

# General Electric: Power, Greed, Deception and Our Environment

Katherine R. Schmoke

---

General Electric is a multi-national corporate conglomerate based in the United States. General Electric, or GE, is one of the largest, most profitable corporations in America. Yet, despite the corporation's immense success, large-scale environmental effects have been noted from General Electric's past and present business activities, advertising techniques, and lobbying methods. The following research identifies two main areas of devastation along the Hudson River in New York and the Housatonic River in Massachusetts. Along with an examination of environmental damage, this research implements a post-Marxist deconstruction of power. The following research also examines the media, corporate welfare, corrupt activities, and existing policy in order to achieve a better understanding of General Electric's vast wealth and success.

---

**SIGNATURE PAGE**

This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the

Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

Jamie Odean  
Director

4/7/14  
Date

Gert Lund  
Reader

4/7/14  
Date

Patricia Hein  
Reader

4/7/14  
Date

General Electric: Power, Greed, Deception and Our Environment

Katherine R. Schmoke

Carroll College

## INTRODUCTION

General Electric is a multi-national corporate conglomerate based in the United States. General Electric, or GE, produces and distributes a variety of products from household items to airplane parts. General Electric has been one of the largest, most profitable corporations in America since the 1960-'s when it designed and sold computer products. In 1993, *Fortune* declared General Electric the largest industrial corporation in the United States with \$192.9 billion in assets (Dye, 1995). In 2013, GE was ranked as the 8<sup>th</sup> largest corporation on *Fortune's* scale with \$146.9 billion in gross revenue and almost \$14 billion in profits (Collins, 2013). General Electric now has more than 160 locations globally and employs more than 305,000 total workers worldwide (GE Fact Sheet, 2014). Along with their immense success in business, General Electric has generally maintained a positive reputation among the American public. Last year, *Newsweek* declared General Electric the 83<sup>rd</sup> "greenest" corporation in the United States while *Fortune* described GE as the 11<sup>th</sup> most admired corporation (Collins, 2013). While examining and admiring the vast income brought in annually at General Electric, the corporation's shortcomings remain unexamined. Yet, despite the corporation's immense success in business and public relations, large-scale environmental effects have been noted from GE's past and present business activities, advertising techniques, and lobbying methods. General Electric's "Ecoimagination" propaganda generally stresses, "Commitment to imagine and build innovative solutions to today's environmental challenges while driving economic growth (GE Fact Sheet, 2014)."

However, when examining actual activities, General Electric seems to value earnings over the environment.

Along with this rosy view from *Fortune* and *Newsweek*, several smaller non-profit organizations have begun to take note of General Electric's environmental activities. In 2014, an organization called *Project on Government Oversight*, or POGO, described GE as the 23<sup>rd</sup> most corrupt corporation in America with 44 proven cases of misconduct (Federal Contractor Misconduct Database, 2014). POGO is a "nonpartisan independent watchdog" that examines, "corruption, misconduct, and conflicts of interest (Federal Contractor Misconduct Database, 2014)." For years, General Electric has fallen comfortably into POGO's top 100 most corrupt corporations in America. Along with cases of misconduct involving the Hudson and Housatonic Rivers, POGO takes into account a number of other environmental violations including violations of The Clean Air Act as well as The Clean Water Act (Federal Contractor Misconduct Database, 2014). In 2013, the Political Economy Research Institute declared General Electric the 9<sup>th</sup> largest toxic air polluter as well as the 42<sup>nd</sup> largest water polluter in America (Political Economy Research Institute, 2013).

## BACKGROUND

General Electric was formed in 1892 when Thomas Edison created a merger between Edison General Electric Company and Thomas-Houston Electric Company. GE originally started in Schenectady, New York but later moved its headquarters to Connecticut. During and after World War II, General Electric was involved in nuclear weapons experimentation and production. GE's nuclear weapons sites created a great

deal of controversial environmental damage (Miller, 2008). This controversy was due to General Electric's extensive involvement in the nuclear weapons industry (Korton, 2001:147). During the 1980-'s, GE built more nuclear weapon systems than any other corporation (Chasnoff, 1991). This involvement spurred a wide-scale boycott of all General Electric products (Chasnoff, 1991). When General Electric pulled out of the nuclear weapons industry in 1993, past failings were generally forgotten. However, three decades later, the environmental damage created by GE, both in the past and currently, has become too great to ignore. Although General Electric is no longer producing and dispensing nuclear weapons and nuclear pollution, the company continues to dump hazardous chemicals from its other industries into the environment. Two main areas of devastation have been noted at the Hudson River in New York and the Housatonic River in Massachusetts.

