

# The Corporation on DVD - Chapter By Chapter

## 1. What is a Corporation?

The Corporation has emerged to be today's dominant institution, one that creates great wealth but also great harms. This documentary examines the history of the corporation and the role it plays in society and our everyday lives. They are artificial creations to produce profit sometimes likened to an eagle, a whale, or a Frankenstein monster out of control.

## 2. Birth

How the corporation came to be. Originally, corporations were set up to serve the public good. Corporation lawyers gained rights through the US Supreme Court using the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment (set up to protect slaves) that gives them the rights of a person. In the last century, the corporation is given more and more rights while people are increasingly stripped of theirs.

## 3. A Legal "Person"

Having acquired rights of immortal persons, what kind of person is the corporation? By law, the corporation can only consider the interests of their shareholders. It is legally bound to put its bottom line before everything else, even the public good.

## 4. Externalities

What is an externality? Milton Friedman describes it as the effect of a transaction between two parties on a third party who is not involved in the transaction. A technical sounding term that basically means let somebody else deal with the problems the corporation creates.

## 5. Case Histories

Case histories can be used to diagnose the kind of personality that makes the corporation an externality-creating machine. Externalities such as harm to employees through the use of sweatshops: the exploitation of Third World countries' employees resulting in a huge discrepancy of price versus cost. Other externalities such as pollution and adverse health effects emerge. These include the genesis of the petrochemical industry and links to cancer, birth defects and other toxic effects. Another externality is harm to the biosphere or the environmental costs resulting from the way corporations operate, costs that will be passed off to future generations. Have we created a doom machine?

## 6. The Pathology of Commerce

If we look at the corporation as a legal person, it exhibits all the characteristics of a psychopath using a personality diagnostic checklist by the World Health Organization.

## 7. Monstrous Obligations

Who bears the moral responsibility for the actions of a psychopathic institution? The employees of the corporation can be the nicest people in their personal lives but still engage in monstrous endeavours at work. Can we separate the individual from the corporation?

## **8. Mindset**

The profit motive drives the actions of the corporation and creates a mindset of competition and anything goes. Meet corporate spy and self-described predator Marc Barry as he describes his tactics for gathering intelligence from competing corporations. Juxtapose his attitude with Ray Anderson, President of Interface, who, in an epiphanic moment, realized he was a plunderer and it was only a matter of time before the law figures it out.

## **9. Trading on 9/11**

A trader describes the tragedy of 9/11 as a blessing in disguise because for some people, it translated into great riches. Brokers celebrated the death and destruction of the Iraq war because in devastation, there is the opportunity for profit.

## **10. Boundary Issues**

We used to regard many areas as too essential to the public good to be commercialized for opportunity, and they were protected by tradition and regulation. Now, everything is becoming fair game in the private taking of the commons – land, oceans, air, water, education, health, energy and social assistance. Where do we draw the line?

## **11. Basic Training**

Marketing has transformed itself into a sophisticated, pervasive force that extends into every part of our lives. Slick advertising campaigns are designed for the express purpose of manipulating children into buying products and training them to become mindless consumers of goods they don't really want. The Nag factor, a marketing study that evaluated the effect of nagging, was designed to teach children how to nag more effectively. Consumers are made, not born.

## **12. Perception Management**

Some of our best creative minds are employed to create illusions that divert us from the real issues and manufacture our consent. Beyond their products, the corporation sells us the idea of a better way of life and produces propaganda that affirms their power as necessary for human progress.

## **13. Like a Good Neighbour**

Pfizer attempts to “make the community better” with a transit security system. An illustration of how the corporation works behind the scenes to reconfigure public policy to suit their needs, yet the image we're shown is markedly different.

## **14. A Private Celebration**

Branding is not just advertising, it's production. It's the dissemination of the idea of the corporation, such as Disney building a town called Celebration, Florida. They are selling the living embodiment of what the Disney brand is supposed to represent.

### **15. Triumph of the Shill**

Welcome to the new world of undercover marketing and product placement. With staged encounters such as passer-bys discussing a hot new CD, advertising is infiltrating our lives in ways we're not even aware of.

### **16. Advancing the Front**

Where do tomorrow's opportunities for profit lie? In the US, the Supreme Court ruled that anything alive can be patented except a human being. Life is ruled commercial fair game, gene pirates scour the world for new sources and the human genome project takes on new fervour.

### **17. Unsettling Accounts**

Journalists Jane Akre and Steve Wilson were fired by the Fox News television station they work for after refusing to change their investigative report on Posilac, a Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH) made by Monsanto. Their research documents potential health and safety problems of drinking milk treated with the synthetic hormone, but threatened with legal action from Monsanto, Fox wants the negative effects played down. The court eventually throws out Akre's whistle blower lawsuit after deciding that the media is allowed to lie.

### **18. Expansion Plans**

The beginning of the fight for the world's most important resource: water. In Bolivia, privatization makes water unaffordable for many of its citizens and the resulting protest turns violent when the military opens fire.

### **19. Taking the Right Side**

The rise of fascism has links to corporate power. American corporations played a role in Nazi Germany and the holocaust, such as IBM's punchcard machines that tabulated the victims' data. Corporate allegiance to profit trumps their allegiance to nationalism.

### **20. Hostile Takeover**

Despotism was often a useful tool for the corporation to secure foreign markets. Corporations once even attempted to overthrow New Deal President Roosevelt and impose a fascist dictatorship in the US.

### **21. Democracy Ltd.**

A coup is no longer necessary for the corporation to dominate governments. Capitalism's protagonists and players are the new high priests of our day. Industry and government have become intertwined to the extent that it's hard to tell when one ends and the other begins. But citizens are resisting and protesting their dissent to the centralization of power in corporate hands. The corporation has responded by enacting programs of corporate social responsibility. Are they just a tactic responding to market pressure?

### **22. Psycho Therapies**

The public is starting to fight back and demand accountability from its corporations and an end to abuse. The Kathy Lee Gifford and Walmart scandal brought the issue of

sweatshops into the national consciousness, yet they still exist. There is a disconnect between what we do for a living and taking responsibility for the effect it has on our planet. Citizens everywhere are working to bridge the gap and regain democratic control. “One should never underestimate the power of the people.”

### **23. Prognosis**

Victories are being won around the world but are they enough to turn the tide of global corporate dominance? Perhaps we can exploit the corporation’s inherent weakness to pursue profit at any cost, even to itself.

### **24. Credits**