

6

Corporations and the Environment

Amalia Leguizamón



Footwear and footwear box displaying Nike's sustainability campaign. Photo by Amalia Leguizamón [Enlarge image](#)

If you're in the classroom, turn around and ask your neighbor to show you their T-shirt or sweatshirt inner label. Show them your label, too. (If you're home alone, pull your T-shirt and stretch your neck to read it yourself.) What does the label say? Where does your T-shirt come from? If your clothes have been made by a large company, like Zara, Adidas, or Levi's, the label will likely say "Made in Vietnam" or "Made in Honduras," or another country in Southeast Asia or Central America and the Caribbean. The Nike sneakers in the picture above were made in Indonesia. (I could have asked you to check your classmate's shoes, but that would have been even more awkward!) Can you picture the factory where these clothes and shoes were assembled? Can you imagine what the factory workers look like, how much they are paid, and what their working conditions are like? Now reflect on the materials that make up your clothes and shoes (or read them from the label if they're listed there).

reflect on the materials that make up your clothes and shoes (or read them from the label if they're listed there). Where does the cotton that makes your T-shirt's fabric come from? I bet you won't find that info on the label and it's rarely on the company's website. That cotton is likely grown in China, India, the United States, or Brazil. Those are the top four cotton-producing countries in the world ([USDA Economic Research Service 2022](#)). Now, can you picture the farm where that cotton was grown? Are the farmers contracted labor for a large agribusiness, or do they own a small plot of land? Do they use large machines or genetically modified seeds? (Almost 100 percent of US cotton has been genetically modified to tolerate herbicide spraying or control insect pests [[Dodson 2020](#)].) What chemical pesticides or fertilizers do farmers apply to protect their crops? How (and where) is raw cotton turned into fabric? How is that fabric (likely made of US cotton in China) transported to the T-shirt assembly factory in Vietnam and, after being manufactured, shipped back to the US to the shop where you purchased it? And where does your T-shirt go after you're done with it? You could trash it or, if you desire to minimize your environmental impact, donate it. Most donated clothes, however, also end up in a landfill. In the Atacama desert, in the north of Chile, over 30,000 tons of unsold or donated clothes are dumped yearly ([BBC News 2022](#)). Mountains of trashed clothes and shoes expand over the desert. Your donated T-shirt is unlikely to biodegrade because—besides the cotton—most clothes and shoes are treated with or contain synthetic chemicals like polyester, rayon, and spandex. Synthetic materials take hundreds of years to biodegrade, releasing chemicals that pollute soil, air, and water streams. The “solution” to landfills is often to burn the trash, which brings additional smoke pollution and fire threats to nearby communities.

You can repeat this exercise and trace the stages of the material economy for any product, from clothes and shoes to salmon and even iPhones, as discussed in [Lesson 2](#). You may have watched an animated clip on YouTube called *The Story of Stuff* ([Story of Stuff Project 2009](#)). The video explains the stages of the material economy that we discussed with the T-shirt example: extraction of natural resources (the farm), production (the factory), distribution (the store), consumption (you), and disposal (landfill). Throughout this system of turning nature into stuff, these are the questions: Who decides what goods and services we need in society and how we produce them? What are the impacts of these decisions on society and the environment?

This lesson studies how our economic system generates negative socioenvironmental outcomes. It pays particular attention to the corporation, the most important and powerful economic institution of our times, and how corporations generate and respond to socioenvironmental change. We will go beyond “bad apple” discourses that blame individual corporations for harmful behavior. Instead, taking a sociological perspective, we will analyze “business-as-usual” practices and dynamics that corporations engage in that create social and environmental harm. We will examine how the power of the corporation has shifted in relation to the government and civil society and its consequences in decision-making and on the distribution of costs and benefits. Thus, we will consider the question of who reaps the benefits and who bears the costs of a globalized economic system. We will examine corporate power in the economy and how it shapes what we know and how we respond to the climate crisis. Throughout the lesson, I also include concrete examples that challenge and limit corporate power. But let's start from the beginning: What is a corporation, and how did it become such a powerful institution?

6.1 The Corporation

A corporation is a business organization. It is also called a company, a firm, the private sector, and capital. Corporations are organized hierarchically, with workers at the bottom and managers, presidents, chief executive officers (CEOs), and owners (called shareholders) at the top. The corporation brings together land (and all its natural resources), labor, knowledge, and capital (meaning invested money and assets) to produce goods and services to create profit ([Pulver and Manski 2021](#)). Indeed, the corporation's main purpose is to provide large, growing, sustained legal returns for shareholders. Under modern law, CEOs are obligated to protect shareholders' interests above all else ([Magnuson 2022](#)). Nike, Apple, Google, Walmart, Amazon, Exxon, JP Morgan Chase, The Coca-Cola Company, and McDonald's are among many examples of modern capitalist corporations.

The corporation as a chartered organization has existed since ancient Rome ([Magnuson 2022](#)). Since then, states (governments) have used the law to shape corporate entities and govern the economy, though their ability to do so has changed over time. In the US post-1776, corporations were associations of people chartered by the state to provide a common good or service that served the public interest, such as supplying drinking water. Amid the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln signed The Pacific Railroad Act, which created the Union Pacific Railroad Company and authorized the Central Pacific Railroad Company to build a transcontinental railroad. The railroad would serve military purposes and, most importantly, build the nation: to unite remote states from east to west through travel, trade, and communication. Compared to modern corporation's charters, state-issued charters post-Civil War were quite narrow in scope. There were limits on how long corporations could operate, their amount of capitalization, the sectors in which they could operate, and their ability to purchase other companies or influence politics and public opinion, among other limitations ([Pulver and Manski 2021](#)).

By the mid-19th century, corporations grew larger through government subsidies to build railroad infrastructure and to expand the steel and manufacturing industries. Corporate lawyers thus sought ways to remove governmental constraints that limited corporate power. They fought in court for the rights and protections afforded by the Fourteenth Amendment to be applied to the corporation ([Achbar and Abbott 2005](#)). The Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution grants citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the US, including formerly enslaved people, and guarantees equal protection under the law. In 1886, the Supreme Court ruling in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* established the legal doctrine of **corporate personhood**, which grants corporations rights and protections from discrimination and equal protection under the law under the Fourteenth Amendment. With a stroke of a pen, judges removed the strict charter laws that mandated corporations to serve the public interests and limited corporate power.