#### SOCIOLOGY OF POWER

Power is typically defined as an individual or group of individual's capacity to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events. General Electric's power is incalculable if power is defined as an individual or groups influence on others. This power is demonstrated consistently through GE's ownership of almost one-sixth of the media, evasion of taxes and extensive destruction of the environment with no notable consequences (Campbell, 2009: 158). General Electric is amongst the most powerful in America if power is measured by a group's ability to change the course of events. By distorting scientific facts and manipulating the masses, General Electric has successfully changed the course of events in a way only the most powerful can.

While writing *The German Ideology* in 1845, Karl Marx discussed how power was associated with a division of interests between classes. According to Marx, there is a continuous struggle between those who own and control society (the bourgeoisie) and those that provide the labor (the proletariat). The bourgeoisie hold the power in society, and this power gives them the ability to oppress the lower class. According to Marx, power does not occur in the relationship between groups, but rather in the control and domination of a class of people. Marx suggested a reorganization of power so that no group is oppressed and degrading power structures cease to exist (Marx and Engels, 1846). In response to Marx, however, several sociologists have come forward to expand upon the simplistic ideas of conflict and power.

Max Weber's theories on powers expanded upon Marx's work. Weber defined domination as, "the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons (Weber, 1968: 314)." Weber's work on power is somewhat more complex as well as more complete when compared to Marx. Weber explained that power can be a result of wealth, property, or other material things. Once domination of a certain group occurs for a long enough time period, it becomes a "structured phenomenon" where the domination is part of the structure of society (Weber, 1968: 342). General Electric's dominance in society is so complete that their actions are unquestioned and perceived as part of the culture of the times.

This acceptance of elite ideology is again described by William Domhoff, a prominent social theorist on power and the elite in the United States. In, *The Powers That Be: Processes of Ruling Class Domination in America*, Domhoff explains that there

are four processes of domination. The first process is described as, “the special interest process,” where the ruling group obtains the means in the economy to get their needs met. General Electric has fulfilled this process by obtaining tremendous amounts of wealth, prestige, and control of the media. The second and third processes involve “policy formation” and “candidate selection.” General Electric has intentionally funded specific politicians in order benefit the corporation. These politicians have in-turn backed legislation to benefit the company. The final process Domhoff discusses is the “ideology process” by which, “the formation, dissemination, and enforcement of the assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes that permit the continued existence of policies and politicians favorable to the wealth, income, status, and privileges of members of the ruling class (Domhoff, 1980: 10).” General Electric has actively been taking part in the ideology process for many years. Through ownership of the media, General Electric ensures that the beliefs and attitudes held by the public benefit the corporation (Campbell, 2009:158).

General Electric has gained its power and prominence in the United States by becoming part of the elite, or the select few who have power in society. In *Who's Running America? The Clinton Years*, Thomas R. Dye (1995) explains how and why elitism occurs and what happens when it is abused. Dye explains that elitism is inevitable once an organization begins to gain power. Dye says reorganizing power structures is neither a viable or desirable option for General Electric or for the United States as a whole (Dye, 1995: 118). “Elitism is not a result of inadequate education of the masses or of poverty or of a ‘military-industrial complex’ or of capitalist control of



the mass media or any special problem in society,” explains Dye (Dye, 1995: 118). Dye describes elitism as an inevitable part of any and all organizations. Every oligarchy, or group of people who have control over an area, has an elite, whether the group intends to or not. Talcott Parsons seems to agree that the elite are an unavoidable and inevitable. In his review of C. Wright Mill’s work, Talcott Parson (1957) explains why power will never be distributed equally amongst a group of people.

“Given the nature of an industrial society, a relatively well-defined elite or leadership group should be expected to develop in the business world; it is out of the question that power should be diffused equally among an indefinite number of very small units, as the ideal of pure competition and a good deal of the ideology of business itself would have it (Parsons, 1957: 123).”

Even radical socialist parties, as Marx suggested, are not free from the power structure that exists between the elite and the masses. Dye’s and Parsons’ additions to Marx’s conflict theory make understanding the elite in the United States, such as General Electric, even more complicated. If power structures cannot simply be eradicated as Marx suggested, the masses should, at the very least, be aware of and educated about the practices of the elite.

