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978-1-107-02094-8 - Corporate Responsibility: The American Experience

Archie B. Carroll, Kenneth J. Lipartito, James E. Post, Patricia H. Werhane and Kenneth E. Goodpaster
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Corporate Responsibility: The American Experience

This thought-provoking history of corporate responsibility in the USA is a landmark publication documenting the story of corporate power and business behavior from the mid-eighteenth century to the modern day. It shows how the idea of corporate responsibility has evolved over time, with the roles, responsibilities, and performance of corporations coming increasingly under the spotlight as new norms of transparency and accountability emerge. Today, it is expected that a corporation will be transparent in its operations; that it will reflect ethical values that are broadly shared by others in society; and that companies will enable society to achieve environmental sustainability as well as a high standard of living. As we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, the social, political, and economic landscape is once again shifting: the need for an informed public conversation about what is expected of the modern corporation has never been greater.

ARCHIE B. CARROLL is Robert W. Scherer Professor of Management Emeritus and Director, Nonprofit Management and Community Service Program at the Terry College of Business at the University of Georgia.

KENNETH J. LIPARTITO is Professor of History and Department Chair at Florida International University.

JAMES E. POST is the John F. Smith, Jr. Professor of Management at Boston University where he teaches strategic management, corporate governance, ethics, and nonprofit management.

PATRICIA H. WERHANE holds the Wicklander Chair of Business Ethics and is Director, Institute for Business and Professional Ethics at DePaul University. She is also Professor Emeritus at the Darden School, University of Virginia.

KENNETH E. GOODPASTER holds the David and Barbara Koch Endowed Chair in Business Ethics in the Opus College of Business at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota.

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“This amazing book provides a terrific overview of the emergence and development of the ways that businesses have both responded to public pressures for taking on more responsibilities and, in some instances, abrogated those very responsibilities. It is a tale that has been waiting a long time to be told and should be required reading for anyone hoping to understand the context in which today’s corporate responsibility paradigm has arisen. The authors’ voices blend perfectly to create a stunning panorama sweeping over 200 years, focusing on both the flaws and the greatness of corporations in America today.”

Sandra Waddock
Galligan Chair of Strategy, Professor of Management and
Carroll School Scholar of Corporate Responsibility,
Carroll School of Management, Boston College

“*Corporate Responsibility* is a powerful treatise on the obligations of corporations to serve the society that charters them. Enlightened leaders have long recognized that corporations cannot ignore the consequences to society. Making money and creating shared value must go hand-in-hand, as Ken Goodpaster and his colleagues make abundantly clear in this brilliantly researched and beautifully written book. It is a *must read* for anyone concerned about the future of capitalism in our society.”

Bill George
Professor, Harvard Business School, former CEO of Medtronic,
and author of *True North*

“The team has done readers an invaluable service by providing sweeping historical perspective that enables us to understand the modern corporate responsibility movement. Anyone who wants to understand the state of play today – and where sustainability is likely to go in the future – would do well to read this book.”

Aron Cramer
President and CEO, Business for Social Responsibility, San Francisco

“*Corporate Responsibility* is the most comprehensive study available on the history of corporate social responsibility in the United States. The volume covers both academic research and business practice. Both scholars of corporate responsibility and business people will find this volume to be a treasured resource.”

Norman Bowie
Professor Emeritus, Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota

“*Corporate Responsibility* describes the changing nature of how the corporation has been viewed through history, particularly as an evolving dialogue within society. The book highlights that things have not always been as they are now, nor is the present our destiny.

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This comprehensive book is essential to understanding how we navigate some of the most contentious debates about the relationship between business and society.”

Rakesh Khurana

Marvin Bower Professor of Leadership Development, Harvard Business School

“This is the history both scholars and students of business have been waiting for! The rise of the modern corporation has shaped American identity and politics from the days of the industrial revolution. The authors deftly and compellingly tell the story, capturing both the resilience of capitalism and our uneasy relationship with its excesses and powers. The central question they pose is critical to our future: “What is the purpose of business and to whom is it accountable?”

Judith Samuelson

Executive Director, Aspen Institute’s Business and Society Program

“An in-depth examination of the 200-year history of society’s ever-changing view of the responsibilities of the modern corporation from some of the very best academic thinkers.”

Steve Lydenberg

Founding Director, Initiative for Responsible Investment,
Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations, Harvard University

“This in-depth study of the history of CSR elevates the academic discourse around this concept. Skeptics take note: societal expectation of business is not a wholly novel, modern idea. From the Social Gospel to the formation of labor groups, social, economic, and political factors over 200 years have grounded our ever-evolving notion of the duty of companies to society. This book brings the reader to this important conclusion: ‘It is not about if a company becomes involved in society. It is now about the how!’”

