



ROBERT LEWIS **STUDYGUIDE**

the **Corporation**

a film by Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott & Joel Bakan



Synopsis

The Corporation (Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott and Joel Bakan, 2004) is a Canadian documentary about the institution of the corporation. One hundred and fifty years ago, the corporation was a relatively insignificant entity. Today, it is a vivid, dramatic and pervasive presence in all our lives. Like the Church, the Monarchy and the Communist Party in other times and places, the Corporation is today's dominant institution.

The film is a critical exposé of the corporation's inner workings, history, controversial impacts and possible future. Featuring a range of interviews with a variety of participants, *The Corporation* charts the spectacular rise of the institution whose overriding mission is to make a profit. However, the corporation's profit-driven mission predisposes it toward characteristics that, in a person, would be considered objectionable or even dangerous.

But in exploring and exposing the power and influence of the corporation this documentary also seeks to provide positive messages of hope, and suggest ways that people can wrest control of their lives from this institution.



Using The Film In The Classroom

The Corporation is a stimulating and challenging documentary suitable for senior secondary students of:

- English •
- Civics and Citizenship •
- Economics •
- Legal Studies •
- Politics •
- Ethical, Moral and Religious Studies •
- Australian Studies •
- Business Studies •
- Media Studies •

Before Watching The Film

The film is about 'corporations'. What is a corporation?

- 1 Look at this definition and make sure you understand each of the elements.
A corporation is:
 - a legal entity,
 - allowed by legislation in a state,
 - which permits a group of people, as shareholders (for-profit companies) or members (non-profit companies),
 - to create an organization,
 - which can then focus on pursuing set objectives,
 - and exercise legal rights, which are usually only reserved for individuals, such as to sue and be sued, own property, hire employees or loan and borrow money.
 A corporation is also known as a 'company'. The primary advantage

- of for-profit corporations or companies is that they provide their shareholders with a right to participate in the profits (by dividends) without any personal liability because the company absorbs the entire liability of the organization.
- 2 What does this mean for the owners of a corporation if that corporation causes harm to others?
- 3 Some well-known examples of corporations are Nike, National Bank, McDonald's and Virgin, although there are countless others. List some major corporations that have an influence on your life. Consider such things as what you eat, wear, read, watch or listen to, how you travel, etc. From this list decide on the five corporations that most influence your life.
- 4 What is your image of a corporation? Look at your top five list and describe each in as few words as possible.



The Corporation



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Do not say what they do ('Nike produces sports clothing and equipment', but rather your image of what they are: 'Nike to me represents ...')

Chances are you used human characteristics to describe them ('cool', 'fashionable', 'greedy', 'manipulative', 'caring for the environment', or whatever). This is actually a key point of *The Corporation*—that legally corporations are 'persons', and therefore we need to ask: 'What sort of persons are they?' Watch the film to explore this question fully.

- 5 The film you are about to watch is a documentary. Define what you think a documentary is.
- 6 Documentaries can be placed into three broad categories:
 - Those that inform by the presentation of facts in a neutral way.
 - Those that seek to persuade you to accept their point of view after a balanced and fair presentation of all points of view.

- Those that are partisan and propagandist, seeking to have you accept their point of view, and selecting and manipulating the nature and type of information that is presented.

Is there anything wrong with making partisan films? Must documentaries always be fair and balanced? Discuss your views.

- 7 Read this quotation from one of the filmmakers, and decide into which of the above categories *The Corporation* best fits.

When it comes to the fate of the Earth, I don't believe in legitimizing destructive forces by validating their perspective in a 'balanced' TV-style journalism format. But I am interested in and, frankly, fascinated by the advocates of economic globalization and corporate dominance. It is essential, in a program of corporate literacy, to hear from them, and to understand their perspective. Reform comes from within as well as without, which is why The Corporation also tries to



