

Mys Rivera
Professor Pugh
Analyzing Documentary Film Assignment

1. What are the environmental issues this documentary focuses on? (2-4 sentences) (3 points)

The Devil We Know (2018) is a documentary focused on the environmental issues of Climate change, contaminated water, access to clean drinking water, air quality, greenhouse gas emissions and waste management. Some of these environmental issues are directly focused on in the film, while others are indirect results but just as significant. The above listed environmental issues are all directly related and statistically attributed to 3M's production of a hazardous chemical compound known as C8. Dupont has used this toxic compound to create Teflon, which is present in thousands of household products around the world. The most notable product being nonstick cookware for kitchen usage.

2. After you watch the film, take a moment to reflect.

a. What are you led to believe are **the causes** of these environmental issues?

I am led to believe that the causes of these environmental issues are Capitalism, Neoliberalism, lack of corporate accountability, absence of inclusive and diverse Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) policies, and corporate created regulations and standards. Additionally lax local regulations of water sources can be a cause of some of these environmental issues.

b. Were these causes explicitly articulated or were they implicit or implied? That is, how intentional was the filmmaker in calling attention to those responsible for the environmental issues in the film? (1-2 short paragraphs) (10 points)

The Neoliberal ideology that is embedded in Capitalism, for the purpose of this film in the form of corporate greed, would be captured and explicitly articulated within the film. For example, in May of 1984, Dupont was knowledgeable that the toxic C8 chemical compound was present in the Ohio River as well as the air but intentionally chose not to tell the community (SH999PLiE, 2019, 20:26-20:40). In response, Dupont claimed that they did not have any incentive to take another position in regards to the compound, and that C8 was the "devil we know" (SH999PLiE, 2019, 52:33-53:01). This implies that there has to be a financial gain significant enough for Dupont to even consider changing their toxic chemical usage. It would have to be advantageous enough for them to also follow through with implementation into their billion-dollar industry products as opposed to their current chemical composition. They are unwilling to change because it would cost them out of pocket expenses which is the only lens they view and validate all things through. This corporate state of mind dominates the world instead of valuing the lives of past and present employees, and the rest of the world's innocent citizens who have been negatively impacted by this harmful chemical without their consent.

The next two causes of corporate created regulations and the absence of inclusive and diverse EPA policies will be address together. Both causes were explicitly articulated in the film multiple times, signifying the importance of their collective impact. Dupont's internal toxicology reports indicate the classification of the C8 compound as a confirmed carcinogen for animals and a possible human carcinogen (SH999PLiE, 2019, 45:25-45:43)

Despite this, Dupont created their own standards and guidelines for exposure to the compound indicating the contaminant levels are "healthy and safe" and "protective of human health" (SH999PLiE, 2019, 27:40-28:30). They were confident that company generated epidemiology and toxicology data would support this. Dupont would not have the flexibility or opportunity to create their own skewed and warped regulations if the EPA prescribed regulations that included C8 and other unregulated contaminants. One potential reasoning for the EPA failing to launch a priority review into C8 until 2002 and a class action suit filing is in my opinion directly attributed to the corrupt nature of an alliance created between the former Deputy Administrator of the EPA and Dupont. The film explicitly called attention to Michael McCabe's undisclosed alliance with Dupont and their collective exploitation and "corporate capture" of the EPA (SH999PLiE, 2019, 59:43-1:01:40).

3. **Are there possible causes or factors that the film omits based on what you've learned in class? If yes, what were they? If not, explain what causes they discussed that aligned with this class. (1-2 short paragraphs) (10 points)**

I do believe that there are some causes or factors that the film omits but not intentionally. One of these factors omitted is the demographic of the West Virginia neighborhood of Parkersburg and the structural violence embedded within this community including its surrounding neighborhoods. This area was the highlight of the film as Dupont had its Teflon plant located there, but in my opinion some essentials were missing. There is an importance to gathering and showing information regarding the socioeconomic factors prior to Dupont's arrival and then after they established their dominance. It would assist in understanding statistical trends of testing environmental elements to create and correlate patterns if any are found. Additionally, the unemployment rates during the time that Dupont began buying farmland and building plants is essential to understanding what class of people were applying and or obtained employment at these plants. I do not think there was a mistake in Dupont building their plant in West Virginia. I strongly believe it was strategic in nature and calculated with other entities that would enable its creation and overlook its impacts.