According to C. Wright Mills (1958), power can be described and explained through a three tiered pyramid. The bottom, or largest tier, contains, “mass society,” or, “the powerless mass of unorganized and atomized people who are controlled from above (Mills, 1958: 40).” The middle tier consists of “the middle levels of power,” or, “a diversified and balanced plurality of interest groups (Mills, 1958:40).” Finally, the top

and smallest tier can be described as “the power elite: a unified power group composed of top government executives, military officials, and corporation directors (Mills, 1958:41).” The leaders in charge at General Electric fit comfortably among the top of the top power elitists.

Mills also argues that the power elite typically share common interests and common enemies. For GE, as with many modern corporations, it is likely that the common interest is profit while their common enemy is the Environmental Protection Agency, or any other group that stands in their way of accumulating unlimited wealth. The bottom tier, or “mass society,” also shares a variety of commonalities. Mass society’s commonalities, however, are not typically as positive as those shared by the power elite. Mills describes how the masses generally share, “a lack of independence,” “a lack of political direction,” and also “widespread apathy (1958:41).” The apathetic and dismissive attitude of the masses allows the power elite to get away with practically whatever they want.

#### GENERAL ELECTRIC AND THE ENVIRONMENT

General Electric did the greatest amount of environmental damage between 1940 and 1976 (Campbell, 2004: 68). During this time in American History, there was little discussion about the effect corporations were having on the environment and there was limited research on harmful chemicals. The culture of the times gave GE an excuse to carelessly pollute the environment without the public’s attention. It is likely that GE had an idea, at this time, that the chemicals they were using were extremely

hazardous. Yet, the company denies ever having any knowledge of problems caused by improper management of hazardous chemicals.

#### THE DANGER OF POLYCHLORINATED BIPHENYLS

Throughout the 1900-'s General Electric owned several large-scale industrial facilities. These facilities were involved in the creating and servicing of power transformers as well as weapons for the United States government (Campbell, 2004: 67). Mainting the transformers located at General Electric's facilities typically involved using polychlorinated biphenyl, or PCBs, a chemical historically used as a coolant. Without proper care and upkeep, power transformers and polychlorinated biphenyls can cause a great deal of damage to the environment (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2012).

Polychlorinated biphenyls are not only threatening to the environment, they also cause harm to humans and animals. This is due mainly to the nature of the chemical. PCBs are colorless, tasteless, and can cause a great deal of damage when in contact with humans or animals. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, PCBs are, "...long lived, semi-volatile and don't dissolve in water (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2012)." PCBs have been linked to a variety of forms of cancer in both humans and animals. Since PCBs are long lived, they tend to create a lasting effect on the areas they contaminate.

According to the United States Department of Public Health and Human Services, since PCBs are insoluble, getting sick by consuming contaminated water is not a legitimate concern. PCBs do, however, come into the body by consuming fish, meat,

dairy and plant products that absorb the chemical. PCBs can also be breathed in causing significant damage to internal organs such as liver damage, eventual liver failure and birth defects in pregnant women. Also, if PCBs come into contact with human skin they have been known to cause chloracne (United States Department of Public Health and Human Services, 2013).

Chloracne is a skin condition caused by exposure to toxic chemicals. Those who have chloracne experience cyst-like lesions on their face, arms, and neck. These cyst-like lesions are extremely resistant to antibiotics and other treatments. Because of their resistance to treatment, chloracne has been known to be problematic for victims throughout their lives (United States Department of Public Health and Human Services, 2013). Those who are diagnosed with chloracne typically have spent long periods of time around high levels of PCBs or other toxic chemicals, similar to what residents around GE's superfunds experienced.

Throughout the time GE was using PCBs, a great deal of employees came forward with concerns about poisoning and severe chloracne (Francis, 1998). However, those in power at General Electric continued to deny any dangers from the exposure. Steve Sandberg, a 13 year employee working in and around PCBs on a GE transformer, was continually told that, "exposure to PCBs is less risky than exposure to the toxins naturally occurring in peanut butter, beer, or raw mushrooms (Francis, 1998:1). Due to the lax attitude surrounding the chemical, Sandberg and the other employees never wore protective clothing or respirators when near the transformers. Sandberg first became concerned when he began to notice the severe symptoms of chloracne.

Sandberg, along with several other past employees have filed suit against General Electric seeking \$500 million in damages (Francis, 1998:4).

