



CENTER FOR ETHICAL
BUSINESS CULTURES®

Project Overview

Corporate Responsibility: A History

In mid-2008, the Center for Ethical Business Cultures® (CEBC) at the University of St. Thomas (Minnesota) launched a 3–year project to research and write U.S. and global histories of corporate responsibility.¹ The anticipated work product will be two narrative volumes along with web access to supplementary material not included in the volumes themselves. The U.S. history project team began in July 2008 and expects to complete and publish the history by mid-2011. The project is funded as part of a major gift to the university by the Halloran Philanthropies.²

Corporate responsibility is not new; its foundations lie in the 18th and 19th centuries. The last 60 years, however, have witnessed dramatic social, economic, environmental and regulatory challenges to business both in the U.S. and globally. Scholars have written extensively on the “concept” of corporate responsibility, but less has been written on how business in the U.S. and around the globe has translated questions of responsibility into strategy and practice. Building on a thorough examination of the historic roots of the concept, the U.S. and global histories will track developments from post-World War II to the present, examine practices in the context of public expectations and regulatory frameworks, and gauge the impact of business on its stakeholders. Throughout, the project will explore the interweaving of the history of *thinking* about business responsibilities and the history of business *practices*.

Overarching **themes** include:

- Struggles over the legitimacy and purpose of the corporation.
- The adaptive nature of business enterprise in the context of changing social, political, economic and environmental conditions, noting drivers of change in relation to business strategies, practices and organizational structures.
- The definition – and periodic revision – of the responsibilities for which business is held accountable.
- The development and maturation of strategies, practices and organizational structures in relation to society’s call for corporate responsibility.
- The social, economic, and environmental influences of business on stakeholders and society as a whole.

Audience: The project goal aims to reach a broad audience of academics, national and international business leaders, and reflective policy makers with a compelling and thought-provoking history of concepts, context and practice. The project seeks to learn from the past *and* provide a foundation that informs future decisions of business leaders.

Parallel Projects – U.S. and Global Histories: The project is conducting research for two separate but related volumes. One is focused on the U.S. experience; the second is focused on the emergence of corporate responsibility in countries and regions around the globe. The first volume will adopt a U.S. perspective, while the global history will explore the experience of different regions and countries. The U.S. history is being researched and written by a team of four authors; the global history is in the planning stages as of this update.

¹ Founded in 1978, the **Center for Ethical Business Cultures** is a business–founded, business–led nonprofit organization. In July 2004, the Center entered into an exclusive affiliation with the **University of St. Thomas** and is housed in its **Opus College of Business**.

² The **Halloran Philanthropies**, founded by entrepreneur Harry R. Halloran, Jr., are guided by Halloran’s belief that business is one of the most powerful drivers for positive social change. Halloran’s commitment to the history of corporate responsibility project builds on his two earlier planning grants to CEBC.

Methodology: To support the U.S. history’s authors, the Center is commissioning research on selected companies, issues, and contextual developments that contribute to understanding the history. In addition, the Center will commission interviews or forums with knowledgeable business practitioners instrumental in developing corporate responsibility strategies from the 1970s to the present.

The U.S. History Project Team: For the U.S. history, CEBC has engaged a distinguished team of scholars, noted below, as well as an advisory network of practitioners and scholars.

- **Executive Editor:** **Kenneth E. Goodpaster**, Ph.D., Koch Endowed Chair in Business Ethics, Opus College of Business, University of St. Thomas.
- **Authors:** **Archie B. Carroll**, Ph.D., Terry College of Business, University of Georgia; **Kenneth J. Lipartito**, Ph.D., Department of History, Florida International University; **James E. Post**, Ph.D., School of Management Strategy and Policy, Boston University; and, **Patricia H. Werhane**, Ph.D., Darden School of Business, University of Virginia and Institute for Business and Professional Ethics, DePaul University.
- **Project Director:** **David Rodbourne**, vice president, CEBC.

The tentative chapter structure of the U.S. history is displayed below:

Tentative Chapter Titles	Time Interval	Content
<i>1. Overview</i>	Stage Setting	“The Big Story” and Key Variables
<i>2. The Rise of the Corporation</i>	Adam Smith to 1880	Deep historical background
<i>3. The Growth of the Corporation</i>	1880-1929	Modern historical background
<i>4. The Corporation & National Crisis</i>	1929-1945	Great Depression through WWII
<i>5. Corporate Legitimacy Affirmed</i>	1945-1960	Postwar Business and Cold War Politics
<i>6. Corporate Legitimacy Challenged</i>	1960-1973	CSR development and justice movements: Racial, Gender, Workers, Consumers, Environment
<i>7. Turbulence among Business Frameworks</i>	1973-1980	Regulation & Business Ethics
<i>8. Ideological Conflict</i>	1980-1988	The Reagan Era: Markets, Stakeholders, and Ethics
<i>9. Capitalism Globalizes</i>	1988-2001	The Fall of the Berlin Wall to 9/11; CSR goes global
<i>10. Today & Beyond: A New Social Contract?</i>	2001-2010	From Enron scandals to the current financial crisis

The Global History Project Team: CEBC has developed an initial literature search on the emergence of corporate responsibility in different regions and countries around the globe. Following this preliminary work, the Center will select a lead author/editor and contributing authors.

Note: Terminology describing this field has varied including: the responsibilities of business, the social responsibilities of business, business social responsibility, corporate social responsibility, corporate responsibility, and corporate citizenship. And, occasionally in recent years, the term sustainability has been used in ways that encompass the aforementioned terms.

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