does not arise.

US military activity in Columbia in 1962 is also examined in an effort to fight communists proponents but often led to transforming the armies of the country into death squads. Many innocent people were killed because of these activities, and the American government has remained reluctant to take responsibility concerning this issue. Chomsky concludes by asserting that it is apparent those considered intellectuals are those who support and rationalize criminal actions of their governments. He compared the authentic dissidents to the Hebrew prophets who were scorned and discriminated while the flatterers in the king's courts were honored. He concludes by observing the duties of intellectuals do not go past the truths, as they are privileged

that comes with an opportunity and consequently a responsibility.

Work Cited

Chomsky, Noam. The Responsibility of Intellectuals, Redux , Using Privilege to Challenge the State. Boston Review. September 2011 < http://www.bostonreview.net/BR36.5/noam_chomsky_responsibility_of_intellectuals_redux.php>