Who's Who in the Film

1: Jane Akre, Whistle-blowing Fox reporter tried to caution public about synthetic hormone rBGH used in cows. Fired for her efforts, she sued Fox, won, then lost on appeal on a technicality • **2:** Ray Anderson, CEO Interface, world's largest commercial carpet manufacturer. Had an environmental epiphany and reorganized his 1.4 billion dollar company • **3:** Joe Badaracco, Prof. Of Business Ethics, Harvard Business School. In all his years teaching business, was never asked so pointedly what a corporation is • **4:** Maude Barlow, Chairperson, Council of Canadians, privatization critic. 'We must re-define our relationship to nature, corporations and controlling institutions' • **5:** Mark Barry, Competitive Intelligence Professional—i.e. a corporate spy. Without guilt,

uses deception to extract information from corporate executives • **6:** Elaine Bernard, Director, Labor Program, Harvard Business School. Morals over markets. 'We need to determine certain things shouldn't be bought and sold.' • **7:** Edwin Black, Author, *IBM and the Holocaust*. Contends IBM's exclusive technology accelerated the Holocaust with the knowledge of its CEO and other employees • **8:** Carlton Brown, Commodities Broker. Says gold traders had one thing on their minds as the twin towers burned • **9:** Noam Chomsky, Institute Professor MIT. 'When you look at a corporation, just like when you look at a slave owner, you want to distinguish between the institution and the individual.' • **10:** Chris Barrett & Luke McCabe, First 'corporately-sponsored' university students.

Convinced a bank, First USA, to pay both their \$40,000 tuitions • **11:** Jonathon Ressler, CEO, Big Fat Inc. Undercover marketing specialist. Compares people influenced by his campaigns to 'roaches' taking the 'brand bait' and spreading it • **12:** Jeremy Rifkin, President, Foundation on Economic Trends. Author of 16 books on the impacts of technology. Culture is primary • **13:** Anita Roddick, Founder, The Body Shop. Pioneer of the 'socially responsible' corporation [appears only in TV version] • **14:** Dr Vandana Shiva, Physicist, ecologist, feminist and seed activist. 'In every period of history ... eventually, when you call a bluff, the tables turn.'

expose the institutional constraints many good people working inside big corporations struggle with.

Mark Achbar

- 8 In viewing this type of documentary you need to be aware that you are watching a film aimed to persuade. Discuss the ways in which a filmmaker can influence your response to and acceptance of such a film.

Exploring And Responding To *The Corporation*

Introduction

This section introduces the audience to information about the origin of corporations and some images associated with them.

A key element in the opening scenes of the film is the use of the ‘bad apple’ metaphor.

- 1 What does this metaphor usually mean?
- 2 Why do you think the filmmakers have invoked it at the start?
- 3 Do you think that the constant stressing of this metaphor has an effect on its usual meaning—changing it from referring to the ‘bad apple’ as the exception to the ‘bad apple’ as all-pervasive or even the norm? Discuss this idea.
- 4 We also see a number of people expressing their own metaphors for the corporation. List the different metaphors used.
- 5 What are some of the different points of view expressed through these metaphors?
- 6 The first five metaphors are all positive. Consider the metaphor of the eagle. The presenter creates a powerful, noble, positive and compelling image. What impression does this create of the presenter? How do the filmmakers undermine that image?
- 7 Read this information about the making of the film.
[W]hen we were doing the interviews [w]e asked every CEO and every critic for their metaphor

of the corporation. It became a Rorschach Test for those individuals; they would project their value system onto their metaphor. The CEOs use positive imagery of football teams, families working together, eagles soaring. The critics have Frankenstein, and many more monsters!

Mark Achbar

Does this change your impression of the person who used the eagle metaphor?

- 9 Why would the filmmakers have chosen to present this person in that way?
- 10 The last few metaphors are all negative ones. Why do you think the filmmakers would have grouped these negative metaphors together and placed them last?

A Legal ‘Person’

The film stresses that corporations have not always existed. They can be dated back prior to the seventeenth century in Europe as not-for-profit entities created to build institutions such as universities and hospitals for the public good. However, in the seventeenth century making money became a key focus. Their wealth was used to finance European colonial expansion—a good example is the East India Company, which was set up in 1600, and at the height of its power influenced over a fifth of the world’s population.

The Corporation locates the beginning of the industrial age as the origin of the modern corporation. Originally a corporation existed as an association of people to carry out a specific function as defined by the state that provided the charter, or authorization and set of limits, on that corporation. A key change was the decision in the United States in 1886 that a corporation could be considered, in a legal sense, as a person.

- Why was this so significant?
- The film argues that the corporation has one overriding obligation, what is it?