#### HUDSON RIVER CONTAMINATION

According to the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC), GE dumped 1.3 million pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls, into the Hudson River from 1947 until 1977 (Moore, 1999: 582). The Hudson River crosses 315 miles of the Eastern United States and is used both agriculturally and recreationally. The Hudson River still remains contaminated; fish have shown severe abnormalities, and the water is unusable for agricultural purposes. The EPA has recently revealed that the cancer risk for those who eat the Hudson's fish is 1,000 times higher than acceptable

Groundwater contamination from PCB's has been particularly worrisome since the chemical has been known to create a wide variety of health problems. Although PCBs are insoluble, they are capable of infiltrating, food sources such as animals and plants through groundwater. GE was only recently forced to begin the cleanup of this massive Superfund while fighting the process at every stage. The EPA estimated the cleanup of this site would cost \$460 million and has been attempting to get some of that money from GE (2012:1). General Electric could quickly pay this fine if they simply paid the EPA what they typically pay their CEO's (around \$17 million per year (Bagdikian, 2004: 102)). Researchers estimate that GE has spent close to \$60 million fighting the EPA's proposal and producing advertisements in an attempt to improve and manipulate public perception.

## HOUSATONIC RIVER CONTAMINATION

Along with the Hudson River, GE has created another threatening Superfund site in Massachusetts's Housatonic River. The Housatonic River is located in Pittsfield, MA and runs 150 miles across Eastern Massachusetts. GE's 254 acre site in this area dumped large amounts of PCB's into the river and also had an accidental spill where chemicals were dumped (Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). The incident began when GE notified the EPA of two transformers and three capacitors that were being improperly stored. Upon further inspection, it was found that one of the transformers had already leaked a great deal of oil containing PCBs into the Housatonic River. The EPA then found seven additional violations of the Toxic Control Substance Act (New England EPA Press Release, 2003:1).

According to the EPA, the contamination includes surface water, soil, and possible groundwater contamination. The EPA rated the Housatonic River as in the top 10% of most hazardous sites in the United States (2012). The Environmental Protection Agency accurately described the devastation within the Housatonic River in a statement to the press:

"Since the early 1900s, GE operated a large-scale industrial facility including the manufacturing and servicing of power transformers, defense and aerospace (ordnance) and plastics, and used numerous industrial chemicals at its Pittsfield facility. From 1932 to 1976, General Electric manufactured and serviced electrical transformers containing PCBs. Years of PCB and industrial chemical use

and improper disposal led to extensive contamination around Pittsfield, MA as well as down the entire length of the Housatonic River (US EPA, 2012:1)."

Since 1977, after the contamination was properly evaluated and measured, a ban was placed on all fishing and consumption of fish from the river due to dangerous levels of contamination within the water (US EPA, 2012:1).

Jack Welch, the CEO of GE from 1981 to 2001 has fought the EPA for ten years over the cleanup of this site. Welch was in support of "natural recovery" of the river, even though contamination levels were posing a serious and immediate threat to the health of several communities. "There is no credible evidence that PCBs cause cancer," said Jack Welch in a 1998 press conference (GE: Decades of Misdeeds and Wrongdoings: 2001:2). But PCBs do, in fact, cause cancer, along with a variety of other health and environmental concerns (United States Department of Public Health and Human Services, 2013). Welch's comment about PCB's was made almost two decades after the EPA had found PCB's too risky to justify using. Although Welch's declaration of safety was completely false, it is likely that his comment was heard by a great deal more people than heard the EPA's original warning in 1976.

Until 1976, there were very few laws regarding PCBs. In October of 1976, the Toxic Substance Control Act (TSCA) became a law. The Toxic Substance Control Act allows the Environmental Protection Agency to control use of PCBs and any other chemicals they deemed to, "cause unreasonable risk to public health or the environment (US EPA, 2012)." As soon as the TSCA was set in place, GE discontinued

dumping PCBs into the Housatonic and Hudson River. Sadly, the “unreasonable” damage had already been done.

#### MEDIA AND POWER

In 1964, David Bazelon, Chief Justice of the United States Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia told peers, “In this job, you have to ask questions that tend toward great fairness. Without the right questions, you’ll never get the facts that lead you to better answers (Campbell, 2009: 69).” When trying to make sense of the damage within the Hudson River and Housatonic River, it is imperative to ask the right questions about General Electric and how a corporation has come to experience such power and what has been done with this power. Asking questions about why things are the way they are allows us to not only become more aware of the current situation, but also create a better set of circumstances for the future.

