Such a qualitatively new mode of existence can never be envisaged as the mere by-product of economic and political changes, as the more or less spontaneous effect of the new institutions which constitute the necessary prerequisite. Qualitative change also involves a change in the technical basis on which this society rests—one which sustains the economic and political institutions through which the "second nature" of man as an aggressive object of administration is stabilized. The techniques of industrialization are political techniques as such, they predetermine the possibilities of Reason and Freedom.

To be sure, labor must precede the reduction of labor, and industrialization must precede the development of human needs and satisfactions. But as all freedom depends on the conquest of alien necessity, the realization of freedom depends on the techniques of this conquest. The highest productivity of labor can be used for the perpetuation of labor, and the most efficient industrialization can serve the restriction and manipulation of needs.

When this point is reached, domination—in the guise of affluence and liberty—extends to all spheres of private and public existence, integrates all authentic opposition, absorbs all alternatives. Technological rationality reveals its political character as it becomes the great vehicle of better domination, creating a truly totalitarian universe in which society and nature, mind and body are kept in a state of permanent mobilization for the defense of this universe.

Noam Chomsky (1928- ) came to prominence in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a theorist of language and of the human mind. But he won a large constituency well beyond the discipline of linguistics during the Vietnam War, when he emerged as one of academe's most vociferous critics of the war policies of the administration of President Lyndon Johnson. In "The Responsibility of Intellectuals," reprinted here, Chomsky deplored the Johnson administration as a pack of lies, and called upon intellectuals to reclaim the classic role of "speaking truth to power." This and other essays in the same vein were collected in Chomsky's American Power and the New Mandarins (New York, 1969).

Chomsky's emphasis on intellectual independence and high principle was felt by many observers to stand parallel to an emphasis found in his technical work as a linguist. In Cartesian Linguistics (New York, 1966), Language and Mind (New York, 1968), and a series of other works, Chomsky argued that the human mind contained innate linguistic capabilities that could not be explained by environmental conditioning. B. F. Skinner and other "behaviorists" had represented the mind as too passive, as too much the product of the history of stimuli, insisted Chomsky. Critics replied that Chomsky was willfully blind to the ways in which social and cultural experience shaped the mind's capabilities. The controversy over Chomsky's ideas divided linguists the world over from the early 1960s through the end of the twentieth century.

Chomsky has remained active in debates about the relation of intellect to political power. He and a number of his contemporaries discuss this relationship in The Cold War & The University: Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years (New York, 1997). Some of the contributors to that volume (especially the biologist R. C. Lewontin and the historian David Montgomery) present a view of this relationship somewhat different from Chomsky's.

Two studies of Chomsky's work attend carefully to both his political writings and to his technical work in linguistics: Neil Smith, Chomsky: Ideas and Ideals (New York, 1999), and James A. McGharry, Chomsky (New York, 1999). An excellent survey of the intellectual history of the 1960s that deals with Chomsky and his contemporaries both as political figures and as practitioners of various academic callings is Howard Brick, Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s (New York, 1998). Chomsky's discomfort with postmodernist notions of truth and power is apparent in his responses to the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, in a debate of 1974 the transcript of which is published in Fons Elders, ed., Reflective Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind (London, 1974), 123-97.
Twenty years ago, Dwight Macdonald published a series of articles in Politics on the responsibilities of peoples and, specifically, the responsibility of intellectuals. I read them as an undergraduate, in the years just after the war, and had occasion to read them again a few months ago. They seem to me to have lost none of their power or persuasiveness. And it is just as much the case that the world is still, to a great extent, the German or Japanese people responsible for the atrocities committed by their governments and, quite probably, he turns the question back to us: To what extent were the German or Japanese people responsible for the vicious terror bombings of civilians, perfected as a technique of warfare by the Western democracies and reaching its culmination in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, surely among the most unspeakable crimes in history? To an undergraduate in 1945–1946—to anyone whose political and moral consciousness had been formed by the horrors of the 1930s, by the war in Ethiopia, by the Russian purge, the "China incident," the Spanish Civil War, the Nazi atrocities, the Western reaction to these events and, in part, complicity in them—these questions had particular significance and poignancy.