- The film also makes a point about corporations and ‘externalities’—that is, the unintended effect of actions by two parties on third, unconnected, parties. What is that?
- Why is this a problem?
- How is it connected to the nature of the corporation as a ‘person’?

One of the features of *The Corporation* is its imaginative use of visual material to promote its concerns in an interesting and arresting way. Look at the discussion in this section of the film of ‘externalities’—the idea that the activities of the corporation have effects and impacts on innocent third parties. The image associated with this is a pie fight.

- What message about externalities is given by the use of such an image?
- Why might this type of image have been used at this point? Consider if it is connected to the comments of a corporation defender, Sir Mark Moody-Stuart, in this section.

Case Histories—the Pathology Of Commerce

In this key section *The Corporation* addresses its major argument and associates the corporation with an anti-social personality. If the corporation can be viewed legally as ‘a person’ then why not socially? Actual internationally recognized diagnostic criteria are used to judge the behaviour of corporations and the picture that emerges is one of the corporation as self-interested, inherently amoral, callous and deceitful; it breaches social and legal standards to get its way; it does not suffer from guilt, yet it can mimic the human qualities of empathy, caring and altruism. Four case studies, drawn from a universe of corporate activity, are used to demonstrate harm to workers, human health, animals and the biosphere.

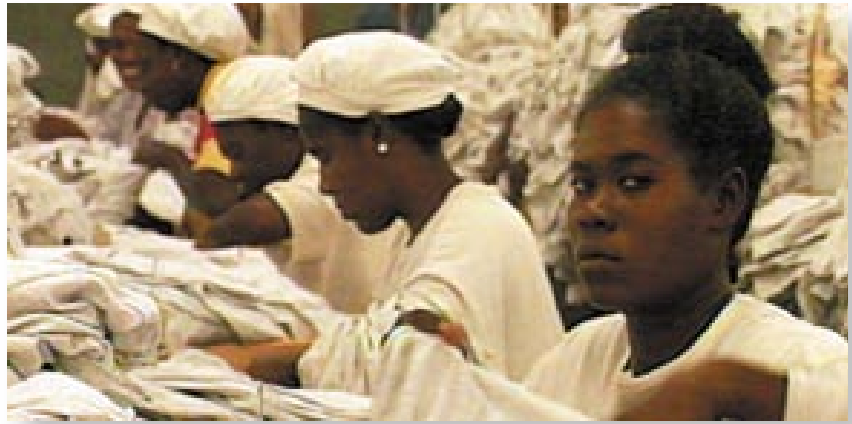
Workers

The film provides four examples of corporations





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behaving badly towards workers. Briefly summarize these examples:

- Lay-offs
- Union busting
- Factory fires
- Sweatshops

- 1 What is the point being made about Kathy Lee Gifford?
- 2 The film presents the first item on its 'Personality Diagnostic Checklists'. Which of the following features or characteristics does it claim are established by the corporation's behaviour towards workers?

- Callous unconcern for the feelings

of others

- Deceitfulness: repeated lying and conning others for profit
- Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviour
- Incapacity to experience guilt
- Incapacity to maintain enduring relationships
- Reckless disregard for the safety of others

Human health

- 3 What examples does the film provide to establish that the corporation willingly engages in behaviour that is harmful to human health?
- 4 What element of personality in

Who's Who in the Film

1: Peter Drucker, The first management guru. Spoke with IBM CEO Thomas J. Watson several times about IBM's business relationship with the Third Reich **• 2:** Dr. Samuel Epstein, Prof. Emeritus, Occupational & Environmental Medicine, U of Illinois. One in every two men get cancer, and one in every three women get cancer **• 3:** Andrea Finger, Spokesperson for Disney-built town of Celebration, population 5000. 'Disney brand speaks of reassurance, it speaks of quality.'
• 4: Milton Friedman, Nobel Prize-winning economist. 'Asking a corporation to be socially responsible makes no more sense than asking a building to be.'
• 5: Sam Gibara, Chairman, former CEO,

