

9-11 by Noam Chomsky  
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*Reviewed by Michael Pozo*

Noam Chomsky is a respected political activist, writer and professor of linguistics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Some of his books include: *Manufacturing Consent (with E.S. Herman)*; *The Culture of Terrorism*; *Media Control* and *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*.

Before reading *9-11* two things should be clear. First, this book should not serve as an introduction to Chomsky merely because of its brevity. As has been evident from so many other reviews, the book is easily misunderstood as a hastily compiled collection of unsubstantiated claims. The truth is, most of the facts and arguments Chomsky gives in relation to September 11, 2001 are well documented from his previous books. So if you are interested in where he came up with his information then you will find it in his more comprehensive texts, with the sources revealed through extensive footnotes.

Second, the book's accessibility (due to its length) and its obvious reactionary title may easily be misconstrued as fit for only a *radical's* approach to U.S. critique. Yet for those readers not familiar with Chomsky, it's also easy to feel the sway of an "anti-American" current within the book's one hundred and eighteen pages. However, if able to get past such fervor on both sides, the book's purpose is clear but by no means a definitive understanding of Chomsky's ideas. In fact, the most constructive attitude one can attain from this book is to agree with our foreign critics. As Chomsky reiterates, those outside the U.S. don't have a problem with the people but with our government. Chomsky's views and efforts, going on forty years or so, have continually strived to assist rather than impede.

*9-11* is a collection of interviews conducted with Noam Chomsky from various news organizations shortly after the attacks. The driving point throughout his comments is that if the U.S. truly believes itself to be a democracy and wishes to be viewed in this light, it must be involved and open to serious critique. The events of September 11, 2001 served to increase this urgency more than ever before.

Chomsky challenges U.S. rhetoric on "terrorism" in order to supplant simplistic ideology such as "good" versus "evil". His argument is that such talk avoids confronting the reasons for September 11. Many readers may find his comparisons of the events of September 11 offensive if not for their validity as a very real pattern of U.S. aggression throughout the years. He cites (among others) our shameful involvement in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Indonesia and the Philippines. Our country's own sordid involvement in foreign affairs has often been less "televised" and quite censored. The absence, or rather disappearance, of the history of our overseas affairs creates a foggy recollection for the general public. This in turn reduces our own brutal actions to a blanketed type of U.S. intervention in which the U.S. reserves the right to intervene as it sees fit, often ending with horrific consequences for the local populations.

According to *9-11*, if such hypocrisy is exposed it may lead us to examine more important and, ultimately, preventative measures. Rather than the false propaganda of patriotism and "cut and dry" illusions, we may look to explore the motivations behind such horrific attacks. Chomsky puts the events of September 11th into perspective when he says, "nothing can justify crimes such as those of September 11, but we can think of the United States as an 'innocent victim' only if we adopt the convenient path of ignoring the record of its actions, which are, after all, hardly a secret"(35).

Incidentally, our cooperation with terrorists and murderous regimes is often only remembered by those who were fortunate enough to escape them. Yet there is the very real problem within such communities in this country to speak out for fear of being deemed unpatriotic or ungrateful.

Again, *9-11* should not be confused with the slew of post -September 11th books. It is not a fixation on Bin Laden or the events themselves. Chomsky constructively re-focuses the study on the need for U.S. citizens

to understand why their government is so hated around the world. The argument being that such an intelligent undertaking would be for the exact opposite of Bin Laden's wishes, mainly the promise of more bloodshed. When he does speak of Bin Laden, it is done prior to the information we have now. But he nevertheless makes Bin Laden's goals clear. They are, mainly, the overthrow of corrupt regimes aided by the U.S. and the installation of whatever he deems to be a true "Islamic" regime. Yet Chomsky concludes that Bin Laden's goals, despite his rhetoric, did nothing for the majority of poor men, women and children who are often mere collateral damage of warring powers. The case was no different here. The losers were the same.

Chomsky had hoped for an active social element after the attacks. As he said, "if the goal of social activists is to reduce the likelihood of further atrocities and to advance hopes for freedom, human rights, and democracy...they should intensify their efforts to inquire into the background factors that lie behind these and other crimes and devote themselves with even more energy to the just cause to which they have already been committed"(116).

Yet with the fall of the Taliban and the dispersing of Al Qa'ida we may have found a quick solution. But Indonesia, Kuwait, the Philippines and Russia may be asking what type of "progress" have we really made. The chance to change the course of U.S. reactionary politics may have indeed been lost.

*9-11* is a brief synopsis of the two most difficult tasks facing dissidents; the overwhelming allegiance to concision in information and the often-undisciplined *radical* approach. However, as a text **for** peace it's one of many still striving to reach an audience kept uninformed for so long. The hope to curb terror and violence, as we have learned, should now belong to everyone.