With respect to the responsibility of intellectuals, there are still other, equally disturbing questions. Intellectuals are in a position to expose the lies of governments, to analyze actions according to their causes and motives and often hidden intentions. In the Western world at least, they have the power that comes from political liberty, from access to information and freedom of expression. For a privileged minority, Western democracy provides the leisure, the facilities, and the training to seek the truth lying hidden behind the veil of distortion and misrepresentation, ideology, and class interest through which the events of current history are presented to us. The responsibilities of intellectuals, then, are much deeper than what Macdonald calls the "responsibility of peoples." given the unique privileges that intellectuals enjoy.

The issues that Macdonald raised are as pertinent today as they were twenty years ago. We can hardly avoid asking ourselves to what extent the American people bear responsibility for the savage American assault on a largely helpless rural population in Vietnam, still another atrocity in what Asians see as the "Vasco da Gama era" of world history. As for those of us who stood by in silence and apathy as this catastrophe slowly took shape over the past dozen years, on what page of history do we find our proper place? Only the most insensible can escape these questions. I want to return to them, later on, after a few scattered remarks about the responsibility of intellectuals and how, in practice, they go about meeting this responsibility in the mid-1960s.

It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies. This, at least, may seem enough of a truism to pass without comment. Not so, however. For the modern intellectual, it is not at all obvious. Thus we have Martin Heidegger writing, in a pro-Nazi declaration of 1933, that "truth is the revelation of that which makes a people certain, clear, and strong in its action and knowledge"; it is only this kind of "truth" that one has a responsibility to speak. Americans tend to be more forthright. When Arthur Schlesinger was asked by the New York Times, in November 1965, to explain the contradiction between his published account of the Bay of Pigs incident and the story he had given the press at the time of the attack, he simply remarked that he had lied; and a few days later, he went on to compliment the Times for having suppressed information on the planned invasion, in "the national interest," as this was defined by the group of arrogant and deluded men whom Schlesinger gives such a flattering portrait in his recent account of the Kennedy administration. It is of no particular interest that one man is quite happy to lie in behalf of a cause which, according to the testimony of the other, is not just; but it is significant that such events provide another example of the guilt in the intellectual community—no feeling, for example, that there is something strange in the offer of a major chair in humanities to a historian who feels it to be his duty to persuade the world that an American-sponsored invasion of a nearby country is nothing of the sort. And what of the incredible sequence of lies on the part of our government and its spokesmen concerning such matters as negotiations in Vietnam? The facts are known to all who care to know. The press, foreign and domestic, has presented documentation to refute each falsehood as it appears. But the power of the government propaganda apparatus is such that the citizen who does not undertake a research project on the subject can hardly hope to confront government pronouncements with fact.

The deceit and distortion surrounding the American invasion of Vietnam are by now so familiar that they have lost their power to shock. It is therefore well to recall that although new levels of cynicism are constantly being reached, their clear antecedents were accepted at home with quiet toleration. It is a useful exercise to compare government statements at the time of the invasion of Guatemala in 1954 with Eisenhower's assurances in March that year that there would be a more accurate, his boast—a decade later that American planes were sent to "help the invaders." Not is it only in moments of crisis that duplicity is considered perfectly normal. "New Frontiersmen," for example, have scarcely distinguished themselves by a passionate concern for historical accuracy, even when they are not being called upon to provide a "propaganda cover" for ongoing actions. For example, Arthur Schlesinger describes the bombing of North Vietnam and the massive escalation of military commitment in early 1965 as based on a "perfectly rational argument": as so long as the Vietcong thought they were going to win the war, they obviously would not be interested in any kind of negotiations at all. (The date is important. Had the statement been made six months earlier, one could attribute it to ignorance. But this statement appeared after months of front-page news reports detailing the United Nations, North Vietnamese, and Soviet initiatives that preceded the February 1965 escalation and that, in fact, continued for several weeks after the bombing began, after months of soul-searching by Washington correspondents who were trying desperately to find some mitigating circumstances for the startling decision that had been revealed. (Chalmers Roberts, for example, wrote with unconscious irony in late February 1965 "hardly seemed to Washington to be a propitious moment for negotiations [since Mr. Johnson had just ordered the first bombing of North Vietnam in an effort to bring Hanoi to a conference table where bargaining chips on both sides would be more closely matched.]" Coming at this moment, Schlesinger's statement is less an example of deceit than of contempt—contempt for an audience that can be expected to tolerate such behavior with silence, if not approval.