The consequences of this ruling are manifold. Corporations can claim rights and privileges originally reserved solely to individuals, such as lobbying legislatures and financing political campaigns—corporate rights ratified by the Supreme Court in the 2010 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, ruling that corporations have a constitutional right to freedom of speech. In consequence, corporations can now directly contribute funds to political candidates, parties, and campaigns, influencing political agendas. Corporations can also own media outlets and use them to disseminate news, information, and opinions that influence public opinion and debate. Corporations can also engage in court to advocate for law changes, defend their interests, and challenge regulations. Invoking the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution (which

regulations. Invoking the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution (which guarantees equal protection and freedom from discrimination), corporations have fought against higher taxes imposed on out-of-state and foreign corporations that would otherwise protect domestic industries. They have also used legal mechanisms to protect corporate privacy and proprietary information. The Supreme Court ruling *Coca-Cola Co. v. Koke Co. of America* (1920) protects Coca-Cola's formula as a trade secret and sets a precedent for safeguarding proprietary production practices. Under this and similar rulings, corporations can legally avoid disclosing production practices and designs that could harm health and the environment, such as disclosing the amount of bisphenol A (BPA), an endocrine disruptor, in aluminum Coke cans. Finally, **limited liability** is another significant legal protection and major advantage of being incorporated. Limited liability means that shareholders in a corporation are not personally liable for the company's debts and liabilities beyond their investments. While these protections encourage investment, they also allow corporate actors to evade accountability for their actions. A prominent example is the case of the Sackler family, owners of Purdue Pharma, the maker of OxyContin. Purdue Pharma filed for bankruptcy in 2019 as part of a settlement agreement to resolve thousands of lawsuits related to its role in creating the opioid crisis in America. Yet, limited liability shielded the Sacklers from losing their personal wealth. The consequences of this protection are staggering. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, in 2022 alone, 107,941 people died from opioid overdoses in the US, with the rate of drug overdose deaths nearly quadrupling from 8.2 in 2002 to 32.6 in 2022 ([Spencer, Garnett, and Miniño 2024](#)). Meanwhile, Purdue Pharma is estimated to have generated over \$35 billion in revenue from OxyContin sales since its introduction in 1996, with the Sackler family withdrawing nearly \$4.3 billion from the company between 2008 and 2016 from OxyContin proceeds ([Keefe 2021](#)).

This case illustrates how limited liability can exacerbate the problem of negative externalities in our economic system. A negative **externality** occurs when the production or consumption of a good or service imposes a cost on third parties not directly involved in the transaction. In environmental sociology, we often examine how corporations generate negative externalities in the form of pollution, resource depletion, or public health crises. The opioid epidemic represents a severe negative externality of Purdue Pharma's business practices, with costs borne by individuals, families, communities, and society at large. Limited liability, in this context, allowed the corporation and its owners to privatize profits while socializing the enormous costs of addiction and mortality. This misalignment of incentives—where those making decisions do not bear the full consequences of their actions—can lead to corporate behavior that maximizes short-term profits at the expense of long-term societal and environmental well-being.

In conclusion, tracing the history of the corporation allows us to see that, while seemingly large, solid, and powerful, corporations are yet another social institution. As such, they are socially constructed and historically specific. The state first chartered corporations to promote the public good. Over the last century, corporate lawyers have fought in court to increase rights and protections for the private sector. Corporations now wield enormous power over government and only serve the interests of shareholders at the expense of society and the environment with limited public control. But if laws created the corporation and gave it rights and protections, then such laws can be undone—or at least new laws can be passed to limit harmful activities and make corporations accountable in case of violations. For example, Congress passed the Securities Exchange Act (1934) to regulate financial markets after the 1929 stock market crash ([Magnuson 2022](#)). More financial regulations were introduced after the 2008 financial crisis with the Dodd-Frank Act (2010), though portions were reversed significantly in 2018 under the Trump administration. The Clean Air Act (1963), the Clean Water Act (1972), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (1976) are federal laws that regulate pollution control, waste management, and environmental remediation. In April 2024, the Biden administration established national-level, legally enforceable national

remediation in April 2021, the Biden administration established national-level, legally enforceable national drinking water standards to address PFAS pollution (known as “forever chemicals”) in drinking water ([US EPA 2024](#)) (see [Lesson 12](#)). It also committed funding to the Environmental Protection Agency through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for PFAS cleanup, remediation, and improvement of drinking-water systems. Public accountability for corporate irresponsibility can take many forms besides the law. As in the case of Purdue Pharma mentioned above, the Sacklers have retained much of their wealth thanks to limited liability. Yet their prestige was shattered by activists who protested their responsibility in the opioid crisis at museums and universities across Europe and the US that had received their philanthropic donations ([Harris 2019](#)).

DO NOT COPY
aleguiza@tulane.edu

6.2 The Development of the Corporation and the Rise of Capitalism

To understand the role of corporations in driving socioenvironmental change, we must place them in the context of the larger economic system: capitalism. By **capitalism**, we refer to the contemporary economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and the creation of goods and services for profit. By **means of production**, we mean the inputs necessary to produce goods and services, like land, machinery, tools, and factories. Those who control such capital, and thus production and trade, are the **capitalists**—the corporation's owners and shareholders. They invest their capital into businesses to generate a profit. Capitalists amass wealth through the labor of wage workers (the majority of us who work for a living) and the exploitation of the environment (the source of the natural resources that make up the stuff we consume). Capital accumulation is the goal of capitalists and the capitalist system: constant reinvestments for sustained economic growth.

Some scholars place the origins of the capitalist system in the colonial excursions of the 16th century, others in the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century ([Patel and Moore 2017](#)). Through expanding frontiers, European colonialism established a relationship of unequal ecological exchange, whereas core countries benefited from extracting land and labor from the colonies to benefit the metropolis (see [Lesson 2](#)). The Industrial Revolution developed coal into steam, an energy source that ushered in technological developments from weaving machines to railroads (see [Lessons 7](#) and [8](#)). The modern capitalist corporation grew out of these developments and pushed them forward. The pursuit of efficiency, productivity, and profitability—to produce more stuff faster and cheaper—became core economic values. Market competition reinforces these values, leading to corporate concentration and monopolies.

Political-economic theories in environmental sociology, such as the treadmill of production, world systems, ecologically unequal exchange, and metabolic rift theories, highlight the contradictions between a capitalist system that must continually expand and the finite limits of our planet (see [Lessons 2](#) and [3](#)). The concept of planetary boundaries reveals that we are undoubtedly exceeding the thresholds of the Earth's system. Introduced by environmental scientists, this framework identifies nine critical processes that regulate the stability and resilience of the Earth system, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and biogeochemical flows; current human activities are pushing several of these boundaries beyond their safe operating space, risking abrupt and irreversible environmental changes ([Richardson et al. 2023](#)). As scientists agree that human (anthropogenic) activities drive global environmental change, geologists propose to name this geological epoch the **Anthropocene** ([Baichwal, Burtynsky, and Pencier 2019](#)). However, as this lesson begins to make clear, not all groups of humans are equally responsible for the economic activities that drive climate change. So instead of Anthropocene, environmental historian Jason W. Moore and others propose the term **Capitalocene** to highlight how capitalism has fundamentally reshaped planetary life ([Moore 2016](#)). Therefore, to address the climate crisis, it is necessary to address the capitalist system as a whole. One alternative to challenge the capitalist imperative of continued economic growth is degrowth. **Degrowth** is an economic and social movement increasingly popular in Europe and the US that advocates to democratically downscale consumption and production in industrialized societies to achieve social and environmental well-being ([Demaria et al. 2013](#)). Some examples of degrowth in practice are the transition towns movement, the slow food movement, and policies aimed at shortening working hours, like the

6.3 Economic Globalization and the Transnational Corporation

While international trade can be traced to precolonial times (the silk and spice routes, for example), since the 1980s, international trade and production have vastly accelerated and expanded to become truly global. Globalization has been facilitated by technological changes that make transnational extraction, production, and distribution possible (see [Lesson 8](#)). Most significant are the development of communication and information technologies, such as satellites and the Internet, which allow the exchange of information across vast spaces in real time, and the development of containerized transshipment (see [Figure 6.1](#)). Shipping containers have revolutionized trade in ways most of us are barely aware of. Containers are of a standard shape so they can be efficiently stacked, removing the time and labor constraints of trying to fit oddly shaped goods onto ships, trucks, and railroads (imagine that containers can transport anything from soybeans to toilet paper to cars). Coupled with the availability of cheap fossil fuel energy to power transport (see [Lesson 10](#)), shipping containerization allows for vast reductions in the cost and speed of shipping large amounts of goods over greater distances. Businesses benefit from expanding around the globe, extracting raw materials in one country and assembling them in the factories of another, seeking where labor and environmental costs and regulations are the lowest, and selling them where consumers can pay the most for their manufactured goods.