Goodyear Tire, world's largest tire corporation. Says corporations today have more power than governments **• 6:** Richard Grossman, Founder, POCLAD, Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy. POCLAD initiates dialogue on the authority of corporations to govern **• 7:** Dr. Robert Hare, U. of British Columbia Psychology Professor and FBI's top consulting psychologist on psychopaths. The corporation is the prototypical psychopath **• 8:** Gabriel Herbas, Professor of Economics in the State University, Bolivia. 'Our governments, sadly, are just puppets for these companies.'
• 9: Lucy Hughes, V. P. Initiative Media, world's largest media-buying corporation. Created Nag Factor study to help corporations get kids to nag their parents

to buy **• 10:** Ira Jackson, Director, Center for Business and Government, Kennedy School at Harvard. Author, *Capitalism with a Conscience* **• 11:** Clay Timon, CEO Landor and Associates Global branding specialists – Visa, Fedex, BP, etc. When Disney wants to market adult fare, they brand it Touchstone **• 12:** Michael Walker, President, Fraser Institute. Sweatshops like Nike's factories help the world's poor get 'plump and healthy'.
• 13: Robert Weissman, Editor, *Multinational Monitor*. Corporate crime specialist. Exposed the top 100 criminal corporations of the last decade **• 14:** Steve Wilson, Whistle-blowing, fired Fox reporter who tried to caution public about synthetic hormone rBGH used in cows.



Acceptable	Unacceptable

the list above is claimed for this behaviour?

Animals

- 5 What is the point about the Posilac example used in the film?
- 6 What element of personality in the list above is claimed for this behaviour?
- 7 What is the point about the Agent Orange example used in the film?
- 8 What element of personality in the list above is claimed for this behaviour?

Biosphere

- 9 What evidence or examples are used in the film to establish that corporations are guilty of harming the biosphere?
- 10 What element of personality in the list above is claimed for this behaviour?
- 11 The film is presenting a very powerful attack on the nature of the corporation. How might a supporter or defender of the corporation respond to this point?

Here are three responses. How effective do you think they are?

A: *The Corporation is an entertaining and provocative study but it also presents an overly pessimistic view of today's corporate world. But by concentrating on the 'bad apples' and all but ignoring the growing revolution to transform business into an agent of world benefit, The Corporation presents an unbalanced picture of business today. There are many other corporations that have put social responsibility front and centre in their operations, to be accountable not only to shareholders but to employees, consumers and society at large.*

Editorial, *Axiom* newsletter



(www.axiomnews.ca/2004/March/mar10b.htm)

B: *Corporations are good things. They provide us with all the goods and services that we have begun to depend on ... Let's get one thing straight: Corporate America is not bad. It provides about seventy percent of jobs in America directly and another seven percent in jobs that cater to corporations. Chances are one of your family members is employed by Corporate America. Furthermore ... corporations improve our quality of life constantly. Pharmaceutical companies, computer corporations, and food industries are all mostly made up by corporations. What would we do without them? Corporations develop new drugs and tools that make all of our lives more comfortable, so why target them for abuse?*

Gabe Williams

http://poly.union.rpi.edu/article_view.php3?view=1870&part=1

C: *Regarding the recent anti-corporation diatribe, I'd like to say: Oh, please! Grow up. It's as ridiculous to call corporations evil as it is to call black men thieves, or blond women dumb, or computer science majors unsociable cave-dwellers. But, if [critics] are making a case for something inherent in the nature of the corporation, in principle, then they should have some integrity and stop supporting the very things*

they claim to despise—go without the comforts with which companies provide them: including the pen and paper or computers with which they wrote their letters to the editor, their clothes, the roofs over their heads, their furniture, jobs, books, planes, trains, and automobiles. Let them live without coalitions of individuals producing from their ideas to the benefit of us all and ultimately, their own. Let's see how much of their lives really are a benefit of capitalistic enterprise.

Aneel Lakhani

(http://poly.union.rpi.edu/article_view.php3?view=1886&part=1)

Monstrous Obligations

An important element of *The Corporation's* argument is presented in this section. The film suggests that even if the individuals who run corporations are saints, the qualities inherent to the corporation override their personal qualities and enforces its own values of profit above all else.

Look at the segment where Sir Mark Moody-Stuart recounts an exchange between himself (at the time Chairman of Royal Dutch Shell), his wife and a group of Earth First activists who arrived on the doorstep of their country home. The protesters chanted and stretched a banner over their roof that read, 'MURDERERS'. The response of the surprised couple was not to call the police, but to engage their uninvited guests in a civil dialogue, share concerns about human rights and the environment and eventually serve them tea on their front lawn.

