DR. DRAGO: Today we welcome Professor Noam Chomsky back to Central High School.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Glad to be back. My first time since 1945.

DR. DRAGO: There we go, there we go yeah, that was the preview. So we just wanted to say thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to speak with us. Just so the audience knows, so the folks at home know, Professor Chomsky graduated as part of 184th class of Central High School. Since joining the staff of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1955, he has published hundreds of articles and dozens of books related not only to linguistics, but also philosophy, politics, contemporary issues, and of course, United States foreign policy. In short, Professor Chomsky represents the paragon of what it means to be a critical thinker. Our first interviewer will be Ana Hallman, a senior.

ANA HALLMAN: Hi Professor Chomsky. So I wanted to ask about something that you’ve said before. So you’ve said before that the elite control the media, but Donald Trump is part of this elite. So why is he at war with the media?

NOAM CHOMSKY: He’s not.

ANA HALLMAN: He’s not?

NOAM CHOMSKY: He’s strong. He’s strongly supported by the media. The major capital table, TV network, Fox News, is a strong supporter. It’s the only TV channel that is specifically focused on a particular strain - pretty reactionary strain - of one of the political parties. None of the others are like this. Talk radio has been taken over by the far right, it’s going to be even more so that strongly supports him. It’s true that there’s a sector of the media, the measure of news channels, that don’t particularly like him but that’s been proved with just about every political figure you can think of.

ANA HALLMAN: Thank you.

MORGAN MIFFLIN: Hi Mr. Chomsky. My name is Morgan and I’m also a senior. My question is: what would you say has been the most surprising or interesting part of the 2016 elections, and how do you feel this election will impact future elections as well as today's political climate?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well by far the most interesting aspect of the 2016 election was the Bernie Sanders phenomenon. The fact that a billionaire supported by other billionaires and with considerable media backing was able to win the presidency over the objection of much of the party's establishment, that's a little surprising, but not really startling. But the fact that the Sanders campaign broke sharply with over a hundred years of American political history - substantial academic research and political science has demonstrated quite persuasively that even a very simple variable like campaign spending is a remarkably good predictor of electability, and that's a policy that - I won't run through the details - but they're pretty remarkable. Well here came somebody for the first time in a little over a century with no support from the corporate sector, no support from private wealth, no media support - mostly they're disdained or disregarded, even use a scary word: "socialist" in the United States as distinct from other countries, that frightening word - and he would have won the democratic party nomination if it hadn't been for the machinations of party managers he might have preferably won the election. By now, in fact, according to polls, and certainly from Fox News, he is by far the most popular political figure in the country. This is really astonishing, there's been nothing like it as far back a we want to go in American history, and it has lots of implications I think.
MORGAN MIFFLIN: Thank you very much.

ROMIE AZOR: Hello Professor Chomsky, my name is Romie and I am also a senior. My question is: what are your thoughts on Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris climate change agreement?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well every country in the world is trying to do something - if not for some quite a lot, others not enough - but at least something to deal with the worst crisis that humans have ever faced in their history. Namely the threat of severe environmental catastrophe which could have devastating effects even in the pretty near future, like your lifetime, unless steps are taken to address it and reverse the tendency towards disaster. That's virtually every country in the world; there is one country in the world, the richest most powerful country in world history, with unparalleled advantages, which is not only refusing to participate, but in fact is acting with dedication to try to accelerate the race to destruction. That's the republican parties of America. The world is looking for someone to rescue it and they're looking to China. So here we have this astonishing spectacle of the world hoping that China will lead the way to salvation, while the self-proclaimed leader of the free world, with unparalleled power and advantages, is trying to undermine the prospects for decent survival, and if somebody from Mars was watching this, they would be astonished. And even more astonishing is that this is not a headline in the newspaper everyday, and it goes way back to the republican primaries. If you go back to the primaries, which were very well reported of course, one thing was ignored: every single candidate, without exception, either denied that what is happening is happening or said well maybe it is but we shouldn't do something, anything about it. That was the so-called moderates: Jeb Bush and John Kasich. This is astonishing; even more astonishing if anyways is what happened on November 8th. I happened to be in Europe so I was watching the European news, all the news was about the American election results, which were important until something much more happening, which wasn't covered here either. There was a conference in Morocco going on, almost 200 countries were trying to put some teeth into the Paris agreement of December 2015, and in that international conference the anticipation was that they could reach a verifiable treaty, but that could not be done because of one organization: the republican party, which would not accept any binding commitments. So what was reached in Paris was just unverifiable commitments; the meeting in Morocco was an attempt to go beyond this. The meeting started, it proceeded on November 8th, the World Meteorological Organization gave a detailed report on the state of the world climate, it was very dire in many ways - I won't go through the details - and then the conference stopped because the election results came in from the United States and the world had to face the fact that I just described. Then came discussions about how we can survive this body-blow, and again they ended up looking to China for leadership. That's the world we're looking at with utter astonishment.