FIGURE 6.1 Container ship on the Mississippi River. Photo by Amalia Leguizamón [Enlarge image](#)

Economic globalization has been facilitated by widespread market-oriented reforms based on neoliberal principles. **Neoliberalism** is a theory of political economy based on the belief that individual well-being can be best achieved through free trade and a free market ([Harvey 2005](#)). Three principles sustain neoliberal theory. First, the market is the best mechanism to ensure the most efficient production and fair distribution of goods and services. Second, state intervention must be kept to a bare minimum; and third, the role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework that protects private property rights and liberates market and commerce. Neoliberalism was advanced in the US by President Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) and in the United Kingdom by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979–1990), who famously said, “There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families,” to express the neoliberal belief that social welfare is the responsibility of individuals and their families rather than the state.

In Latin America, neoliberalism was first imposed in Chile by the dictator General Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990) and a group of US-trained economists known as the “Chicago Boys.” Structural adjustment reforms expanded across the region in the 1990s under the banner of the Washington Consensus, a package of neoliberal policy prescriptions imposed by Washington, D.C.–based institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to promote economic growth through comparative advantage in Latin America (see [Lessons 4](#) and [17](#)). The principle of **comparative advantage** posits that countries should specialize in producing goods and services they can make most efficiently relative to other nations, which, in the case of many Latin American countries, often meant focusing on primary commodity exports and natural resource extraction, reinforcing economic dependencies and environmental degradation ([Leguizamón 2023](#)). Structural adjustment measures included reducing government spending, privatizing state enterprises and state-controlled natural resources, fiscal and monetary reforms, deregulating labor markets and environmental protections, eliminating tariffs and subsidies that protected domestic production, and removing restrictions on foreign direct investments. Neoliberal restructuring across Latin America is oriented toward the establishment of assembly factories (*maquiladoras*) in free trade zones across Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean (the result of US businesses outsourcing jobs to lower wages and cut costs) and the extraction of natural resources for export, especially nontraditional commodities such as fresh fruits and flowers, soybeans, and lithium. For example, Colombia has become the world’s second-largest exporter of fresh-cut flowers after the Netherlands. These flowers are grown mostly by women (because of gendered expectations of women being gentler and more detailed workers) and year-round, thanks to Colombia’s unique climate (see [Figure 6.2](#)). Cut flowers are arranged into bouquets in large warehouses by workers manually aided by conveyor belts and flown refrigerated to the US (which imports roughly 80 percent of Colombian production). You can purchase these bouquets in stores like Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods.





FIGURE 6.2 Female worker in flower export farm in Colombia. Photo by Amalia Leguizamón [Enlarge image](#)

While development models based on export crop specialization have been promoted in Latin America as a means to achieve economic growth and alleviate poverty and hunger, the results have been uneven. In Cundinamarca, the Colombian region where most cut flowers are grown, the expansion of large flower farms has encroached on land previously used for domestic agricultural production, leading to declining food production and increased food insecurity ([Patel-Campillo 2010](#)). Furthermore, detrimental employment practices (such as resistance to wage increases) and weakening labor laws negatively impact flower workers' ability to escape poverty and achieve household **food security**. Women, who make up a significant portion of the workforce, often face a double burden: they must work longer hours to compensate for low wages while still fulfilling domestic caregiving responsibilities. This reduction in both income and family time intensifies the risk of malnutrition among flower workers' children.

The environmental costs of this industry further compound these socioeconomic challenges. Intensive cultivation practices in the cut flower industry often involve heavy use of pesticides, fungicides, and chemical fertilizers, leading to soil degradation and water pollution. In Colombia, flower farms consume large quantities of water, exacerbating local water scarcity issues. The industry also contributes to climate change through its substantial carbon footprint, primarily due to refrigeration and air transportation of flowers to global markets. For instance, the International Council on Clean Transportation estimated that in 2018, Valentine's Day flowers grown in Colombia and flown to US airports produced approximately 360,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide ([Davidson 2021](#)). To put this into perspective, that's equivalent to the annual emissions of about 78,000 cars. These environmental impacts not only degrade local ecosystems but also potentially threaten the long-term viability of the industry and the livelihoods it supports.

6.4 The Transnational Corporation

In this globalized political-economic context, corporations have expanded their reach transnationally.

Transnational corporations (TNCs), or multinational corporations, are large businesses operating in multiple countries. Take, for example, Bayer, the company that acquired Monsanto in 2018. Bayer is a TNC headquartered in Germany that produces pharmaceuticals (including over-the-counter brands such as Aspirin, Aleve, and Alka-Seltzer) and crop science products and services (including genetically modified seeds, chemicals for pest management, and technologies for precision farming). As described in [Lesson 13](#), companies like Bayer are great examples of **vertical** and **horizontal integration** that lead to corporate concentration and oligopolies—when just a handful of companies control every aspect of the commodity chain.

As corporations become transnational, their power over government and civil society increases ([Gould, Pellow, and Schnaiberg 2008](#)). Corporations can outsource production to states and countries with laxer regulations and fewer labor and environmental protections. The very threat of outsourcing often causes governments and workers to comply with corporate rules for fear of economic recession and increased unemployment (see [Lessons 5](#) and [17](#)). Furthermore, the largest transnational companies have more economic value and, thus, are more powerful than many countries. For example, the market capitalization of a company like Apple (\$2.1 trillion in 2021) is larger than the gross domestic product of 96 percent of the world’s countries, including Italy, Brazil, Canada, and Russia. Indeed, of the top 22 largest economies, 6 are transnational corporations (see [Table 6.1](#)). This imbalance often results in governments advancing corporate agendas, even at the expense of society and the environment. For example, the US government has been a strategic ally to Bayer/Monsanto to protect the company’s biotech patent rights and promote the adoption of genetically modified seeds in the Global South ([Leguizamón 2020](#)).

TABLE 6.1 Companies Compared to the Size of Economies (Data for 2021)

Ranking	Country/Company	Nominal Gross Domestic Product (country) or Market Cap (company) (billions)
1	United States of America	\$21,433
2	China	\$14,343
3	Japan	\$5,082
4	Germany	\$3,861
5	India	\$2,869
6	United Kingdom	\$2,829
7	France	\$2,716
8	Apple (tech company)	\$2,125
9	Italy	\$2,004

10	Microsoft (tech company)	\$1,942
11	Saudi Aramco (oil company)	\$1,888
12	Brazil	\$1,840
13	Canada	\$1,736
14	Russia	\$1,700
15	Amazon (tech company)	\$1,688
16	Alphabet (tech company)	\$1,656
17	South Korea	\$1,647
18	Australia	\$1,397
19	Spain	\$1,393
20	Mexico	\$1,269
21	Indonesia	\$1,119
22	Facebook (tech company)	\$939

Source: "The World's Tech Giants, Compared to the Size of Economies." The Visual Capitalist. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-tech-giants-worth-compared-economies-countries/>.