- 1 How does Sir Mark Moody-Stuart see himself—as an unfeeling,



The Corporation



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antagonistic exploiter of resources, or as caring, sympathetic and concerned for the welfare of the environment?

2 How does the film undermine this image?

3 Why does the film present him in this way? One reviewer has said: *The Corporation is polemical in the best sense in that it gives time to many views while purposefully making its own cogent and compelling arguments. The Corporation is not a one-sided diatribe although the cumulative effect is clear enough. There is a great deal of contrary opinion presented.*
 Peter Crayford, *Australian*

Financial Review, 5 June 2004.

- 4 Would you agree with this assessment of the way that *The Corporation* presents the views of its opponents? In developing your answer you should draw on several examples from the film.

Mindset

- What is the ethical mindset of corporate players? Should the institution or the individuals within it be held responsible for the cor-



1: Charles Kernaghan, Director, National Labor Committee. By exposing Walmart and the Kathy Lee Gifford brand's labor practices, made the sweatshop abuses common knowledge • **2:** Robert Keyes, President and CEO, Canadian Council for International Business. Lobbies for business interests on trade issues. Doesn't like to use the word 'corporation'. • **3:** Mark Kingwell, Philosopher, cultural critic, author. The primary question is: how do we make corporations democratically accountable? • **4:** Naomi Klein, Author, *No Logo* and *Fences and Windows*. Branding aficionado. Branding isn't advertising; it's the new production • **5:** Tom Kline V.P. Pfizer Inc., world's largest pharmaceutical corporation, on a tour of Pfizer's philanthropic initiatives near its Brooklyn

factory • **6:** Chris Komisarjevsky, CEO Burson Marsteller Worldwide, a leading global PR agency. Helps big corporations 'have a voice' and share 'how they feel about things.' • **7:** Dr. Susan Linn, Prof. Of Psychiatry, Baker Children's Centre, Harvard. Critic of the Nag Factor study and of exploiting children's developmental vulnerabilities • **8:** Robert Monks, CEO LENS; Founder, Institutional Shareholder Services; pioneering shareholder activist. • **9:** Sir Mark Moody-Stuart, Former Chairman, Royal Dutch Shell. Presided over Shell during the Brent Spar fiasco and the hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other activists • **10:** Michael Moore, Academy Award-winning documentary filmmaker, best-selling author. The problem is the profit motive:

for corporations, there's no such thing as 'enough' • **11:** Oscar Olivera, The Coalition in Defense of Water and Life. Bolivian anti-water privatization activist. Trusts in the people's capacity for 'reflection, rage and rebellion.' • **12:** Irving Wladawsky-Berger, Vice President IBM, Technology and Strategy in IBM Servers. Dismisses Edwin Black's allegations against IBM as having been 'discredited.' • **13:** Mary Zepernick, Coordinator, POCLAD, Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy. POCLAD initiates dialogue on the authority of corporations to govern • **14:** Howard Zinn, Historian, author, *A People's History of the United States*. Fascism rose in Europe with the help of enormous corporations.

- poration's actions?
- What are the points being made during the interviews with Sam Gibara, Ray Anderson and Carlton Brown?
 - Ray Anderson describes corporations as 'plunderers'. Explain what he means by this term.
 - He sets the criterion: 'If any product cannot be made sustainably, it should not be made at all.' What does he mean by this?

Ray Anderson is a central figure in the film. Read this quote from the film's press kit:

Ray Anderson blew me away. It's a personal story about his epiphany, his paradigm shift. He comes across as one of the stars of the film. Here's a corporate insider who realized that he had to become environmentally friendly ...

In terms of structuring the film, it was important to me to find those stories where the interview subjects revealed something, either about themselves or about their experience, that had an emotional impact.

Jennifer Abbott

He's a star in the film. His appeal was filmic. His look, his eyes, his Jimmy Carter accent. When it's just in text, it's much easier to see through it.

Joel Bakan

- Why would Anderson be presented so prominently?
- What is his message?