Overall state-based violence is also omitted from this film in the form of city or state government officials having a voice in clear opposition to Dupont's actions. Particularly, the way government officials in both Ohio and West Virginia failed to action corporate pollution, allowed social inequalities in concentrated neighborhoods to be the breeding ground for deaths, deformities in unborn children, diseases and other serious long-term illnesses within the population. There was no coverage of politicians local or otherwise who took a firm overt stand against what Dupont as a corporation were doing but the plants in particular to diminishing the quality of life of the surrounding residents.

4. Reflect on this documentary using a critical criminology lens. (1 paragraph) (5 points)

The visible and invisible mechanisms within West Virginia that were present before, during and after the creation of Dupont's Teflon plant was founded with the intent on maximizing egregious and reprehensible damages to its citizens. All of the above created an opportunity that left an entire community of people and generations after them to be vulnerable and in a volatile state against a corporation not given any boundaries. The people of West Virginia were not protected by the very organizations, legal representatives, laws, policies or practices in place to protect themselves. In fact, what was reinforced and allowed due the lack of action instead was oppression of the masses, growth of the inequality gap, appeasement of the powerful elites, and gaslighting the powerless. The narrative that was conveniently not being publicized was very clear to the people of West Virginia. Any and all paths that garnered extra financial gain from toxic products was valued higher than their human lives and came at the expense of the quality of life of their children. The people of West Virginia did not benefit at all from Dupont's presence in their community, not even in the employment opportunities that were provided by Dupont at their Teflon plant. Whistleblowers such as Wilbur Tennant, Sue Bailey, Ken Wamsley and Joe Kiger had the power within approach to bring light to the violations Dupont had been enabled to carry out for decades. Without them, Dupont may very well still be operating under the same unregulated policies for their toxic chemicals produced at their labs to generate billions via their popular non-stick products. The sheer expansion in lines of products that once contained this toxic compound points to consumerism and the power the media has to creating that supply chain from coerced demand from false narratives of corporations.

5. Does the film highlight issues around **environmental racism or poverty**? In other words, does the film implicitly or explicitly point to the fact that those affected by environmental issues usually are poor people of color, Indigenous peoples, or white poor people, (all with little political power). If yes, how? If no, where/how could they have included them? (1-2 short paragraphs)

I think the film does highlight issues around environmental racism. From what I observed during my analysis, the city of Parkersburg, West Virginia had a predominantly white demographic. The only people of color seen in the entire film were employees for Dupont, as they were being interviewed by different media source outlets but not residents of the town. I would assess from the above that those affected by environmental issues were poorer white people without much if any political power or financial resources. Another factor that causes me to assess this is that Sue Bailey explicitly states "She couldn't quit because she needed the insurance" (SH999PLiE, 2019, 09:50-10:05). This indicates that Sue was not of the rich, powerful and elite class, but rather amongst the most vulnerable and possibly impoverished in her community. Despite her vulnerability, she risked her own life and that of her unborn child at the time when confronted with some of the truth regarding the C8 she was exposed to daily during her employment with Dupont. Another highlight of environmental racism that may seem implicit to some but was

explicit to me was the Dupont corporation's additional Teflon manufacturing plant in 2002 in Fayetteville, North Carolina (SH999PLiE, 2019, 43:00). This decision was made by Dupont with a plethora of knowledge related to the issues observed, documented and claimed by West Virginia residents but did not seem to matter. This city of Fayetteville was deemed less than, along with its residents who did not have any recourse for what Dupont was prepared to do once the Teflon plant was functional.