General Electric has employed a variety of methods to maintain power and increase revenue while avoiding questions and fighting off accusations about environmental damage. One of the most successful methods GE has employed for controlling public opinion and evading social responsibility is ownership of media outlets. GE’s effective cover-up of catastrophic and extensive environmental damage can be largely attributed to their control of global media, news and entertainment. General Electric is one of the six firms that control the United States news and media production. AOL, Disney, Viacom, News Corp., and Bertelsmann manage the remaining parts (Campbell, 2009:68). These companies have taken part in a large-scale vertical integration process meaning their ownership has increased over all aspects of media



production and distribution while all companies that can't keep up are systematically cut out. The limited number of corporations controlling the media means the public gets more information and entertainment but less diversity. These corporations purposefully choose what is shown to the public and what is ignored. Not coincidentally, environmental issues and public safety concerns rarely get any coverage through programming or commercials.

Bagdikian (2004) explains the process of vertical integration within the media as well as the media's desire to protect itself;

“...the most persistent absence of relevant news in the major media is what the major media know with exquisite detail: important information about the major media themselves. Control of public information by a handful of powerful global firms weakens democracy by omission of news that might interfere with media's maximizing their own profits. The same tendency makes the news media sympathetic to profit maximization by whatever means among corporations in general (Bagdikian, 2004: 20-21).”

Since General Electric is one of the main corporations in charge of the media, it holds the ability to ensure its questionable activities are never put in the spotlight. To do this, GE avoids talking about environmental issues, denies claims of damage and also fills the news with irrelevant, useless information. General Electric's bountiful connections to Vivendi Entertainment, NBC, and Comcast guarantee that past and present indiscretions will never be discussed in any meaningful way (James, 2012:2).

In 2013, General Electric told the public that the corporation intended to withdraw from the media industry in order to become more active in other areas. In the beginning of 2013, GE sold their ownership of NBC to Comcast for \$16.7 billion. GE's claims of backing out of the media industry seem to be false since the corporation still holds stocks at both NBC and Vivendi (James, 2012:2).

It is typically considered news media's responsibility to provide the general public "the closest approach to the truth that is possible for a human institution (Bagdikian, 2004:74)." However, in recent history there have been innumerable instances of intentional dishonesty widely spread throughout news sources. A salient example of dishonesty and manipulation occurred during the Bush administration when the public was repeatedly told that Iraq "possessed weapons of mass destruction (2004: 20-21)." Despite both politician's and the media's allegations, no such weapons existed. Claims about weapons were created in order to rally public support for the impending war (2004). In cases of environmental damage, General Electric has taken to employing the same methods used by the Bush administration in order to elicit a specific public response.

General Electric has begun spending huge sums of money fighting those who discuss issues they see as damaging. Elizabeth Campbell found that Transnational Corporations spend about \$1 billion a year in anti-environmental public relation professionals (2009:68). These are typically scientists willing to deny claims of environmental damage in order to sway the public into doubting contradicting sources. "By disproportionately saturating the global media with these so-called experts, they

offer enough manufactured doubt to ensure that governments take no initiative to act,” says Campbell (2009:68).

In the 1990’s, General Electric reported through the media untrue claims about PCBs, repeatedly asserting that high levels were not dangerous and would not cause cancer. General Electric continued to make these claims even though the corporation, as well as most scientists of the time, was aware that PCBs had been correlated with much higher levels of disease (Chasnoff, 1991). Later, GE began to spread the false notion that the polluted rivers had a natural process that would break down the chemicals and clean themselves up (GE: Decades of Misdeeds and Wrongdoings, 2001:2). Decades later, the Housatonic and Hudson River remain highly contaminated and unusable for the majority of the surrounding area’s needs.

In *The New Media Monopoly*, Ben Bagdikian also discusses how top officials at General Electric are able to accumulate an unearthly amount of money by “getting the government off their back” and leaving the public in the dark. Facts about corporate official’s income and benefits were not made clear to the public until Jack Welch, CEO from 1981 to 2001, went through a very public divorce. In the divorce papers, it was verified that Welch had:

“Received \$16.7 million a year; access to the corporate aircraft; use of an \$80,000-a-month Manhattan apartment, with its expenses paid for by the company; along with floor-level seats to New York Knicks basketball games, VIP seating at Wimbledon tennis games, a box at Yankee Stadium and Boston Red Sox games, four country club fees, security and limousine service at all times,

satellite TV in all four homes, and dining bills at a favorite restaurant. In retirement, Welch's pension continues most of the perquisites for life plus \$86,535 for the first thirty days of each year's consultancy, plus \$17,307 for each additional day (Bagdikian, 2004: 21-22)."

