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The World's Top Public Intellectual?

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Christopher Orlet writes: *A popularity contest for public intellectuals seems about as silly as a beauty contest for dogs. Still both are done. The latest — and as far as I know the only — was conducted by the journals Prospect and Foreign Policy. Editors compiled a list of their top 100 intellectualoids and Web readers were asked to select their top five. More than 20,000 people voted. The winner? Noam Chomsky — by a landslide, no less.*

In “Best in Show,” his most recent contribution to the “Among the Intellectualoids” column in *The American Spectator*, Orlet explains: “Chomsky’s top finish was predictable, particularly since the MIT linguistics professor has worn the unofficial mantle of world’s top intellectual since 9/11, the event which more than anything else rescued him from obscurity. Ask any hip young slacker to name one public intellectual and inevitably you will get the name Chomsky. Ask for two names and you will get a blank look. Outside his field of expertise, however, Chomsky remains the proverbial anti-intellectual. The *Prospect’s* David Herman (perhaps reluctantly) admits that Chomsky’s geo-political pronouncements are often “maddeningly simple-minded.” His numerous adolescent acolytes are not devotees of theoretical linguistics (yawn), but rather followers of his puerile politics. Give Chomsky credit where it is due, in the field of linguistics. But his forays into geo-politics recall Richard Posner’s remark in his book *Public Intellectuals* that ‘a successful academic may be able to use his success to reach the general public on matters about which he is an idiot.’”

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