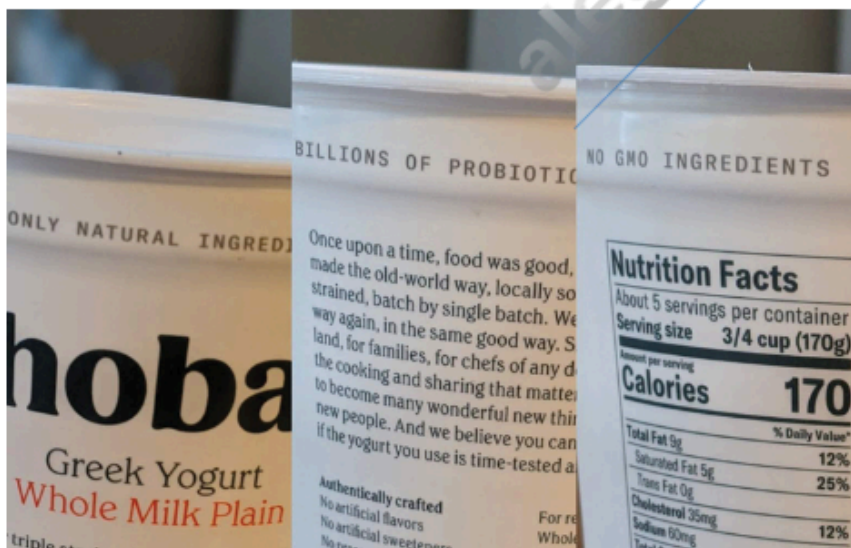
But while corporations have become very powerful, neither governments nor civil society have stopped trying to rein in their power. For example, in the last 10 years, governments worldwide have introduced ambitious initiatives to reduce international tax evasion and increase global corporate tax revenues, with mixed results (Alstadsæter et al. 2024). In the US, the Biden administration proposed for the 2025 fiscal year to implement a global minimum tax of 21 percent for multinational and US-based corporations (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2024). This proposal was not passed by Congress. Instead the Trump administration has reduced corporate taxes. Governments and communities also litigate against TNCs for environmental, human rights, and labor law violations. There are some great movies and documentaries that portray these historical lawsuits. Among them: *Crude*, a documentary depicting the plight of the Ecuadorian government and local Indigenous groups against oil and gas company Chevron over three decades of crude oil contamination in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Berlinger 2010); *Dark Waters* (starring Mark Ruffalo and Anne Hathaway), portraying the legal battle against the chemical manufacturing corporation DuPont over the use of PFOA, a toxic chemical used to produce Teflon (Haynes 2019); and *Erin Brockovich* (starring Julia Roberts), which traces the lawsuit against the Pacific Gas and Electric Company for its contamination of the water supply in a small town in California (Soderbergh 2007).

6.5 Greenwashing Capitalism

The corporate pursuit of productivity and profitability drives greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation (see [Lesson 3](#)). Yet, as much as corporations are the main economic institutions driving climate change, corporations also lead our societal response to this problem. This section explores how corporations aim to “green” capitalism by fostering environmental sustainability through marketing strategies and technological innovations. This is commonly known as **greenwashing**, defined by [Merriam-Webster Dictionary \(2024\)](#) as “the act or practice of making a product, policy, activity, etc. appear to be more environmentally friendly or less environmentally damaging than it really is.”

Marketing Strategies for Eco-minded Consumers

One way corporations address rising social concerns about environmentally damaging corporate practices is by shifting toward sustainability as a marketing tactic. More and more consumers, probably not unlike you, want to minimize their carbon footprint and avoid products that may harm their health and thus look to purchase “green” products. Most companies will invest in sustainability campaigns to target such concerns and meet consumer demands for eco-friendly products. One example is Nike’s “Move to Zero” campaign depicted in the picture opening this lesson. And while more and more consumers are willing to pay an extra buck for sustainable alternatives for clothing and even travel and transportation, it is around food consumption that a “sustainable consumer culture” has taken the strongest hold ([Rieger and Schor 2021](#), 81). We worry about consuming food contaminated with toxic chemicals, growth hormones, or genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (see [Lessons 12](#) and [13](#)). Companies profit from those fears by selling food labeled as “natural,” “organic,” and “GMO-free.” See [Figure 6.3](#), showing Chobani yogurt, which you can find in any grocery store across the US. What do the labels tell you? What emotions are they meant to evoke in you? The labels inform you the product is allegedly made with “only natural ingredients” and contains “no GMO[s].” The design and the brand story narrated on the product evoke images of a simple, wholesome lifestyle you can achieve by consuming it.



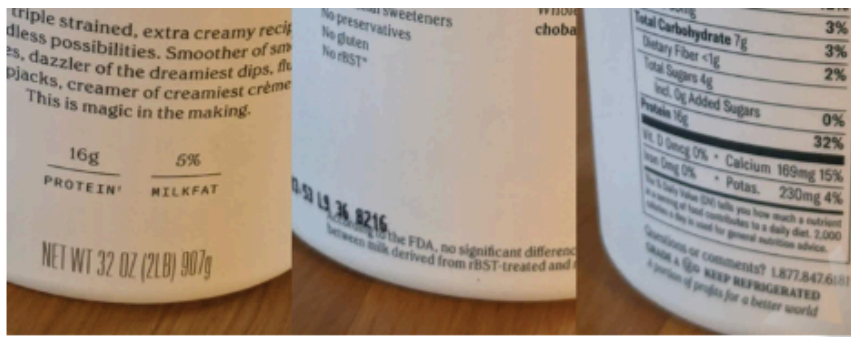


FIGURE 6.3 Chobani yogurt sold in the US Photo by Amalia Leguizamón [Enlarge image](#)

Now, compare [Figure 6.3](#) with [Figure 6.4](#), which shows another Chobani yogurt, but this one is produced for the Mexican market. (Chobani is a TNC that holds over 20 percent of the US yogurt market and produces and distributes products across North America, Australia, and New Zealand.) What similarities do you observe? What differences? Because it is made for a Spanish-speaking market, the Chobani product sold in Mexico has a label written in Spanish, even though it was produced in the US (you can read it on the top left corner, where it says “Producto de E.U.A.”—“Product of the United States of America”). The yogurt for the Mexican market, like the label of the yogurt sold in the US, also states that it does not contain GMOs (“ingredientes sin OGM”) or gluten (a misleading statement in the first example because milk is already gluten-free). I’m sure you’ve noticed the foremost difference between these two products: two black stop sign–shaped labels on the top right corner of the yogurt for the Mexican market. One warns of “excessive sugars,” and the other of “excessive saturated fats.” The Mexican Secretaría de Salud, the equivalent institution of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, mandates these labels to warn consumers if a particular food product exceeds the daily recommended value of a list of nutrients of concern, including sugars, salts, and saturated fats. These labels are currently mandated across Latin America, in countries like Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, and Mexico, as a governmental effort to curb the detrimental health impacts of consuming ultra-processed foods ([Nowell 2024](#)). As part of these efforts, in some of these countries, like Chile, companies are also banned from marketing food directly to children.