Although this should have been big news across America, it was kept private from both the public and shareholders due to the media's tendency to protect itself.

#### CORPORATE WELFARE

General Electric's deceptive behavior is not limited solely to environmental damage, or the media's cover-up of the damage. In the past three decades, General Electric has been involved in a variety of financial scandals including, but not limited to; tax evasion, fraud, and perjury. In *Take the Rich off Welfare*, a book by sociologists Mark Zepezauer and Arthur Naiman, sixty three separate criminal cases were found where GE was held accountable for restitution. Of forty three corporations studied, General Electric was the only one to be suspended from doing business with the government. This suspension, however, was short-lived and GE got back to business five days later. Zepezauer and Naiman calculated that between 1990 and 2002 GE ended up paying a grand total of \$982.9 million in fines, restitution, penalties and settlements (1996).

In "No Fooling—Corporations Evade Taxes," John Miller found that in 2011 GE paid no corporate income taxes and actually received a \$1.1 billion "tax benefit" (2011). In 2010 and 2012, General Electric again paid no income taxes. General Electric manages to get away with paying zero dollars in taxes by employing some of the most effective tax avoidance techniques such as storing money off shores and employing the world's

leading tax experts. Economists have recently accused General Electric of hoarding somewhere above \$100 billion in offshore accounts, though the details of these charges are still unclear. In the last two years, General Electric has been gaining a substantial amount of attention for their tax techniques though no charges have yet been pressed (Kavoussi, 2013). Despite evading corporate taxes, GE somehow still manages to obtain huge subsidies from the government. "The company is among the top ten recipients of corporate welfare and was awarded \$2,526,300,000 in federal contracts in 2005," explained sociologist Elizabeth Campbell (2009). Campbell associates the huge welfare benefits to the corporation's political affiliations. GE has millions in campaign donations in recent years and has been successful in legislation partly due to their donations. Recently, GE has been lobbying congress to craft legislation to create benefits for itself; this process has cost \$24 million so far. General Electric is also lobbying to overturn the United States Superfund Law of 1980. The 1980 Superfund law allows the government to hold corporations responsible for cleaning up toxic chemicals (Campbell 2009). If successful, it is likely that we will see a dramatic increase in dangerous toxic pollution.

One of the most widely known and discussed incidents occurred in 2010 when GE gave \$3.2 million in kickbacks to Iraqi companies in order to secure medical contracts. General Electric completed their shady business under the cover of the Oil-For-Food Program. The Oil-For-Food program was originally a humanitarian effort intending to improve the lives of those struggling with meeting their basic needs in Iraq. General Electric took advantage of the program and its good intentions and wrongfully made a great deal of money through widespread corruption and bribery. General

Electric paid \$23.4 million in penalties under United States bribery laws but has neither admitted to nor denied taking part in bribes and other corrupt activities (Abetti, 2011).

## CONCLUSION

General Electric emphasizes, “Commitment to imagine and build innovative solutions to today’s environmental challenges while driving economic growth (GE Fact Sheet, 2014).” Yet, General Electric has systematically destroyed the environment, evaded responsibility and somehow ended up benefitting from the mistreatment of others. Corporate officials at General Electric have used their political power, immense stock of capital, and media control to manipulate and exploit the masses. New political scandals involving GE arise each year yet the corporation has methodically silenced all opposing views. In a society where power is bought and sold, only the richest can afford to compete. GE’s power has allowed the corporation to abuse the environment and deny civil rights with few repercussions. Although the company remains hugely successful, the environment has endured decades of damage from GE’s past and current negligent activities. GE’s abundance of power and control over the media, taxes, and the environment explains how the corporation is able to act the way it does while still make billions in profit every year. General Electric is an accurate illustration of everything Karl Marx predicted the ruling class would be: tyrannical, deceitful, and undeniably oppressive. Since the masses share an attitude of apathy and lethargy rather than dreams of a revolution, we must move forward in the only way possible: by exposing the truth behind the powerful elite.

