



MATT WUERKER

# THE CORPORATION

BY CHRIS NIELSEN

I just finished watching "The Corporation," which I would have to describe as one of the best movies I have seen in a while. It so hits the nail on the head of what is going on in our country, and frankly explains my worst fears about the Bush mis-administration. Namely, that it is an administration that is controlled and made up of CEOs and the companies they stand for. Bush and big oil *et al*, including the Bin Laden family holdings to start with, comes to mind. Dickhead Cheney and Halliburton certainly cannot be left out. I also cannot leave behind or leave out the huge military corporations which have such a huge influence in our country.

But my most poignant aftertaste after watching this movie is: Just what is a corporation? Is it a group of people? Is it an organization? Or is it more like an organism? I would have to say I think it is more of the latter. Dictionary.com describes an organization as the following: "Something that has been organized or made into an ordered whole; Something made up of elements with varied functions that contribute to the whole and to collective functions; A group of persons organized for a particular purpose; An association; a benevolent organization; A structure through which individuals cooperate systematically to conduct business; The administrative personnel of such a structure."

The definition for organism is as follows: "An individual form of life, such as a plant, animal, bacterium, protist, or fungus; a body made up of organs, organelles, or other parts that work together to carry on the various processes of life; a system regarded as analogous in its structure or functions to a living body: the social organism."

What is very disturbing about a corporation, in essence, is its longevity and also its ability to carry on even when integral parts (*i.e.* an organ) fail or get fired. The failed organ gets replaced as easily as placing an ad in a newspaper or an ad on Monster.com or just making a promotion. Once that is done the corporation continues. Even in the event of huge fines for misconduct, a corporation normally weathers the storm and continues. For example, in March 2005, Dupont Dow Elastomers LLC, a company formed in 1996 by E. I. Du Pont de Nemours & Company and the Dow Chemical Company, pled guilty and was sentenced to pay an \$84 million criminal fine for participating in an international conspiracy to fix prices of polychlorene rubber, also known as chloroprene rubber."

But a thriving corporation is something more insidious, absolute, invincible and omnipotent. It truly is an organism in the way it eats up the competition, in terms of corporations such as Mall-Wart, leaving once thriving small town malls or downtown business districts the equivalent of ghost towns. Or how about the way large corporations chew up employees and spit them out as is the case with the majority of corporations peddling textiles such as shoes and clothing. One can't help but wonder at the amazing profit margin that companies such as Nike and Gap make each year with the help of paying people literally pennies on the dollar.

Consider that just a few decades ago virtually all automobiles driven in this country were made here by union workers, and yet all of the big three car makers were able to stay afloat. The same could be said for (I would estimate) 75% of the major corporations in the United States. Furthermore, I just noticed recently any time I call a 1-800 help number, such as for my notoriously unreliable DSL provider, I get someone with a Middle Eastern accent. So in addition to 90% of our manufacturing and

textile jobs being lost and farmed out, yet another segment of our workforce (1-800 help) is being lost in the name of corporate profits. What I have not seen any estimates of, or for that matter proof of their existence, is just how many jobs have been lost in the last decade at the hands of greedy, exploitive corporations. What is the price we have had to pay for this greed? In other words, think of the billions of dollars that don't get paid to U.S. workers and subsequently spent in this country — because these jobs are gone. It is money that would be spent each and every day here in the United States.

In essence, each large U.S. corporation while existing as a living organism also exists as a small country within itself (due mainly to the fact they are largely unregulated). As a result, they end up governing the government of not just the United States, where they claim to reside, but they also govern the countries where they farm out the work. When you really lay it all out, these corporations operate like terrorists. They control governments of other countries; they extort money from any willing unscrupulous official; they terrorize the citizenry of countries in which they are located and more often than not enslave the same people; and also the countries that are taken over are pillaged and raped of their natural resources and left polluted and ravaged. This is all done at the hands of U.S. corporations.

What is the answer to this situation? Essentially, since these corporations have been allowed for the last 100-plus years to conduct themselves like small, terrorist countries — a lofty perch, indeed — it is an incredible uphill battle to unravel this mess. There definitely needs to be some way of limiting the size of these corporations, and also their power. But at the current time we have top CEOs (*i.e.*, Bush and Cheney) representing big oil and huge conglomerates such as Halliburton, and pulling strings not just here in the poor old USA, but globally.

I personally think that as consumers we need to simply stop purchasing products from any large corporation — period! We need to greatly reduce buying any products made with petroleum, which is a tall order. We need to check labels and see where products are manufactured, and more importantly, assembled — it has become commonplace for items to be manufactured in one country and assembled in another country where the labor is the cheapest (hence the blossoming in the last several decades of sweatshops and child labor worldwide, thanks to U.S. corporations).