FIGURE 6.4 Chobani yogurt sold in Mexico Photo by Amalia Leguizamón [Enlarge image](#)

Comparing food labels lets us see how companies greenwash marketing claims to attract eco-minded consumers. However, shopping, even by eco-minded, educated consumers, can only do so much to protect public health and the environment and change business practices. For one, labels only provide partial information. In our example, food companies like Chobani may inform you that their products do *not* contain GMOs. However, in the US, they are not required to inform you when their products *do* contain genetically modified ingredients. Activists in the US have long fought for GMO labeling, but corporations have successfully resisted such regulations. In 2016, the US Congress finally passed the National Bioengineered Food Standard to establish a national mandatory standard to disclose foods containing GM ingredients ([USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, n.d.](#)). However, mandatory compliance will not begin until June 2025, provided there are no further delays. This rule requires labeling foods that are genetically engineered or may contain traces of GMOs. This includes most food products that contain soy, corn, canola, and sugar beets, which are also used to make common food ingredients such as high-fructose corn syrup, cornstarch, soy lecithin, and granulated sugar. These ingredients are used to produce everything from cereal, cookies and soda to salad dressing and baby formula. However, while food activists demanded to label such foods visibly as “GMO” to inform consumers clearly, corporate interests prevailed ([Hernandez 2022](#)). Such foods will instead be labeled as “bioengineered,” a term that does not resonate with most consumers. (See [Figure 6.5a](#) and [Figure 6.5b](#), then compare these logos with the black stop sign–shaped labels mandated in Latin America. Which label does best to educate and empower consumers?)



FIGURE 6.5AB USDA-approved logos for bioengineered (GM) food. Source: Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture [Enlarge image](#)

The food industry has long influenced nutrition and health policy in the US, with corporate interests often prevailing over public health needs. For example, in her book *Food Politics*, [Marion Nestle \(2013\)](#) shows how food companies use political processes and marketing methods to shape nutritional guidelines—one of these you may recognize as the food pyramid often seen on posters in schools—to convince people to consume *more* (or at least more of their products). To protect sales and profits, food companies fight against the most important dietary advice: Eat *less*. Thus, while labeling initiatives are a step in the right direction (data shows that food labeling laws in Latin America incentivize companies to produce healthier products), their impact is limited. On the one hand, a label will only give you limited information, as with the example of the T-shirt label opening this lesson. Furthermore, in our Chobani example, you may ask yourself, Where does the milk that makes the yogurt come from? Are milking cows crowded in a **concentrated animal feeding operation** ([Lesson 14](#))? What is the **ecological footprint** of producing yogurt in the USA and selling it in Mexico? If you are concerned with the health impacts of consuming genetically modified ingredients, you may also wonder (and the label will never tell you): What are the health impacts on the rural communities who live, work, and play by the farms where genetically modified crops are grown? What are the ecological impacts of genetically engineering plants and spraying large amounts of chemical pesticides? If you're curious about these issues, you can explore my book *Seeds of Power: Environmental Injustice and Genetically Modified Soybeans in Argentina*. In it, I reveal the negative impacts of genetically modified soybeans in Argentina, the third-largest grower and exporter of GMOs after the US and Brazil, and explain why communities sometimes protest exposure to the toxic agrochemical spraying that GMOs require, but most often don't.

On the other hand, purchasing products marketed as “sustainable,” “natural,” or “organic” is an option only available to those with plenty of resources. In *Shopping Our Way to Safety*, [Andrew Szasz \(2009\)](#) coined the term “inverted quarantine” to explain how people increasingly rely on market-based solutions to address environmental risks. Szasz argues that instead of isolating what is perceived as toxic or dangerous, we isolate ourselves from the problem by purchasing products that promise to protect us—like buying bottled water to avoid contaminated tap water (a “better safe than sorry” approach, as [Norah MacKendrick \(2018\)](#) argues in [Lesson 12](#)). However, instead of relying on individual acts based on consumerism, which do not bring systemic change, Szasz calls us to engage in broader political or social efforts to tackle the root causes of these risks, including advocacy for stronger environmental regulations and community organizing to demand corporate accountability and sustainable practices from industries. For example, in *Seeds of Power*, I recount the story of a group of mothers in Argentina who organizes against the health hazards of agrochemical spraying on GM soy farms. In coalition with academics and activists, they have inspired an anti-agrotoxin movement in Argentina that demands regulation banning agrochemical use within town limits.

Techno-Optimist Solutions

Another way in which corporations claim to lead the response to climate change is by investing in technological solutions that promise to decouple economic growth from environmental harm. This path is proposed by **ecological modernization theorists** (see [Lesson 2](#)). A key aspect of transitioning to a “green” economy is a renewable energy transition to shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydropower (see [Lessons 3](#) and [10](#)). Corporations drive the decarbonization transition by investing in technological advancements in renewable energies and electric vehicles (EVs) for transportation. For example, Tesla is one of the leading companies promoting electromobility by developing electric cars and battery technologies

technologies.

Corporations advance an energy transition that is primarily technological. There is optimism that technological progress will reduce greenhouse gas emissions while consumers maintain their lifestyle and corporations their profits (see [Lesson 8](#)). However, building EVs and solar power plants requires vast amounts of raw materials, like lithium, cobalt, copper, and nickel. The corporate-led energy transition has thus resulted in the expansion of a “green” resource frontier across the Global South and Latin America in particular ([Dorn 2022](#)). A prominent example is the expansion of lithium extraction in the “Lithium Triangle,” an area encompassing the Andean desert salt flats of Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia, which holds the world’s largest lithium reserves.

Lithium is deemed a key “transition mineral.” It is used to produce lithium-ion batteries essential for electronics, EVs, and energy storage from intermittent renewable sources like solar and wind. Lithium extractivism in the Lithium Triangle is presented by corporations and governments as environmentally friendly and promoted as a model for modernization and sustainable development ([Voskoboynik and Andreucci 2022](#)). However, these techno-optimist narratives render invisible the social and environmental burdens of allegedly “green” extractivism. The corporate extraction of lithium in the Lithium Triangle expands over Indigenous territories, creating tensions with local communities primarily due to high water usage in an area where water is extremely scarce. It takes over half a million gallons of water to obtain 2,000 pounds of lithium. EV batteries can contain as little as 17 pounds of lithium, while the Tesla Model S long-range battery can contain over 700 pounds of this mineral. Lithium mining thus threatens already vulnerable ecological landscapes and rural livelihoods.

Indigenous communities respond to such threats in multiple and complex ways. For example, the Atacameño-Likanantay people in the Salar de Atacama in Chile have at times resisted and protested against extractivist harms and, at other times, negotiated with mining companies for financial benefits for the communities ([Mejia-Muñoz and Babidge 2023](#)). Most significantly and consistently, Indigenous communities in the Salar de Atacama and across Latin America have demanded to be involved in decision-making in extractive development projects by calling upon the principle of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) recognized by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 ([Walter and Urkidi 2016](#)). FPIC ensures that Indigenous peoples have the right to give or withhold consent to projects that may affect their lands, territories, and resources. It requires that Indigenous communities are adequately informed about the extractive activities in advance, consulted in a culturally appropriate manner, and allowed to approve or reject the proposed developments without coercion. This legislation has been instrumental for Indigenous communities and environmental activists in Latin America to stop mega-development projects across the region, from mining to hydroelectric dams. An emblematic case is the Yanacocha/Conga Project in Peru, an open-pit gold and copper mining project proposed by the world’s largest gold mining corporation, Newmont Mining, which has been suspended since 2012 ([EJOLT 2015](#); [Sparrow 2022](#)). A similar example includes the conflicts over the Agua Zarca hydro dam in Honduras, which led to the killing of Indigenous leader Berta Cáceres (see [Lesson 19](#)) ([Estrada, Trujillo, and Eisner 2021](#)). And more recently, nationwide anti-mining protests in Panama in late 2023 prompted Panama’s Supreme Court to rule against the Canadian corporation First Quantum, which aimed to operate the largest open-pit copper mine in Central America ([Fox and Cuéllar 2023](#)).