Part of the appeal of Anderson and many other interviewees lies in the interview techniques employed by the filmmakers. A problem with many documentaries is that the subject is interviewed at an angle to the camera lens so the subject is never speaking directly to the audience. The alternative is to have the interviewee speak to the camera, however this often results in a wooden, unrealistic and impersonal image of the interviewee.

The problem is: how do you get the interviewee to speak directly to the

viewer, yet interact as though communicating with a real person? (see diagram on page 10)

The makers of *The Corporation* have a solution to this.

I knew I wanted people addressing the camera directly. There's something really engaging about that ... I devised a part-silvered mirror at forty-five degrees in front of the camera. The interviewee is speaking straight into the camera, but they're seeing my face superimposed over it, so they're not conscious of the lens. We could engage in eye contact and a lot of non-verbal communication while the person was talking.

I find the results to be quite subtle. I think the quality of the interviews are really interesting. It's intimate, relaxed and the subjects found it a lot easier to be speaking essentially face to face with a person rather than speaking to a cold camera lens. Just me raising my eyebrows or tilting my head could prompt them, non-verbally, to continue or to clarify. You see their non-verbal gestures—facial expressions—that were directed at me are now directed to the viewer. There's a texture that I found very engaging and successful.

Jennifer Abbott

- Do you agree that this technique has added 'life' to the interviewees? Select several interviews and see if you can identify ways in which they do seem to be interacting with another human.

Boundary Issues

In this section *The Corporation* continues its exploration of the impact of privatization on people's lives.

In the fifteenth century, the enclosure movement began to put fences around public grazing lands so that they might be privately owned and exploited. Today, every molecule on the planet is up for grabs. In a bid to own it all, corporations are patenting animals, plants, even your DNA.

Around things too precious, vulner-

able, sacred or important to the public interest, governments have, in the past, drawn protective boundaries against corporate exploitation. Today, governments are inviting corporations into domains from which they were previously barred.

The Corporation press kit

- What are these 'boundary issues'?
- What might be the effects of taking things from the public to the private sphere?

Basic Training

The Initiative Corporation spends \$22 billion worldwide placing its clients' advertising in every imaginable—and some unimaginable—media. One new medium: very young children. Their 'Nag Factor' study dropped jaws in the world of child psychiatry. It was designed not to help parents cope with their children's nagging, but to help corporations design their ads and promotions so that children would nag for their products more effectively. Initiative Vice President Lucy Hughes elaborates: 'You can manipulate consumers into wanting, and therefore buying your products. It's a game.'

Today people can become brands. And brands can build cities. And university students can pay for their educations by shilling on national television for a credit card company. And a corporation even owns the rights to the popular song 'Happy Birthday'. Do you ever get the feeling it's all a bit much?

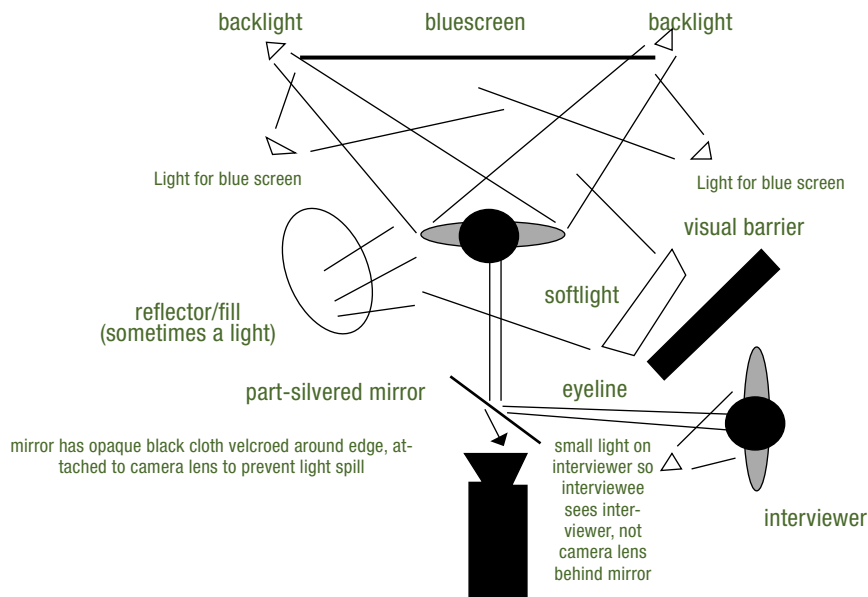
Corporations have invested billions to shape public and political opinion. When they own everything, who will stand for the public good?