ROMIE AZOR: Thank you.

DARYA BERSHADSKAYA: Hi Professor Chomsky, I'm Darya and I'm a junior at Central. So I was wondering if you would agree that in terms of Western Culture, secular constitutions define, and in some ways guarantee, the parameters for religious freedoms?

NOAM CHOMSKY: I'm sorry, I didn't quite understand.

DARYA BERSHADSKAYA: Would you like for me to repeat it?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Yeah, I didn't get the point.
DARYA BERSHADSKAYA: Ah yes, well, let me just repeat the question really quickly.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Yeah.

DARYA BERSHADSKAYA: Would you agree that in terms of Western Culture, secular constitutions define, and in some ways guarantee, the parameters for religious freedoms?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well they certainty should. The United States Constitution pretty much does that. Other constitutions do so more or less, it varies, but it certainly is a desideratum. There should be guarantees for cultural and religious freedom.

DARYA BERSHADSKAYA: Okay, thank you for that.

MADDY STROHM: Hi Professor Chomsky, my name is Maddy Strohm and I'm a junior at Central High School, and my question is: what do you think the line is between anarchism and totalitarianism?

NOAM CHOMSKY: They're at extreme opposite ends of the spectrum. Every other form of political organization that you can think of is in between these two extremes. So I don't think one can really describe a line, it's like finding a line between zero and infinity - lot's of things in between.

MADDY STROHM: Thank you.

HENRY MCDEVITT: Hi Professor Chomsky. My name is Henry, I'm a junior. So my question is only relevant if you keep up with Donald Trump on Twitter. So I guess that's my first question.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well, I don't. I don't use it but there's enough reported in the press so I have some sense of what goes on.

HENRY MCDEVITT: Okay, did you see his most recent controversial tweet where he said "covefefe," it was like an unintelligible word and nobody really knew what it meant?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Yeah, I read about it, and I think that's consistent with the whole con-game that's going on. Whether he's doing it purposefully or knows what he's doing or not, I don't know. But the people who are organizing the general program like Steve Bannon, I presume understands very well, the idea is to keep the tension focused on this media personality, so with the latest strange or obscure thing he's said is you know he was three million illegal immigrants voted for Clinton. Obama was at his house, whatever it is, it doesn't matter how crazy the word is that he made up. They're focused on that, meanwhile the basically Paul Ryan-wing of the Republican party, which is the most extreme and savage wing of reactionary politics - he's slowly, quietly, ramming through legislation, which the population would never accept, and the executive orders are becoming quietly, and they're implementing a project which is barely looked at. Sometimes it's really quite astonishing, so it's quite interesting to see the way the republican party managers Ryan and McConnell, manage to sneak through a vote, hidden by Trump craziness and his ram through virtually in secret which took away your privacy, which allows commercial institutions to use information about you that you don't want to give them, and they use it for advertising and probably controlled purposes. Turns out the population is overwhelming opposed to that, so it had to be done in secret, and it was - it was sort of finally noticed when it happened. But things like that are happening step-by-step, so there's kind of a two-tiered
process going on, one we pay attention to the twitters, the crazy statements, the claims that need to be verified and you forget about later, I should say that Democrats are participating in this by focusing on the really quite marginal question of whether there was Russian efforts to interfere in the election, the kind of thing we do all the time far more and so on. So they're focusing on that all the actual programs that are being implemented, which are extremely harmful, are being pretty much sidelined, and I suspect that's what the whole twitter phenomenon is about.

HENRY McDEVITT: Yeah, that's really interesting. Thank you.