To turn to someone closer to the actual formation and implementation of policy, consider, for example, the reflections of Walt Rostow, a man who, according to Schlesinger, brought a "spacious historical view" to the conduct of foreign affairs in the Kennedy administration. According to his analysis, the guerrilla warfare in IndoChina in 1946 was launched by Stalin, and Hoani initiated the guerrilla war against South Vietnam in 1958 (The View from the Seventh Floor, pp. 39 and 132). Similarly, the Communist planners probed the "free world spectrum of defense" in Northern Azerbaijan and Greece (where Stalin "supported substantial guerrilla warfare"—ibid., pp. 36 and 148), operating from plans carefully laid in 1945. And where is the "indifference to guerilla warfare" of the Russo-German pact?
remove the dangerous tensions from Central Europe at the risk of even more slowly staged corrosion of communism in East Germany” (ibid., p. 156)

It is interesting to compare these observations with studies by scholars actually concerned with historical events. The remark about Stalin’s initiating the first waves of the Cold War in 1946 does not even merit refutation. As to Hanoi’s purported initiative in 1958, the situation is more clouded. But even government statements indicate that in 1959 Hanoi received the first direct report of what Diem referred to as his own Algerian war, and that only after this did they lay these plans to involve themselves in this struggle. In fact, in December 1958 Hanoi made another of its many attempts—rebuffed once again by Saigon and the United States—to establish diplomatic and commercial relations with the Saigon government on the basis of the status quo. Rostow offers no evidence of Stalin’s support for the Greek guerrillas; in fact, though the historical record is far from clear, it seems that Stalin was by no means pleased with the adventurism of the Greek guerrillas, who, from his point of view, were upsetting the satisfactory postwar imperialist settlement.

Rostow’s remarks about Germany are more interesting still. He does not see fit to mention, for example, the Russian notes of March-April 1952, which proposed unification of Germany under internationally supervised elections, with withdrawal of all troops within a year, if there was a guarantee that a reunified Germany would not be permitted to join a Western military alliance. And he has also momentarily forgotten his own characterization of the strategy of Truman and Eisenhower administrations: “to avoid any serious negotiation with the Soviet Union until the West could confront Moscow with German rearmament within an organized European framework, as a fait accompli”—to be sure, in defiance of the Potsdam agreements.

But most interesting of all is Rostow’s reference to Iran. The facts are that there was a Russian attempt to impose by force a pro-Soviet government in Northern Afghanistan that would grant the Soviet Union access to Iranian oil. This was rebuffed by superior Anglo-American force in 1946, at which point the more powerful imperialists in the region decided on a pro-Western government. We recall what happened in the late 1950s, the only Iranian government with something of a popular base experimented with the curious idea that Iranian oil should belong to the Iranians. What is interesting, however, is the description of Northern Afghanistan as part of “the free world spectrum of defense.” It is pointless, by now, to comment on the debasement of the phrase “free world.” But by what law of nature does Iran, with its resources, fall within Western dominion? The bland assumption that it does is most revealing of deep-seated attitudes toward the conduct of foreign affairs.

For example, Arthur Schlesinger has recently characterized our Vietnamese policies of 1954 as “part of our general program of global goodwill.” Unless intended as irony, this remark shows either a colossal cynicism or an inability, on a scale that defies comment, to comprehend elementary phenomena of contemporary history. And it is going to cost to make the testimony of Thomas Schelling before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, January 27, 1966, in which he discusses the two great dangers if all Asia "goes Communist".