“Greening” capitalism promises to integrate environmental sustainability with capitalist principles. However, as discussed in this section, the corporate shift toward sustainability shows that these are nonradical changes oriented toward protecting capital rather than the environment. This is evident in the push for EVs as a primary solution to transportation-related emissions. While presented as an eco-friendly alternative, the EV strategy largely aims to maintain the dominance of the personal automobile industry rather than promoting more comprehensive and

maintain the dominance of the personal automobile industry rather than promoting more comprehensive and potentially more sustainable alternatives like expanded public transportation networks or improved rail systems. By focusing on replacing conventional vehicles with electric ones, corporations (and policymakers) sidestep the need for fundamental changes to urban planning and transportation systems that could more effectively reduce overall vehicle dependency and associated environmental impacts. Marketing strategies and techno-optimist solutions, such as the promotion of EVs or the framing of lithium extraction as “green,” reproduce social inequalities between people and between nations and continue to accelerate the treadmill of production. These approaches exemplify how greenwashing allows corporations to claim environmental leadership while avoiding the systemic changes necessary for true sustainability.

6.6 How Corporations Shape the Climate Change Debate

Corporations are leading the technological trajectory on climate change solutions. They are also massively influential in shaping the debate on this issue. How does corporate power influence what we know and how we respond to environmental harm? In this final section, I analyze key corporate tactics and strategies to create doubt and denial about anthropogenic climate change. These are sociological explanations for why we are not collectively responding to the climate crisis more effectively despite the urgency of climate action (see also [Lesson 16](#)).

The fossil fuel industry, namely oil, gas, and coal corporations such as Exxon Mobil and Peabody Coal, and industry associations such as the American Petroleum Industry, have been leading efforts to deny the significance of climate change since well before global environmental problems entered the international policy agenda in the early 1990s. Exxon company files reveal that the company has conducted scientific research into the potential warming effects of carbon emissions since the 1950s, but instead of taking action, it proceeded to fund a campaign of denial and disinformation ([Hall 2015](#)). Essential for this disinformation campaign to delay climate action has been the alliance with (and heavy funding of) conservative think tanks and foundations ([Dunlap and McCright 2015](#)). **Think tanks** are privately funded research organizations dedicated to influencing public policy. Conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation (which produced the infamous Project 2025 document) have been instrumental in fostering conservatism and neoliberal ideology in the US. Climate change is a central target of the conservative agenda for what it represents: a challenge to deeply held American values on the pursuit of economic growth, prosperity through the exploitation of natural resources, and free market capitalism. Achieving deep, rapid, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions—a key takeaway from the 2023 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report—requires substantial government funding and extensive regulation of polluting companies, policies opposed to the neoliberal agenda. As climate legislation threatens conservative values, corporate profits, and “business as usual,” corporate actors and their political allies have set out to prevent the implementation of environmental policies that may threaten their economic and political interests.

Corporations have taken political action to lobby against and block climate policy. [Brulle \(2018\)](#) shows that, between 2000 and 2016, the electric utilities, fossil fuels, and transportation sectors spent the most on lobbying against climate change–related legislation. Their expenditures dwarfed those of environmental groups and the renewable energy sector. Thanks to lobbying expenditures, corporations have become major players in decision-making on climate legislation and influence outcomes that would otherwise negatively impact their operations.

Most significantly, the fossil fuel industry and its political allies have funded a climate change denial campaign to challenge the scientific evidence of climate change, replicating the strategies and tactics that the tobacco industry had previously employed to delay tobacco control. The strategy of “manufacturing uncertainty” has aimed to challenge or undermine the validity and legitimacy of climate science and to attack the integrity and authority of climate scientists. The film *Merchants of Doubt* shows how nonexperts present themselves across the media as highly qualified, attacking both climate science and climate scientists ([Kenner 2015](#)). As [Dunlap and McCright](#)

(2015) explain, the strategy of manufacturing uncertainty has evolved into “manufacturing controversy” to give the appearance of controversy *within* the scientific community about anthropogenic climate change. Conservative think tanks have produced non-peer-reviewed reports and journal articles that cast doubt on climate science to discredit scientific consensus. One such example is the reports developed by the Heartland Institute under the umbrella of the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change (NIPCC), a nonexpert organization to counter (and create confusion and controversy about) the IPCC. Whereas the IPCC report represents the consensus of thousands of scientists worldwide, the NIPCC represents the financial interests of polluting corporations.

Beyond funding think tanks and lobbying efforts, corporations exert significant influence over climate change narratives through their control of media outlets. This control operates on multiple levels, from direct ownership of media **conglomerates** to the power of advertising dollars. Large fossil fuel companies, for instance, are major advertisers in mainstream media, potentially influencing editorial decisions and coverage of climate-related issues. According to a story on the website and podcast Drilled, *Reuters* and *The New York Times*, two “top trusted” media outlets, have consistently received funding to promote the interests of the fossil fuel industry ([Westervelt and Green 2023](#)). Indeed, *The New York Times* received more than \$20 million in revenue from fossil fuel advertisers between 2020 and 2023.

Moreover, the consolidation of media ownership into a handful of large corporations has led to a narrowing of perspectives presented to the public. [Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model \(2002\)](#) suggests that corporate-owned media tend to favor viewpoints aligned with their economic interests, which often includes downplaying the urgency of climate action. This can manifest in various ways, such as giving disproportionate airtime to climate change deniers in the name of “balance,” framing climate policies as economically detrimental, or simply under-reporting on climate issues.

Social media platforms, while offering alternative channels for information dissemination, are not immune to corporate influence. In fact, the social media landscape is highly concentrated, with a few tech giants attracting most global users. The world's top social media and messaging apps are largely owned by a handful of companies: Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger, and Instagram are all owned by Meta; YouTube is owned by Google's parent company Alphabet; TikTok and WeChat are owned by Chinese companies ByteDance and Tencent respectively ([Routley 2022](#)). This concentration extends to search engines, with Google holding a monopoly in many markets ([McCabe 2024](#)). Such consolidation of power allows these companies to exert enormous influence over information flow and public discourse, including on climate change issues. Their platforms use targeted advertising and algorithm-driven content curation, which can create echo chambers that reinforce existing beliefs, including climate change skepticism. The oligopolistic nature of social media and tech companies thus amplifies corporate control over climate narratives, making it even more challenging for scientific consensus and urgent calls for action to break through to the general public and policymakers.

How do we combat scientific misinformation? [Farrell, McConnell, and Brulle \(2019\)](#) propose a coordinated set of strategies across four areas: public inoculation, legal strategies, political mechanisms, and financial transparency. Inoculation concerns questions about how individuals perceive scientific information—in other words, how our preexisting ideology, religion, or value system plays a role in whether we accept or reject the scientific consensus. In this case, providing abundant evidence of scientific consensus would not be enough to change the mind of a climate skeptic. Instead, these scholars argue that public opinion can be “inoculated” against misinformation, like a vaccine, by explaining how and why climate deniers mislead to neutralize the influence of disinformation. We

can inoculate ourselves against disinformation by communicating facts, revealing misleading sources (Who are the actors behind disinformation, and what are their financial and political motivations?), and explaining the tactics and strategies used to mislead I described earlier. Legal strategies aim to hold fossil fuel companies accountable for their impacts on climate change. News coverage of such lawsuits also helps influence public opinion and inoculate against disinformation. Political strategies aim to understand and disrupt when and how the political process is being manipulated and to mobilize to defund the fossil fuel industry through divestment campaigns. Finally, political transparency requires disclosing when and how corporations fund think tanks and advocacy groups that spread misinformation.