## REFERENCES

- Abetti, Pier. 2011. "General Electric at Crossroads: The End of the Last US Conglomerate?" *International Journal of Management and Technology* 54 (4): 345-368
- Abbott, Andrew. 2009. "GE's Ecoimagination: Eco-Friendly?" *American Journal of Sociology and Society* 6 (4): 12-14
- American Psychiatric Association. 2000. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) Washington:
- Bagdikian, Ben. 2004. *The New Media Monopoly*. Massachusetts: Beacon Press.
- Campbell, Elizabeth. 2009. "Corporate Power: The Role of Global Media in Shaping What We Know About the Environment." Pp 68- 84 in *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*, edited by K. Gould, and T. Lewis. New York: Oxford University Press
- Chasnoff, Debra. 1991. "Deadly Deception: General Electric, Nuclear Weapons, and Our Environment."
- Collins, Jim. 2013. "What Makes a Leader 'Highly Effective'?" *Fortune Magazine*.
- Delaney, Kevin and Rick Ecksteen. 2004. *Public Dollars, Private Stadiums*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Domhoff, William and Hoyt Ballard. 1968. *C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite*. Toronto: Beacon Press.
- Domhoff, William. 1972. *Fat Cats & Democrats*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Domhoff, William. 1978. *Who Really Rules? New Haven and Community power Reexamined*. California: Goodyear Publishing Company.

- Domhoff, William. 1982. *The Powers That Be: Processes of Ruling Class Domination in America*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Dye, R. Thomas. 1995. *Who's Running America? The Clinton Years*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- "EPA New England Press Release." 2003. Retrieved May 4, 2014, from [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)
- "GE: Decades of Misdeeds and Wrongdoings" 2001. *Multinational Monitor* 22 (7): 26-31
- "GE Fact Sheet" 2014. Retrieved March 31, 2014, from [www.ge.com/about-us/fact-sheet](http://www.ge.com/about-us/fact-sheet)
- "Federal Contractor Misconduct Database." 2014. Retrieved May 4, 2014, from [www.contractormisconduct.org/index](http://www.contractormisconduct.org/index)
- Francis, Eric. 1998. "Conspiracy of Silence." *Sierra Magazine* October 1998. Retrieved May 5, 2014 from [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)
- Hanley, Caroline. 2011. "A Spatial Perspective on Rising Inequalities in the United States." *International Journal of Sociology* 40 (4): 6-30
- James, Meg. 2012. "GE Completes Its Purchase of Vivendi's Stake in NBC Universal." *Los Angeles Times*.
- Kavoussi, Bonnie. 2013. "General Electric Avoids Taxes By Keeping \$108 Billion Overseas." *New York Times*
- Korten, David. 2001. *When Corporations Rule the World*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian
- Lawrence, Matthew. 2010. "GE Site Faces Superfund Designation." *Journal of Agriculture and Management* 18 (2): 17-20
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1846. *The German Ideology*. Moscow: David Riazanow Publishing



- Miller, David. 2008. "The Paradoxes of Patenting at General Electric." *Journal of the History of Science in Society* 102 (4): 634-658
- Miller, John. 2011. "No Fooling—Corporations Evade Taxes." *Dollars & Sense* 294: 11-12
- Mills, C. Wright. 1958. "The Structure of Power in American Society." *The British Journal of Sociology* 9 (1) 29-41
- Moore, Michaela. 1999. "Thinking Outside the Box: A Negotiated Settlement Agreement for the Remediation of the General Electric/Housatonic River Site Ensures Environmental Health and Economic Prosperity for Pittsfield Massachusetts." *Boston College Environmental Law Review* 26 (3): 576-617
- Parsons, Talcott. 1957. "Review: The Distribution of Power in American Society." *World Politics* 10(1): 123-143
- Political Economy Research Institute. 2013. "Top 100 Polluters Indexes" Retrieved May 4, 2014 from ([www.peri.umass.edu/indexes](http://www.peri.umass.edu/indexes))
- United States Environmental Protection Agency. 2012. "PCB Superfund Sites" Retrieved December 10, 2012 ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov))
- United States Department of Public Health and Human Service. 2013. "Public Health Statement for Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)" Retrieved November 12, 2013 ([www.publichealth.va.gov](http://www.publichealth.va.gov))
- Weber, Max. 1968. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York: Bedminster Press.
- Zepezauer, Mark and Arthur Naiman. 1996. *Take the Rich Off Welfare*. Tucson, AZ: Odonian