First, this would exclude "the United States and what we call Western civilization from a large part of the world that is poor and colored and potentially hostile." Second, "a country like the United States probably cannot maintain self-confidence if just about the greatest thing it ever attempted, namely to create the basis for decency and prosperity..."
For a translation of Churchill's biblical rhetoric into the jargon of contemporary social science, one may turn to the testimony of Charles Wolf, senior economist of the RAND Corporation, at the congressional committee hearings cited earlier:

"I am dubious that China's fears of encirclement are going to be abated, eased, relaxed in the long-term future. But I would hope that what we do in Southeast Asia would help to develop within the Chinese body politic more of a realism and willingness to live with this fear than to indulge it by support for liberation movements, which admittedly depend on a great deal more than external support... The operational question for American foreign policy is not whether that fear can be eliminated or substantially alleviated, but whether China can be faced with a structure of incentives, of penalties and rewards, of inducements that will make it willing to live with this fear."

The point is further clarified by Thomas Schelling. "There is growing experience which the Chinese can profit from, that although the United States may be interested in encircling them, may be interested in defending nearby areas from them, it is, nevertheless, prepared to behave peacefully if they are." In short, we are prepared to live peacefully within our—"to be sure, rather extensive—habitations. And quite naturally, we are offended by the undignified noises from the sanctimonious quarters. If, let us say, a peasant-based revolutionary movement tries to achieve independence from foreign domination or to overthrow semifeudal structures supported by foreign powers, or if the Chinese are irrational to refuse to respond properly to the schedule of reinforcement that we have prepared for them, if they object to being encircled by the benign and peace-loving "rich men" who control the territories on their borders as a natural right, then, evidently, we must respond to this belligerence with appropriate force.

It is this mentality that explains the frankness with which the United States government attacks every government and apologist who defends the American refusal to permit a peaceful settlement in Vietnam at a local level, a settlement based on the actual distribution of political forces. Even government experts freely admit that the National Liberation Front is the only "truly mass-based political party in South Vietnam"; that the NLF had "made a conscious and massive effort to extend political participation, even if it was manipulated, on the local level so as to involve the people in a self-contained, self-supporting revolution" (p. 374); and that this effort had been so successful that no political groups, "with the possible exception of the Bahidiists, thought themselves equal in size and power to risk encircling the Ho Chi Minh" (p. 362). Moreover, they concede that until the introduction of overwhelming American force, the NLF had insisted that the struggle "should be fought out at the political level and that the use of massed military might was in itself illegitimate." The struggle was to be the minds and loyalties of the rural Vietnamese, the weapons to be "ideas" (pp. 91-92; cf also pp. 93, 99-108, 155 f.; and correspondingly, that until mid-1964, aid from Hanoi was largely confined to areas—doctoral know-how and leadership personnel (p. 321). Captured NLF documents indicate that the enemy's "military superiority" with their own "political superiority" (p. 106), thus fully confirming the analysis of American military spokesmen who define our problem as how, "with considerable armed force but little political power, [to] contain an adversary who has enormous political power but only modest military power."
not able to compete politically with the Vietnamese Communists." Thus, Mohr continues, the Vietnamese demand a "pacification program" which will have as its core the destruction of the clandestine Vietcong political structure and the creation of an iron-like police force. This political program has as long as it remains an "open society," in the formulation of some correspondents, on October 23, quotes a high South Vietnamese official as saying: "Frankly, we are not strong enough now to compete with the Communists on a purely political basis. They are organized and disciplined. The non-Communist nationalists are not—we do not have any large, well-organized political parties and we do not yet have unity. We cannot leave the Vietcong in existence." Officials in Washington understand the situation very well. Thus Secretary Rusk has pointed out that "if the Vietcong come to the conference table as full partners they will, in a sense, have been victorious in the very aim that South Vietnam and the United States are pledged to prevent." (January 28, 1966). Similarly, Joint Chiefs of Staff reported from Washington: "Compromise has had no appeal here because the Administration concluded long ago that the non-Communist forces of South Vietnam could not long survive in a Saigon coalition with Communists. It is for that reason—and not because of an excessively rigid sense of protocol—that Washington has steadfastly refused to deal with the Vietcong or recognize them as an independent political force." In short, we will—magnanimously—permit Vietcong representatives to attend negotiations, but only if they will agree to identify themselves as agents of a foreign power and thus forfeit the right to participate in a coalition government, a right which they have now been demanding for a half-dozen years. We know well that in any representative coalition, our chosen delegates could not last a day without the support of American armies. Therefore, we must increase American force and resist meaningful negotiations, until the day when a client government can exert both military and political control over its own population—a day which may never dawn, for as William Bundy has pointed out, we could never be sure of whether our Southeast Asia "would change her attitude and practice towards those she had drawn." Thus if we were to "negotiate in the direction of solutions that are put under the label of neutralization," this would amount to capitulation to the Communists. According to this reasoning, then, South Vietnam must remain, permanently, an American military base.