6.7 Conclusion

Corporate practices often contribute to environmental degradation through resource depletion and pollution. However, growing public concerns have prompted many companies to embrace marketing sustainability campaigns and invest in technological solutions. The shift toward sustainability has merely greenwashed capitalism, showing that, despite best efforts, companies continue to prioritize short-term profits over people and the environment.

As we look to the future, the role of corporations in addressing environmental harm will remain crucial. Corporations have the resources to invest and innovate to develop sustainable and just business practices. Yet history shows that corporations have resisted regulations that cut corporate profits. It is thus crucial that governments, consumers, and civil society organize to ensure that corporate actions align with the broader goals of environmental protection and social justice.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The legal concept of corporate personhood has significantly expanded corporate power by granting corporations rights similar to those of individuals, including the ability to influence political agendas, finance campaigns, and safeguard proprietary information, thereby altering the balance of power between corporations and society.
- The capitalist drive for perpetual growth and profit maximization leads to environmental degradation by exploiting natural resources and labor, as highlighted by theories such as the treadmill of production.
- Economic globalization and neoliberal policies have empowered transnational corporations by reducing trade barriers and regulatory constraints. This has led to their immense economic influence and capacity to shape global governance and environmental standards, which in turn has sparked efforts by governments and civil society to challenge and regulate their power.
- Many corporations adopt green marketing strategies to appeal to eco-conscious consumers, but these strategies often prioritize brand image over substantial environmental benefits. This practice, called greenwashing, can mislead consumers and obscure the true ecological impact of consumer products.
- While technological advancements in renewable energy and electric vehicles are crucial for reducing carbon emissions, they also create new environmental and social challenges, such as resource extraction impacts and inequities. The shift to a green economy may perpetuate existing inequalities rather than address them.
- Corporations, particularly in the fossil fuel industry, have employed tactics such as funding denial campaigns and lobbying against climate policies to delay action on climate change. To combat this influence, strategies including public inoculation, legal accountability, and transparency about funding sources are crucial for addressing misinformation and mobilizing effective climate action.

POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD

- **State:**
 - a. Give tax credits and subsidies for employment and labor training (see Schnaiberg's proposal in [Lesson 20](#)).
 - b. Implement global minimum taxes for transnational corporations.
 - c. Promote policies that promote well-being rather than economic growth, such as legislation to shorten working hours.
 - d. Invest in expanded public transportation networks and improved rail systems.
 - e. Strip companies of corporate personhood.
- **Capital:**
 - Internalize negative **externalities** (meaning that corporations absorb the full costs of their production processes).
 - Localize production (shrink distances between the links of the **commodity chain**).
 - Reincorporate social mandates (as in the early days of the corporation when they were associations of people chartered by the state to provide a common good or service that served the public interest, such as expanding and improving rail systems).
- **Civil Society:**
 - Eco-minded consumers should focus on the first two R's of reduce-reuse-recycle. Aim to consume *less* and enjoy *more*.
 - Consumer movements can demand proper labeling to educate consumers, protect children from marketing, and boycott harmful corporate practices.
 - Workers can organize in unions to demand higher pay, better benefits, and safer working conditions
 - Students can organize to demand their universities divest from fossil fuel companies
 - Communities in extractivist zones can mobilize against extractivist development projects that may harm their livelihoods and territories by relying on the principle of free, prior, and informed consent (ILO Convention No. 169).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has the legal doctrine of corporate personhood, established in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad*, influenced the scope of corporate power and its ability to impact political and public opinion?
2. How have economic globalization and neoliberalism facilitated the expansion of transnational corporations, and what are the implications of their power on global governance and environmental regulation?
3. To what extent do corporate sustainability campaigns, such as Nike's "Move to Zero" or Chobani's "natural" labeling, genuinely contribute to environmental sustainability compared to their role as marketing strategies? Are you aware of comparable examples? What are the implications of this for consumer behavior and corporate accountability?
4. How does the corporate-led transition to renewable energy and electric vehicles impact the environment and local communities, especially in resource-rich areas like the Lithium Triangle? What are the potential trade-offs between technological progress and environmental and social sustainability?
5. What tactics and strategies are deployed by corporations to affect public perception of climate science, and what are the most effective methods to counteract this disinformation in the public sphere?

SOURCES

Achbar, Mark, and Jennifer Abbott, dirs. 2005. *The Corporation*. Zeitgeist Films.

Alstadsæter, Annette, Sarah Godar, Panayiotis Nicolaides, and Gabriel Zucman. 2024. *Global Tax Evasion Report 2024*. EU Tax Observatory.

Baichwal, Jennifer, Edward Burtynsky, and Nicholas de Pencier, dirs. 2019. *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*. Mercury Films, Seville International.

BBC News. 2022. "The Fast Fashion Graveyard in Chile's Atacama Desert." February 5. Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uyHgY2O__fY.

Berlinger, Joe, dir. 2010. *Crude*. First Run Features.

Brulle, Robert J. 2018. "The Climate Lobby: A Sectoral Analysis of Lobbying Spending on Climate Change in the USA, 2000 to 2016." *Climatic Change* 149(3): 289–303. doi: [10.1007/s10584-018-2241-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-018-2241-z).

Davidson, Ros. 2021. "The Environmental Impact of Cut Flowers? Not So Rosy." *Ideas.Ted.Com*, May 5. <https://ideas.ted.com/the-environmental-impact-of-cut-flowers-not-so-rosy/>.

Demaria, Federico, Francois Schneider, Filka Sekulova, and Joan Martinez-Alier. 2013. "What Is Degrowth? From an Activist Slogan to a Social Movement." *Environmental Values* 22(2): 191–215. doi: [10.3197/096327113X13581561725194](https://doi.org/10.3197/096327113X13581561725194).

Dodson, Laura. 2020. "Use of Genetically Engineered Cotton Has Shifted toward Stacked Seed Traits." *Amber Waves*. USDA Economic Research Service, December 7. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2020/december/use-of-genetically-engineered-cotton-has-shifted-toward-stacked-seed-traits/>.

Dorn, Felix Malte. 2022. "Green Colonialism in Latin America? Towards a New Research Agenda for the Global Energy Transition." *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies/Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe* (114): 137–46.

Dunlap, Riley E., and Aaron M. McCright. 2015. "Challenging Climate Change: The Denial Countermovement." In *Society and Climate Change: Sociological Perspectives*, edited by R. E. Dunlap and R. J. Brulle, 300–32. New York: Oxford University Press.

EJOLT. 2015. "Yanacocha Mining Company in Conga—Cajamarca (Peru)." February 3. <http://www.ejolt.org/2015/02/yanacocha-mining-company-conga-cajamarca-peru/>.

Estrada, Victoria, David Trujillo and Chiara Eisner, producers. 2021. "Berta y el río." Radio Ambulante, March 2. <https://radioambulante.org/audio/berta-y-el-rio>.

