



# Noam Chomsky (Critical Lives)

*Wolfgang B. Sperlich*

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Noam Chomsky has become the acknowledged supreme anti-authoritarian figure of our age. A prolific writer, researcher and critical thinker, he has shaped contemporary linguistics, philosophy and liberal thought like no other. Volumes on Chomsky abound, yet an approachable and up-to-date introduction to the man and his life has until now been lacking, due perhaps to the sometimes dense and technical nature of Chomsky's writing, and also the sheer volume of his work. "Noam Chomsky" presents just such an introduction. With extensive biographical background notes, photographs, and illustrations, Wolfgang B. Sperlich introduces the reader to Chomsky's major innovations in linguistics and politics, illuminating the work within its historical context. Chomsky's formative years and his main intellectual influences, especially in the field of language studies; and his gradual separation from the mainstream American intellectual community are described. The work also traces the latest developments in Chomskyan linguistics and how they relate to wider issues of cognition, neuro-science, biology and evolution. Chomsky's career as a political activist is charted: from a 16-year-old university student against the background of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the 1950s and '60s and his pacifist-anarchist lectures and writings; the 1970s and '80s and his development of increasingly radical anarcho-syndicalist thought; the late 1980s and '90s and his seminal treatise on mass-media Manufacturing Consent; and, to the present where he has become an increasingly ferocious critic of American politics and the American political system. Those interested in Chomsky's contributions to linguistics will find in Noam Chomsky a challenging but non-technical introduction; those interested in Chomsky's politics will receive a common-sense lesson in political analysis; and, those interested in Chomsky's life will discover a rich and sympathetic portrait of a man who, despite a forbidding reputation, is actually very human indeed.

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