The Corporation press kit

- Lucy Hughes is asked if her research and its applications are ethical. She answers that she 'doesn't know'. Do you think her work is ethical? Prepare a simple table divided into two



The Corporation



columns headed acceptable and unacceptable. Is it ethical to do such research and use it to influence children's desires and in turn their parents' spending habits? (see table on page 7)
This list should enable you to answer the above question and justify your answer.

Perception Management

This section deals with two ideas: firstly, that the corporation is prepared to do good things and help the communities they are part of. Secondly, that it is fair and appropriate for the Corporation to have a voice in the community and to present its views and arguments effectively.

- Look at the Chris Komisarjevsky interview. How do the filmmakers challenge the speaker's claim to corporations' right to present their views?
- Is this approach effective? Is it fair?
- Look at the interview with Tom Klein of Pfizer. How do the filmmakers undermine his position?
- Is this approach effective? Is it fair?
- Do you think the arguments of the two pro-Corporation interviewees, in defence of how Corporations

act, and challenging the whole thesis of the film that Corporations are only ruled by profit, are effectively answered? Are they effectively undermined?

A Private Celebration/Triumph Of The Shill

These sections reveal a tactic of corporations to engage in 'undercover marketing'.

- Is this a problem?
- Does being aware that it is happening act as a protection against it? Explain your reasons.

Advancing The Front

The film focuses here on corporations' attempts to control life itself. Their method of doing so, by use of patents, means that huge changes are occurring without government involvement or public discussion.

- Most people know little about such issues. How can we be expected to be involved?
- How could governments be involved? Should they be? Explain your reasons.

Unsettling Accounts

This section of *The Corporation* looks at three case studies: the censorship of two investigative reporters, the privatization of water in a town in Brazil, and the role of IBM in supporting Nazi Germany in the Second World War.

- What is the important point about news and corporations that emerges from this case study? (For more information on the case see www.foxbghsuit.com)
- There is no case for Fox put by a Fox spokesperson. Does this matter?
- What is the main point being made about the privatization of water?
- Again, there is no spokesperson for the Corporation involved. Does this matter?
- What is the point that is being made about IBM's involvement with Nazi Germany?
- In this case, IBM's view is presented. How does the film counter it?

Hostile Takeover

This section provides a historic example of an attempt to replace the President of the United States by Corporations. It failed. However, the point being made is that such a coup is no longer necessary, as transnational

and global corporations already exert significant influence over nation states.

- How does the film create the image of corporate power being anti-democratic?
- Is this effective?
- Is enough evidence given in the film to support the claim about transnational power over governments? Does this matter?

Democracy Ltd

One of the main tenets of *The Corporation* is that corporations are motivated first and foremost by profit. Many corporations today talk about 'triple bottom line accounting'—this is profit, social impact, and ecological sustainability.

- How does the film challenge this idea that corporations can act and are acting in a more acceptable fashion?
- Is it convincing?

Psychotherapies / Prognosis

These final sections look at ways of making corporations accountable. One of the filmmakers has said, 'We don't want people to emerge from this film feeling only despair'.

- Look at the UNOCAL example. A chamber of commerce representative talks about the unfair 'demonization' of the company. Is this what *The Corporation* does? How does it counter the UNOCAL position?
- Look at the interview with Michael Moore. What tactic do we see him using against corporations? Is this effective?
- What is his message about ordinary people's complicity and responsibility?
- Look at the Arcata town meeting. It is presented as a symbol of hope that a town could challenge corporations. Is it successful?
- Look at the basmati rice example. How was success achieved here?
- Look at the Cochabamba water supply example. How was victory achieved here?

- Look at the Ray Anderson example. How is he presented as an example of success in overcoming the power of the corporation?

Here is a statement from the filmmakers about Ray Anderson.