6. Make three separate connections between what was in this film and what we have covered in class thus far. Make these connections explicit, do not expect me to know what connection you're making. I recommend writing this answer in separate bullet points, with 2-4 sentences for each. (12 points, 4 points per connection)

- Connection 1: **Master Narratives:** Dupont employees to include scientists, lawyers, toxicologists, Public Relations representatives and the corporate medical director facilitated a master narrative that only considered their economic interest and gain to the masses via television commercials, testimonies and internal corporate documentation. The media is culpable for allowing and spreading coverage of such propaganda and ignoring the truthful testimonies of the people and choosing not to cover any of that information instead. It was convenient to cover up the truth because media outlets make money off of the companies that pay for commercials to be shown. Additionally, the false narrative attached to the Lubeck Water Department's annual quality report indicated that according to Dupont, low concentrations have been found in the water (SH999PLiE, 2019, 27:40-28:30). Dupont knew that the concentrations were extremely high but also that they were illegally dumping the toxic waste into the waterways despite official instruction not to do so (SH999PLiE, 2019, 28:50-29:20).
- Connection 2: **Power Over:** Dupont's blatant and illegal approach to coerce and control the EPA via public statements (SH999PLiE, 2019, 59:43-1:01:40) and into maintaining a false narrative that they know to be harmful to the public. Another example of how power over is connected is the information and or instruction that Dupont gave to their employees. For example, Sue Bailey was instructed to pump the discharged water from the Teflon making process "out back" and directly into the river (SH999PLiE, 2019, 28:50-29:20). Sue Bailey did not know the ramifications behind the chemicals she was exposed to. In addition, a 40-year former employee Ken Wamsley worked in the Teflon lab and was directly told by a Dupont supervisor that Dupont feared the chemical may be detrimental to pregnant women but it won't hurt the men and they did not have anything to worry about (SH999PLiE, 2019, 7:50-8:25). This could not be any further from the truth, as male former employees have died, developed tumors, been diagnosed with cancer and other life altering diseases from C8 and Teflon exposure.
- Connection 3: **Standpoint Epistemology:** This concept within Critical Race Theory can be strongly connected with the Dupont Corporation, the truth about the C8 chemical compound, and the creation of Teflon. Statistics from Dupont lab experts exposed that C8 was a carcinogen, yet it was publicly represented as being safe over and over again. This

completely undermined all of the suffering that had been caused to thousands of people. Another example of how Standpoint Epistemology is connected to this film is regarding former Dupont employee Sue Bailey. Her son Bucky was born with deformities that were consistent with laboratory testing results in rats. Even with this correlation, Dupont blamed Sue for her son's birth conditions and defects despite her direct contact and exposure with the C8 compound on a daily basis during her employment (SH999PLiE, 2019, 09:20-09:45). There was not enough evidence to suggest that Bucky's deformities were a direct cause of C8 exposure and Teflon creation, even though Bucky's C8 levels in his bloodstream were tremendously higher than Sue's (SH999PLiE, 2019, 1:15:01-1:15:20, 39:50-40:20).

7. Reflect on this assignment. Questions to consider: Did you enjoy watching this film? Why or why not? What did you learn that you did not know before? What was the most difficult part of this assignment and why? Do you have any suggestions on how I can improve this assignment in the future? Any other comments? (1 paragraph) (10 points)

I was horrified watching this film and being able to identify all of the opportunities Dupont actually had to make changes for safer chemicals and products. They blatantly ignored all of the statistics, laboratory testing results and real-life examples of suffering employees in the name of their own profit and gain. Even worse in my opinion were the internal documents that flagged issues and chemical reactions to humans, animals and even the drinkable water. It was very difficult to see how the Dupont corporation revictimized its own employees by denying that their chemicals were responsible for the deformities of unborn children due to their mothers' exposure. One of the most important realizations I had after watching this film is that the EPA, an agency that is supposed to protect people and assist in ensuring their longevity and health failed. They did not fail because they exhausted all options fighting for the removal of C8 permanently, but because they were controlled by corporate power. Because of this, I am even more reluctant to trust that any government entity that was created in the interest of the people will actually follow through without fearing they can be bought off in one way or another. I think this was a great assignment that was dynamic and permitted many "lightbulb" moments of connections with material covered in class. It also showed real life historical examples of the corruption that exists in the world and the levels in which they are allowed to exist. I would not change anything about this assignment, as the questions were broad enough to allow detailed reflection but also assisted in framing the guidelines to keep you engaged with the overall picture not just individualized portions of it. I would recommend the consideration of this type of assignment as a Final as well or at least present the option of a film analysis. It allows for students who are educationally stimulated differently to have a chance to showcase their understanding and ability to articulate key concepts of the course.

REFERENCES

1. SH999PLiE. (2019)., *The Devil We Know*. (2019, July 28). [Video]. Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJFbsWX4MJM1>