All of this is of course reasonable, so long as we accept the fundamental axiom that the United States, with its traditional concern for the rights of the weak and downtrodden, and with its unique insight into the proper mode of development for backward countries, must have the courage and the persistence to impose its will upon the force until such time as other nations are prepared to accept these truths—or simply to abandon hope.

If it is the responsibility of the intellectual to insist upon the truth, it is also his duty to see events in their historical perspective. Thus one must applaud the insistence of the Secretary of State on the importance of historical analogies, the Munich analogy, for example. As Munich showed, a powerful and aggressive nation with a fanatic belief in its manifest destiny will regard each victory, each extension of its power and authority, as a prelude to the next, and therefore it will proceed by identical routes. The old route whereby expansionist powers push at more and more doors, believing they will open, until, at the ultimate door, resistance is unavoidable and major war breaks out. Herein lies the danger of appeasement, as the Chinese tirelessly point out to the Soviet Union, which they claim is playing Chamberlain to our Hitler in Vietnam. Of course, the aggressiveness of liberal imperialism is not that of Nazi Germany, though the distinction may seem rather academic to a Vietnamese peasant who is being gassed or incinerated. We do not want to have that kind of a war. We do not want to stand by and watch our fellow citizens be killed off. We have the right to demand that the United States move forward in toward economic modernization, as relatively 'open' and stable societies, to which our access, as a country and as individual citizens, is free and comfortable. The formulation is appropriate. Recent history shows that it makes little difference to us what form of government we oppose, as long as it remains an 'open society,' and makes it clear that one country—term—a society, that is, which remains open to American economic penetration or political control. If it is necessary to approach genocide in Vietnam to achieve this objective, then this is the price we must pay in defense of freedom and the rights of man. In Pursuing the aim of helping other countries to progress openly, we are doing nothing new. Hans Morgenthau has aptly described our traditional policy towards China as one of favoring 'what you might call the weakest link in the chain of competition with regard to the exploitation of China. In fact, few imperialist powers have had explicit territorial ambitions. Thus it was 1784, the British Parliament announced that "to pursue schemes of conquest and extension of dominion in India is measures repugnant to the wish, honor, and policy of this nation." Shortly after, the conquest of India was in full swing. A century later, Britain announced its intentions in Egypt under the slogan "Intervention, Retrench, Withdrawal." It is unnecessary to comment on which parts of this promise were fulfilled, within the next half century. In 1956, on the eve of hostilities in North China, the Japanese stated their Basic Principles of National Policy. These included the use of moderate and peaceful means to extend her strength, to foster social and economic development, to eradicate the menace of Communism, to correct the aggressive policies of the great powers, and to secure her position as the stabilizing power in East Asia. Even in 1937, the Japanese government had "no territorial designs upon China." In short, we follow a well-trodden path.

It is useful to remember, incidentally, that the United States was apparently quite willing, as long as 1939, to negotiate a commercial treaty with Japan and arrive at a modus vivendi. Thus in a speech to his Southeast Asia "would draw" out of the war, Van Lang. And as for China, as Secretary Hull put it, the bombing of Chungking and the rape of Nanking were rather unpleasant, it is true, but what was really important was our rights and interests in China, as the responsible, unhygienical man of the day saw quite clearly. It was the closing of the Open Door by Japan that led inevitably to the Pacific war, just as it is the closing of the Open Doors by "Communist" China itself that may very well lead to the next, and no doubt last, Pacific war.