In the end, the adoration of the supreme, almighty corporation needs to come to a screeching halt. But this can only take place if small companies are patronized, in order to ensure that huge corporations do not continue or come to life in the first place.

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# THE GLOBALIZED MILLENNIUM

The last several months I have been trying to put my finger on what the tension I am sensing in our country is all about. I have come up with several etymological theories, including the emotional fallout from natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. This would have to include shock over the horrific and unbelievable disaster itself, and shock regarding subsequent cries of racially biased lackadaisicalness on a federal level.

I have also been considering how fearful we all are of another 9/11 event, particularly since we are still in the process of taking over Iraq. As if Islamic Fundamentalism isn't bad enough, we are in the middle of pissing it off and becoming a target for every extremist group in the Middle East. Ever since we started this invasion of Iraq, I have been feeling that the other 9/11 shoe is about to drop. I do not think I am alone in terms of this feeling — far from it, indeed.

Then I decided to do a little research on another theory: that globalization is at the root of our countrywide tension.

I started with an author I saw featured on a recent PBS "News Hour" episode. His name is Thomas L. Friedman, who made some very good arguments regarding how important it is to be aware of what globalization is doing to our country. Friedman, a nationally syndicated *New York Times* columnist, has written several books about the National Security Agency (NSA), and a 2005 book titled *The World is Flat*, which is about globalization and the effects of outsourcing.

On a gut level, I sense that the effects of globalization are not to be taken lightly. As more and more jobs leave this country (primarily manufacturing), our workforce is being very polarized. Namely, either people here are doing high-tech, high paying work, or are at the bottom of the socio-economic scale working for soul-raping corporations such as McDildo's or Mail-Wart (yes, puns intended). There's not much inbetween. We're also not producing sufficient scientists or physicians to stem the tide of those looking for and getting jobs here from other countries with degrees in science and medicine. So, essentially, we are losing our manufacturing jobs to workers in other countries; and at the same time we are seeing people from foreign countries coming here and taking our science and medicine jobs, since we are not producing people to fill these positions.

On a very deep, yet multi-faceted level, this situation simply yet alarmingly translates to our inability to compete on a global scale. A quote by Friedman in a recent interview (and I am paraphrasing this) simply said that when most of the baby-boomers were kids we were told to eat all our dinner because someone in China or India was starving. But in the 21st century amid globalization kids today need to be told to do their homework because someone in China or India is starving for their future, potential jobs.

This is a telling statement, because I think it sums up a lot of the tension which is taking place in the United States today. It places an intuitive acumen on what many are feeling: that we are not as competitive as we thought. And when you consider our current undereducated, overweight, overmedicated, overpampered society in the United States, we have fallen desperately behind.

An April 2005 *USA Today* article states that for the past quarter-century the American Medical Association and other industry groups have predicted a glut of doctors and worked to limit the number of new physicians. In 1994, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* predicted a surplus of 165,000 doctors by 2000. It never happened, according to Harvard University professor David Blumenthal. Now the United States has a shortage of doctors. Additionally, because it takes 10 years to train a doctor, the nation will have a shortage of 85,000 to 200,000 doctors in 2020 unless action is taken soon. In the meantime, where are we getting physicians? You guessed it — from abroad.

This situation is a perfect example of why we need to push more and more college students toward medicine and sciences, including mathematics, physics and engineering. We need to get our kids off Ritalin; get them off their Playstations; and most importantly off their asses.

In a December 2005 article, Edna Francisco, a contributing writer for MiSciNet, asks if there is a serious need for more highly-skilled U.S. scientists, and states: "Many people would answer yes, particularly supporters of the Technology Talent Act of 2001." Francisco goes on to state that two advocates who worked on this legislation (Congressman Sherwood Boehlert and Senator Joe Lieberman) argued that the nation's academic institutions have not produced enough skilled scientists and felt that the country needed to meet the inevitable demand for a larger scientific workforce in the future.

Another situation which is detracting people from college degrees in medicine and the sciences, which I am frustrated by (and portends a good blog rant) is how a career in real estate has become the new goal for so many people in this country. Why bother going to college, or high school for that matter, if I can make hundreds of thousands of dollars flipping properties? The answer is that it does not make us competitive in the world market. It is another get-rich-quick scheme, much like the one which so many got sucked into three-quarters of a century ago, when people invested heavily in the stock market — just prior to the Great Depression. Those who lost their asses in the late 1990s when the bottom dropped out of dot-com industry also definitely come to mind.

My advice to everyone I meet is the same, no matter their age: get educated; get *more* educated and be prepared to compete as you never have — in this new globalized new millennium.

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