ALEX WIESNER: Hello Mr. Chomsky.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Hi

ALEX WIESNER: I'm a junior, my name is Alex, and I had a question that sort of is away from Trump but is on the topic of nationalism. And I first wanted to establish, just to be clear, are you opposed to all forms of nationalism?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well I think that people have perfect right to cultural and other forms of identification as they choose to construct them. As long as they're not harmful to others.

ALEX WIESNER: But do you think they could ever be legitimate logically, or supported with logic?

NOAM CHOMSKY: I'm sorry. A supported what?

ALEX WIESNER: Do you think that nationalism could ever be supported with logical argument?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well, nations have been defined by the scholarship as imagined communities, and they're all kinds of imagined communities to which we belong, and they can be perfectly constructive. People do not want to be isolated atoms, they want association with others, so when I was at Central High School, I cheered for the football team even though I didn't care about it, and that's part of the kind of membership in a community, you'll adopt certain things. When I take my grandson to a Red Sox baseball game and we cheer for the Red Sox, I give in, that's fine, it doesn't mean anything it's just saying yeah we're in a friendly relationship with the other people sitting in the stands eating hot dogs and drinking coke or something, a nice afternoon. And if nationalism is something like that, which it can be, then it's not something negative, even has positive significance. If it turns into something that involves real hostility and aggressiveness, then it's something different. And the same is true even of rooting for your favorite team.

ALEX WIESNER: Well the main part of my question was - I wanted to clarify that because I wanted to what extent do you feel nationalism is essential for inspiring people to join institutions such as the military and put their lives on the line for their country?

NOAM CHOMSKY: I don't know if it's nationalism, I mean if you're in a country, you have connections with other people in the country that you don't have outside of it. So for example, even I can vote for policies that affect what the United States government does to a limited extent, a sufficient extent those are democracies limited. But it exists and I can do that. However, I can't vote for policies that Germany will follow. I meet other people who speak the same language or part of the same culture or carry out that in the same activities much moreso to an extent here than in other countries, although
there are plenty of connections with other countries, too. And those associations can reflect themselves in the decision let's say, when I was a student at Central High, the decision was to join the war against the axis. That was a national decision, I personally approved of it, but I couldn't make the country participate in the choice to have Australia join the war. So yes, there's something to that, and it may be harmful and negative but not necessarily.

ALEX WIESNER: Alright, thank you.

ASA CADWALLADER: Hi Mr. Chomsky, my name is Asa, and I'm a senior. So we read parts of your book Manufacturing Consent in the beginning of the year, and my question is: has technology, specifically the internet, forced mass media to be more or less transparent with the American people?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Actually my co-author and I, coauthor is an emeritus Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, the Wharton School, we did do a second edition of the book about fifteen years ago in which we considered the question of whether the appearance of the internet should - it was pretty lively in that time - whether that affected the conclusions we were drawing, and we decided that they really didn't. We did modify the original book in some way because of changes that have taken place, but not this. Now if I were asked that what you just asked, I would think I would draw pretty much the same conclusions with regard to the major media and the way they function, the internet has had some effects, but I don't think its changes the essential properties. Like take the one example that I just mentioned, the absolutely astonishing facts about what's been happening in the past year, essentially, with regard to attitudes toward policy, on attitudes but policy toward climate change. In my view, free and independent media should be absolutely focusing attention on this, and should have been ever since the republican primaries. This is the most important issue in human history, but they don't, it's there, you know, if you look for it you can see some discussion about it, but it's kind of at the margins. During the primary campaigns it was barely there, well that's pretty much what we would have predicted on the basis of the analysis of media function in the book you mentioned. Now that's, with the existence of the internet, and there are many other similar cases.

ASA CADWALLADER: Thank you.

