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**MICHEL DEGRAFF:** Talking about students at MIT. So some of you are graduating soon, and this might be your last chance to ask Noam Chomsky a question. So anyone who hasn't spoken yet would like to ask a question before you graduate?

**AUDIENCE:** We've talked in this class a bit about silencing and how that kind of leads into the whole system. Sorry, I can speak up. So we've talked about silencing.

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** About?

**MICHEL DEGRAFF:** Silencing.

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** Silencing.

**AUDIENCE:** Yeah. And how stories are hidden, like you talked about-- what can we do about that?

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** About silencing?

**AUDIENCE:** What measurable steps can we take towards uncovering the stories and actually making change happen?

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** Well, what you do about silencing is speak up. We have a lot of freedom if we use it. In fact, a lot more than in the past.

Take the last thing I mentioned. For women, the opportunity is to speak up and become active and have an impact is way beyond what it was, say, 50 years ago. In fact, I was talking to Michel about this before.

I got a ton of email. And a lot of it is from young people. And one question that keeps coming up over and over again is, everything's awful. What can we do? But if you look closely over many years, I've noticed that the kinds of questions you get depend on where the people are coming from.

So if people are coming from-- say when I go down to give talks in immigrant slums in South

Boston, nobody ever asks what they can do. They tell me what they're doing.

When I go to a remote village in Southern Colombia where people are being murdered by paramilitaries and there's a chemical company trying to-- a gold mining company trying to destroy the water supply. They don't ask me, what should they do? They tell me what they're doing.

When people are privileged and have every opportunity in front of them, they ask, what can we do? And the fact is almost anything. There's all sorts of opportunities open. Way more than there were in the past because we do enjoy the legacy of people who have struggled in the past under much harsher conditions and have provided us with the opportunities we now have.

Like, say, the opportunities to be a student at MIT. That's an opportunity. It gives you all sorts of things. It was closed to half the population 50 years ago. It was closed, of course, to minorities almost entirely.

Well, it just illustrates what's gone on all over the society. I mean, take, say, the Sanders campaign, which I think was the most important aspect of the 2016 election, by far.

Out of that, there are groups developing that are really trying to do things. You can be part of that. Make new ones. All sorts of opportunities.

And I think the prospects for the future are not too bad when you think of people's actual attitudes. And the way those attitudes could be melded into activist and political and other programs to bring about changes in society. So I don't think there's a real shortage of opportunity.

I mean, there are all sorts of efforts to atomize people, keep you alone. That's one of the functions of social media incidentally. You sit alone with-- whatever it is-- your device and you think you have friends in Indonesia and so on. But you're really separated from the people around you.

Atomization is a very important way of controlling people, because you can only do things if you work together. So when you're all separated, that's great. Then, those who really run things, they do get together. They don't sit around looking at iPads, and so on. So you can keep the population--

In fact, that's one of the main things consumerism is about. You take a look at the history of the advertising industry. It's quite interesting.

The huge advertising and public relations industry developed in the freest countries in the world, in Britain and the United States about a century ago. And the reason was pretty clear. It was often stated. People had won enough freedom, so that you couldn't control them by force. So you had to control them in other ways.

And the best way of controlling them is what was called convincing them to be concerned with the superficial things of life, like consumption. So if you can get to a stage where-- thinking of my granddaughter. Teenage girls on a Saturday afternoon. The best thing they can think of doing is walking through a mall and looking at things they can't buy. That's great. When you get to a society like that, you've got people under control.

And there's some pretty obvious things that are never discussed, like you've all heard 10 million times about the wonders of free market societies. But almost no one tells you that the business world hates free market society. And in fact, they spend hundreds of billion dollars a year to undermine markets. It's called advertising.

Anyone who has studied economics knows that markets-- the marvels of markets are based on informed consumers making rational choices. Then, you study the mathematics and you make up the models, and so on.

Take a look at the real world. Hundreds of billions of dollars are spent every year to ensure that uninformed people make irrational choices. It's called advertising.

If you had a market society. If, say, Ford Motor Company has cars to sell, what they would do is say, here are the characteristics of our cars. Small ad on television. Here's the characteristics. Here's what Consumer Reports says about it. That's not what they do.

What they do is try to create illusions, so you will be uninformed and make an irrational choice. In fact, while the economics department is talking about rational choice models and so on, with informed consumers, the business world is trying to make sure it doesn't happen. Of course, that's the thing that has the effect.

Speaking of silencing, how much do you hear about this in economics courses? Or in the general discussion? It's not deep. It's not profound. It's not quantum physics. We all know it. It's right in front of our eyes, but it's kept silent. And those are the kind of things you have to

break through with.

**MICHEL DEGRAFF:** Thank you so much, Noam. That was wonderful. [applause]