Quite often, the statements of sincere and devoted technical experts give surprising insights into the intellectual attitudes that lie in the background of the latest savagery. Consider, for example, the following comment by economist Richard Lindholm, in 1959, expressing his frustration over the failure of economic development in "free Vietnam": "the use of American aid is determined by how the Vietnamese use their incomes and their savings. The fact that a large portion of the Vietnamese imports financed with American aid are either consumer goods or raw materials used rather directly to meet consumer demands is an indication that the Vietnamese people desire these goods, for they have shown a strong preference for their willingness to use their pluners to purchase them."

In short, the Vietnamese people desire Buicks and air conditioners, rather than sugar-sugar equipment or road-building machinery, as they shown by their behavior in a free market. And however much we may deplore their free choice, we must allow the people to have their way. Of course, there are also those legged beasts of burden that one stumbles on in the countryside, but as any graduate student of political science can explain, they are not part of a responsible modernizing elite, and therefore have only a superficial influence on the political life of the nation.
In no small measure, it is attitudes like these that lie behind the butchery in Vietnam, and we had better face up to them with candor, or we will find our government leading us towards a "final solution" in Vietnam, and in the many Vietnams that inevitably lie ahead.

Let me finally return to Macdonald and the responsibility of intellectuals. Macdonald quotes an interview with a death-camp paymaster who bursts into tears when told that the Russians would hang him. "Why should they? What have I done?" he asked. Macdonald concludes: "Only those who are willing to resist authority themselves when it conflicts too intolerably with their personal moral code, only they have the right to condemn the death-camp paymaster." The question "What have I done?" is one that we may well ask ourselves, as we read, each day, of fresh atrocities in Vietnam—as we create, or mouth, or tolerate the deceptions that will be used to justify the next defense of freedom.

EDWARD W. SAID

Selection from Orientalism
1978

That Western knowledge about "the East" (especially the parts often called "the Middle East" and heavily infected with the Islamic religion) had been badly distorted by the imperialist matrix of its creation was a key argument in a book of 1978 destined to become one of the most actively debated books of literary scholarship written in the twentieth century. In Orientalism Edward Said (1935–2003) founded what came to be called "post-colonial theory," and inspired countless studies of non-Western societies from a perspective proudly emancipated from the colonial setting in which so many Europeans and Americans had formed their understanding of vast segments of the globe. In the introduction to Orientalism, reprinted below, Said outlines his central points and explains his approach.

Ethnically Palestinian, Said spent his childhood in Egypt before immigrating with his parents to the United States. Unlike many Palestinians, he was not a Muslim. His family had been Protestant, but in his adult career Said was a zealous secularist. A leading participant in the controversies over Israel that intensified throughout his life, Said was the most visible defender of the Palestinian cause in the United States. Quarrels—sometimes bitter and vituperative—about his role in the Arab-Israeli debates often overlapped with disputes over Orientalism and over Said's later writings about the relation of empire to knowledge, especially Culture and Imperialism (New York, 1993). Among the most respected critics of Said's work were Bernard Lewis and Aijaz Ahmad.

Although known for his insistence that knowledge often reflected the concentrations of power that surrounded the practice of scholarship, Said was a persistent and often eloquent defender of an independent role for scholars. He vigorously resisted efforts to reduce scholarship to special pleading. This theme became more prominent in his later career, and was developed forcefully in his contribution to Louis Menand, ed., The Future of Academic Freedom (Chicago, 1996), 214–28, and in lectures delivered shortly before his death and published posthumously as Humanism and Democratic Criticism (New York, 2004).

Said was a professor of comparative literature at Columbia University for forty years, during which time he published numerous works of literary criticism, including The World, the Text, and the Critic (New York, 1983). He also published a brief autobiography, Out of Place: A Memoir (New York, 1999). Although he lived only until the age of sixty-seven, Said completed more than twenty books. His works have been translated into thirty-six languages. Of the many posthumous essays that appeared in the wake of his death, one that is especially informative, and indicative of the impression Said made on his friends, is Michael Wood, "On Edward Said," London Review of Books (October 23, 2003). The best starting place for a study of his work is the symposium, "Edward Said: Continuing the Conversation," Critical Inquiry (Winter 2005), 565–529.