DYLAN LEWIS: Hi professor Chomsky, my name is Dylan and I'm a junior. Earlier we were talking about the line or the non-existent line between totalitarianism and anarchism, but it seems like with some societies and countries, such as Cuba, the two ideas become kind of blurred and people think that Cuba started out as an anarchist rebellion and then kind of became more of a totalitarian government. I was just wondering what your thoughts are on Fidel Castro and the type and system of government that he tried to implement in Cuba.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well first of all, Cuba never attempted to approach anywhere near anarchism. So and secondly, Cuba is by no means totalitarian, so I don't accept - I agree that what you're saying is pretty standard conventional ideology in the United States, but I think it's quite remote from reality. What happened in Cuba is complex, there are many positive developments, there are many grounds for criticism, but when we look at Cuba, especially from the United States, there is a crucial fact that should be central to our inquiry. What did we do? That's the question we should always be asking. So what's the answer to it? Well, quickly, January in 1959, the Castro rebellion took over. By fall of 1959, planes were bombing Cuba from a U.S. territory. By March 1960, the Eisenhower administration made a secret - we now know - secret decision to overthrow the government of Cuba. Within a few months the Kennedy administration came in, very quickly launched and supported invasion of Cuba; when that
failed, the Kennedy administration launched a severe terrorist war against Cuba, a major terrorist war called Operation Mongoose and it was no joke. There is - you should read about it if you haven't - that war was intended to lead to an invasion of Cuba by October 1962. If you'll recall that's when the Cuban missile crisis took place, one motive was probably to deter an intended invasion. After the crisis ended, Kennedy started a terrorist war again, I won't go through the rest of the history but it stays like that, meanwhile the United States imposed extremely harsh embargoes, economic warfare against Cuba, opposed by the entire world I should say. Take a look at the votes annually at the UN General Assembly, by now it's U.S. and Israel versus the world, and Israel is voting with the United States because it has to, violating the embargo. Well, under these conditions, a major superpower, a small country dependent on the superpower for survival, had been a virtual colony that the United States, ever since the U.S. intervened in the Spanish American War. Since then it stayed that way until 1959. The real question: how could it even survive? That's amazing. So in the light of that critical background, we can then take a look at what actually happened in Cuba and it's a complex story, there are many judgments to be made, but it's nowhere near - never has been - either anarchism or totalitarianism.

DYLAN LEWIS: Do you think that Fidel Castro was successful in implementing socialism?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Nowhere near it. There was barely any effort to implement socialism in the traditional sense of that word. In the United States, socialism means state control of the economy and society, but socialism meant democratic control of all institutions. So workers control industry, community controls communities, free open interchange, those are things the essential elements of socialism in its traditional meaning. And of course Cuba doesn't come close to that.

DYLAN LEWIS: Thank you so much.

ELYA KAPLAN: Hi Mr. Chomsky my name is Elya, I'm a junior. I'm wondering - I'm going to veer back to Trump - I'm wondering what you think about Trump's influence on the Israeli-Palestinian relations and potential peace agreement between the two.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well if we look at the record, there were - there's an international consensus, an overwhelming international consensus, includes the Arab states, organization of Islamic states, which includes Iran, Europe, Latin America, essentially everybody. It's calling for a two-state settlement on the internationally-recognized border. That's the ceasefire line of February 19, 1949, what's called the Green Line. Any Israeli development activity across the Green Line is flatly illegal, that's been determined by the highest authorities, the UN Security Council, the International Court of Justice, the Red Cross, who administer the Geneva Conventions. So that's the international consensus. Could there be a peace agreement at those terms? Well, in fact, the issue arose in January 1976. The three major Arab states - Egypt, Syria, and Jordan - brought a resolution to UN Security Council calling for a two-state settlement on the international border that perhaps with minor mutual modifications which would guarantee the rights of each state, Israel and Palestine, to exist in security within secure and recognized borders. That was the proposal. Israel violently opposed it, the US vetoed it. Same thing happened in 1980: the US vetoed it, this time under Carter. I won't run through the rest of the history but if you look at it, you'll see that consistently the United States has provided the economic, military, the diplomatic support for Israel's systematic construction of the kind of greater Israel in the occupied terror end of the West Bank. Isolation of Gaza and violation of the Oslo agreements all supported by the United States. That's the major impediment to a political settlement. With Trump it's just going to go on beyond that, at least if you look at the people around him, his choice of ambassador and his nearby advisers, that they not only support Israeli expansionism, but their illegal expansionism I should
say, but they are closely involved with the most extremist elements of it. Way to the right of Benjamin Netanyahu, so we'll see but it looks unpromising.

ELYA KAPLAN: Thank you.

DR. DRAGO: Professor Chomsky, Elliott Drago here, I know we're coming up on 1:45 do you have time for two more questions?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well very quick, I have another appointment coming up, yeah.