There are questions you can ask of Anderson: what's he doing with his workforce? How did he get that \$200 million extra revenue without taking more out of the earth? Did he lay off people? Did he cut back wages? How is he with unions? We don't know any of that. We know how he is on the environment, but we don't know about the other externalities. I'm not saying he's bad or good; I don't know the answer to the question. He's a wonderful man and entirely sincere, but he probably wonders if his decision will work. Anderson's solution is that his company should continue to own the carpets that it manufactures and effectively lease them to people. Then he, as an owner, has an interest in maintaining them, making sure they don't wear out too soon. And that will be good for the environment.

The Corporation Press Kit

- Does this weaken the impact of Ray Anderson as a model for success?
- Does *The Corporation* provide realistic and achievable ways of addressing the problem so that people can leave the film with a sense of optimism?

Conclusion

Here are some statements by the filmmakers about what they wanted to achieve in their film.

My overriding objective in making The Corporation was to challenge conventional wisdom about the role of the corporation in society, to make the commonplace seem strange, to alienate viewers from the normalcy of the dominant culture allowing them to gain a critical distance on the corporations and the corporate culture that envelop us all ...

The Corporation to me is many things, but it resonates most strongly as a

gesture towards exposing the destructive nature of that institution. It is my hope that the film will contribute to change made possible by ever-growing awareness ...

I think it will spark a lot of dialogue. That will be very gratifying ... our goal is to get people to see the institution of the corporation in an entirely new light ... [so that] people can't walk down the street and look at corporate logos the same way any more ...

One of my goals was for viewers to ask questions about this strange thing, the corporation. I hope people walk away empowered and motivated to do something ...

A great social critic, Karl Marx, said that understanding the world is the first step toward changing it. We've taken an institution that's been reified and what we've done in this project is to say that's not the case: it's an institution that we've created.

The Corporation Press Kit

- 1 Do you think the film has achieved these aims?
- 2 Do you think it presents a powerful anti-corporation image?
- 3 Do you think it presents a strong argument against the corporation?
- 4 Is it an effective documentary?
- 5 Is it effective propaganda?
- 6 Do you think the corporation ought to be defined more as a technology, rather than a person? What impact would that have on the corporation's rights and responsibilities?

Further Reading

- Joel Bakan, *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, Simon and Schuster, UK, 2004
- Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 2003.
- Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, Flamingo, UK, 2001.
- Naomi Klein, *Fences and Windows*, Flamin-



- go, UK, 2002.
- Michael Moore, *Downsize This*, Perennial, UK, 2000.
 - Ted Nace, *Gangs of America: The Rise of Corporate Power and the Disabling of Democracy*, UK, 2003
 - *New Internationalist*, July 2002.

Further Viewing

- *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* (Achbar/Wintanick, 1992). An exploration of the career and views of media critic Noam Chomsky, co-directed by *The Corporation's* Mark Achbar.
- *The Yes Men* (Dan Ollman and Sarah Price, 2003) 'Changing the world one prank at a time'. Anti-corporate activists go to conferences and impersonate members of the World Trade Organisation, giving satirical speeches and proposing ludicrous ideas that are taken seriously.
- *The Take* (Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein, 2004). Lewis and Klein document the phenomenon of 'occupied businesses' in Argentina after the economic collapse. Argentine

workers walked into empty factories and businesses and starting running them without their bosses.

- *Roger and Me* (Michael Moore, 1989). Director Michael Moore pursues General Motors CEO Roger Smith in an attempt to confront him about his massive downsizing of the Flint, Michigan plant and its subsequent effect on the town.

Web Sites

- www.thecorporation.com is the film's official web site. The press kit and other information can be accessed from this site.
- www.thenation.com/ provides an alternative to the mainstream media in the US. *The Nation* is a Washington-based newspaper that has been published since 1865. Naomi Klein, among others, is a regular contributor.
- www.michaelmoore.com/ is Michael Moore's official web site for those interested in the maverick director and author's views.

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The Corporation is distributed in Australia by:

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Street, East Brisbane, QLD, 4169.

Tel: 07 3391 0124. Fax: 07 3391 0154

Email: gil@gilscrinefilms.com.au

Web: www.gilscrinefilms.com.au

This study guide was produced by ATOM. For more information about ATOM study guides, The Speakers' Bureau or Screen Hub (the daily online film and television newsletter) visit our web site: www.metromagazine.com.au or email: damned@netspace.net.au