Farrell, Justin, Kathryn McConnell, and Robert Brulle. 2019. "Evidence-Based Strategies to Combat Scientific Misinformation." *Nature Climate Change* 9(3):191–95. doi: [10.1038/s41558-018-0368-6](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0368-6).

Fox, Michael, with Jorge Cuéllar. 2023. "Panama Protests: A Model for Pushing Back Extractive

- FOX, Michael, with Jorge Cuellar. 2020. "Panama Protest: A Model for Pushing Back Extractive Capitalism." *NACLA*, December 11. <https://nacla.org/panama-mining-protest-extractive-capital>.
- Gould, Kenneth A., David N. Pellow, and Allan Schnaiberg. 2008. *Treadmill of Production: Injustice and Unsustainability in the Global Economy*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Hall, Shannon. 2015. "Exxon Knew about Climate Change Almost 40 Years Ago." *Scientific American*, October 26. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/exxon-knew-about-climate-change-almost-40-years-ago/>.
- Harris, Elizabeth A. 2019. "The Met Will Turn Down Sackler Money Amid Fury over the Opioid Crisis." *The New York Times*, May 15.
- Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Haynes, Todd, dir. 2019. *Dark Waters*. Participant, Willi Hill, Killer Content.
- Herman, Edward S., and Noam Chomsky. 2002. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Reprint edition, 28. New York: Pantheon.
- Hernandez, Joe. 2022. "GMO Is Out, 'Bioengineered' Is In, as New U.S. Food Labeling Rules Take Effect." *NPR*, January 5.
- Keefe, Patrick Radden. 2021. *Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty*. New York: Doubleday.
- Kenner, Robert, dir. 2015. *Merchants of Doubt*. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.
- Leguizamón, Amalia. 2020. *Seeds of Power: Environmental Injustice and Genetically Modified Soybeans in Argentina*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Leguizamón, Amalia. 2023. "The Political Economy of the Environment in Latin America." In *Routledge Handbook of Latin America and the Environment* edited by Beatriz Bustos, Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro, Gustavo Garcia-López, Felipe Milanez, and Diana Ojeda, 101–11. Routledge.
- MacKendrick, Norah. 2018. *Better Safe Than Sorry: How Consumers Navigate Exposure to Everyday Toxics*. First Edition. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Magnuson, William. 2022. *For Profit: A History of Corporations*. New York: Basic Books.
- McCabe, David. 2024. "'Google Is a Monopolist,' Judge Rules in Landmark Antitrust Case." *The New York Times*, August 5.
- Mejia-Muñoz, Sara, and Sally Babidge. 2023. "Lithium Extractivism: Perpetuating Historical Asymmetries in the 'Green Economy.'" *Third World Quarterly* 44(6): 1119–36. doi: [10.1080/01436597.2023.2176298](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2176298).
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary. 2024. "Greenwashing." Accessed August 20, 2024. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/greenwashing>.
- Moore, Jason W. 2016. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. PM Press.
- Nestle, Marion. 2013. *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. Revised and expanded tenth anniversary edition. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Nowell, Cecilia. 2024. "Latin America Labels Ultra-Processed Foods. Will the US Follow?" *The*

Guardian, May 21. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/may/21/latin-america-food-labels-processed-foods>

Patel, Raj, and Jason W. Moore. 2017. *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Patel-Campillo, Anouk. 2010. "Agro-Export Specialization and Food Security in a Sub-National Context: The Case of Colombian Cut Flowers." *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 3(2): 279–94. doi: [10.1093/cjres/rsq011](https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsq011).

Pulver, Simone, and Ben Manski. 2021. "Corporations and the Environment." In *Handbook of Environmental Sociology*, edited by B. Schaefer Caniglia, A. Jorgenson, S. A. Malin, L. Peek, D. N. Pellow, and X. Huang, 89–114. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Richardson, Katherine, Will Steffen, Wolfgang Lucht, Jørgen Bendtsen, Sarah E. Cornell, Jonathan F. Donges, Markus Drüke et al. 2023. "Earth beyond Six of Nine Planetary Boundaries." *Science Advances* 9(37): eadh2458. doi: [10.1126/sciadv.adh2458](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adh2458).

Rieger, Annika, and Juliet B. Schor. 2021. "Consumption." In *Handbook of Environmental Sociology*, edited by B. Schaefer Caniglia, A. Jorgenson, S. A. Malin, L. Peek, D. N. Pellow, and X. Huang, 71–87. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Routley, Nick. 2022. "Visualizing the World's Top Social Media and Messaging Apps." *Visual Capitalist*, November 18. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/social-media-universe-2022/>.

Soderbergh, Steven, dir. 2007. *Erin Brockovich*. Universal Pictures Home Entertainment.

Sparrow, Claudia, dir. 2022. *Maxima*. TrustFall Films.

Spencer, M. R., M. F. Garnett, and A. M. Miniño. 2024. *Drug Overdose Deaths in the United States, 2002–2022*. National Center for Health Statistics, Data Brief no. 491. . <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc.135849>

Szasz, Andrew. 2009. *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

The Story of Stuff Project. 2009. *The Story of Stuff*, p. 2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM>.

U.S. Department of the Treasury. 2024. "U.S. Department of the Treasury Outlines Tax Proposals to Reduce the Deficit, Lower Costs for Working Families, and Ensure the Wealthy and Large Corporations Pay Their Fair Share." Press release, March 11. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2169>.

US EPA. 2024. "Biden-Harris Administration Finalizes First-Ever National Drinking Water Standard to Protect 100M People from PFAS Pollution." Press release, April 10. <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/biden-harris-administration-finalizes-first-ever-national-drinking-water-standard>.

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. n.d. "Bioengineered Food Disclosure." U.S. Department of Agriculture, p. 20. Accessed July 12, 2024. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/be>.

USDA Economic Research Service. 2022. "Cotton Sector at a Glance." U.S. Department of Agriculture. Accessed May 10, 2024. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/crops/cotton-and->

Agriculture. Accessed May 10, 2024. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/crops/cotton-and-wool/cotton-sector-at-a-glance/>.

Voskoboynik, Daniel Macmillen, and Diego Andreucci. 2022. "Greening Extractivism: Environmental Discourses and Resource Governance in the 'Lithium Triangle.'" *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 5(2): 787–809. doi: [10.1177/25148486211006345](https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486211006345).

Walter, Mariana, and Leire Urkidi. 2016. "Community Consultations: Local Responses to Large-Scale Mining in Latin America." In *Environmental Governance in Latin America*, edited by F. de Castro, B. Hogenboom, and M. Baud, 287–325. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Westervelt, Amy, and Matthew Green. 2023. "Reuters, New York Times Top List of Fossil Fuel Industry's Favorite Media Partners." *Drilled*, December 5. <https://drilled.media/news/drilled-mediagreenwashing>.

LIST OF KEY TERMS

[Anthropocene](#)

[capitalism](#)

[Capitalocene](#)

[commodity chains](#)

[Comparative advantage](#)

[concentrated animal feeding operations \(CAFOs\)](#)

[conglomerate](#)

[corporate personhood](#)

[degrowth](#)

[ecological footprint](#)

[ecological modernization theory \(EMT\)](#)

[externalities of scale](#)

[externality](#)

[food security](#)

[Greenwashing](#)

[horizontal integration](#)

[limited liability](#)

[means of production](#)

[neoliberalism](#)

[think tank](#)

[transnational corporations \(TNCs\)](#)

[vertical integration](#)