DR. DRAGO: Okay, thank you.

ATHELLO ADESHIGBIN: Hello Professor Chomsky, my name is Athello Adeshigbin and I am a senior at Central and my question is: you said you lived in Europe, so with Brexit earlier and the recent French election, and even with Trump, do you think the Western world is shifting right?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Do I think what?

ATHELLO ADESHIGBIN: The Western world is shifting right, politically speaking?

NOAM CHOMSKY: I didn't hear the last phrase.

ATHELLO ADESHIGBIN: Is the Western world shifting right?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Is the Western world shifting right?

ATHELLO ADESHIGBIN: Yes.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well take a look at the United States. Who is the most popular political in the United States by a large margin? According to Fox News polls, Bernie Sanders. Does that mean the United States is shifting to the right? In fact the population is one thing, political domination and policies and other things, they've separated for a long time. So if you look at public attitudes, they're very different from public policy. Take say higher taxes on the wealthy, as long as polls have been taken, there's very strong public support for that. Higher tax on the wealthy declined same is pretty much true on health care. I mentioned the privacy issue, and in fact there's case after case, so I think the population is splitting, there's a lot of anger, disillusionment, contempt for institutions for very good reasons. It's a consequence of the neoliberal policies of the last generation, which have led to stagnation or decline for the majority, real wages are actually lower than they were in 1979 before this began. Very high concentration of wealth, growth of financial institution, enormous growth of financial institution which are basically predatory, cause repeated crises and a decline in democratic participation. So people are angry. We saw that in the French elections a couple of weeks ago, we saw that in the U.S. elections, but it's not really a shift to the right, it's a shift against policies that have been extremely harmful, objections taking various forms, some of them pretty frightening. Like the neo-fascist revival in Europe. People as old as I am who can remember the 1930s can look at this with some concern. On the other hand, there are very positive developments, like the Sanders phenomenon, the Corbyn support in England, the rise of Podemos in Spain, and a bunch else. So a lot of different developments.

ATHELLO ADESHIGBIN: Alright, thank you for your time.
SHANAYAH WYCHE: Hi, how are you Professor Chomsky? My name is Shanayah Wyche.

NOAM CHOMSKY: Hi.

SHANAYAH WYCHE: I have sort of a closing question for you, I believe one which you might agree with that in the central basis of the liberal philosophy, philosophy in itself is resisting an reevaluating. In this recent polarizing political culture, what advice can you give growing students like us to resist and reevaluate America's political future?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Where is America's political future going?

SHANAYAH WYCHE: As young students, what can we do to-

NOAM CHOMSKY: What can you do?

SHANAYAH WYCHE: Yes, resist and reevaluate the political future?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well, when I go home tonight and take a look at my flood of email, there will at least a dozen - maybe more - questions from young people saying I'm really disturbed at what's happening, I feel hopeless, what can we do? And the answer to that is if you're sufficiently privileged to be able to ask that question on the internet, then the opportunities for you are enormous. The answer is you can do almost anything, from trying to shift the dramatic, anti-human policies and the current U.S. administration's pursuing even in electoral politics, organization, activism, education, any number of popular initiatives which you can participate in. There's almost no limit, in fact it's much easier for your generation than for earlier generations because you have the legacy of the struggles that our predecessors have taken under much harsher conditions. Just to take something obvious, when I was at Central High School, there weren't any women's voices, it was a boy's school. There was another girl's school somewhere else. Okay, now there has been significant progress in particular in women's rights, a lot of battles have been won, more ahead, but a lot has been won, and the same is true on many other levels. It's a much more civilized society than it was, thanks to the activism of people, often young people, who struggled under conditions much harsher than ours. We enjoy the legacy of their achievements, we can go on. There's many open opportunities, the problem is to grasp them.

SHANAYAH WYCHE: Thank you so much.

ANA HALLMAN: Thank you Professor Chomsky for your work and wisdom, and for sharing these things with some of the students at Central. We appreciate you giving us your time and discussing some of your ideas with us. Have a good day!

NOAM CHOMSKY: Thank you very much. Thank you.

For any comments or concerns regarding this transcription, please contact the Centralizer at chscentralizer@gmail.com