Carol L. Cone

Global Practice Chair, Edelman Business and Social Purpose

“This book should be required reading for aspiring executives and those who teach them. This superb history shows how shifting norms in a global world have made corporate responsibility both radical and requisite in modern business. Through the lens of corporate responsibility you can see not simply the evolution of the corporation in the past but the trajectory of the international economy in the future.”

Christopher McKenna

Centre for Corporate Reputation, Said Business School, University of Oxford

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The American Experience

ARCHIE B. CARROLL

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JAMES E. POST

PATRICIA H. WERHANE

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Executive Editor

Illustrations compiled and annotated by Kirsten Delegard
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With gratitude to Harry R. Halloran, an executive whose vision, determination, and belief in the social responsibility of businesses and business women and men, inspired and sustained this effort.

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Archie B. Carroll is Robert W. Scherer Professor of Management Emeritus and Director, Nonprofit Management and Community Service Program at the Terry College of Business at the University of Georgia. Carroll joined the faculty of the Terry College of Business in 1972. He was awarded the Robert W. Scherer Chair of Management in 1986. From 1995 to 2000 he served as Department Head of Management and since 2000 has been Director of the Nonprofit Program. He was named Professor Emeritus in 2006. Carroll's research has emphasized corporate social responsibility, corporate social performance, business ethics, and stakeholder management. Carroll has published twenty books (in various editions) and over 100 articles in journals and books. He is the author of *Business & Society: Ethics and Stakeholder Management* (seventh edition, 2009) with Ann K. Buchholtz, and *Business Ethics: Brief Readings on Vital Topics* (2009). In 1975 Carroll was elected Chair of the Social Issues in Management Division of the Academy of Management. He served as President of the Society for Business Ethics between 1998 and 1999. In 2003, he received the Terry College of Business Distinguished Faculty Service Award. He was elected Fellow of the Academy of Management in 2005. In 2008, he received the Florida State University College of Business Distinguished Ph.D. Alumni Award.

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Tappan and the Origins of American Express Financial Advisors (2001); and *The Bell System and Regional Business: The Telephone in the South, 1877–1920* (1989). Lipartito's articles have appeared in the *American Historical Review*, the *Journal of Economic History*, *Technology and Culture*, *Industrial and Corporate Change*, and the *Business History Review*. From 2003 to 2007 Lipartito served as editor of *Enterprise & Society: The International Journal of Business History*. He is recipient of the 2000 Harold F. Williamson Prize from the Business History Conference in 2000, the 2004 Abbott Payson Usher Prize from the Society for the History of Technology, and the 2009 Gardner-Lasser Aerospace History Award for his book on the Kennedy Space Center.

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James E. Post is the John F. Smith, Jr. Professor of Management at Boston University where he teaches strategic management, corporate governance, ethics, and nonprofit management. Post has held administrative positions at Boston University, including chairman of the Management department, faculty director of the Public & Nonprofit Management Program, and faculty director of the Doctoral Program. He is the author, coauthor, or editor of twenty books and more than 120 scholarly papers. He is coauthor, with Lee E. Preston, of *Private Management and Public Policy: The Principle of Public Responsibility* (1975); *Corporate Behavior and Social Change* (1978); *Managing Environmental Issues: A Casebook* (1992, with Rogene A. Buchholz and Alfred Allen Marcus); and *Redefining the Corporation: Organizational Wealth and Stakeholder Management* (2002, with L. Preston and Sybille Sachs). He is coauthor of the sixth through eleventh editions of *Business and Society*. Post's consulting and advisory engagements include the Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, National Wildlife Federation, Corporate Conservation Council, President's Commission on Sustainable Development, US Agency for International Development, and the office of the United Nations Secretary General (Global Compact Program). He has also served as a Senior Fellow and Research Director of the business and society research program at The Conference Board, a leading business research organization. He served as a member of the Nestlé Audit Commission, an independent body that audited that company's compliance with the World Health Organization's international code of conduct.

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Kenneth E. Goodpaster holds the David and Barbara Koch Endowed Chair in Business Ethics in the Opus College of Business at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota. He joined the St. Thomas faculty in 1989. Throughout the 1970s Goodpaster taught graduate and undergraduate philosophy at the University of Notre Dame; he joined the Harvard Business School faculty in 1980. Goodpaster's research has spanned a wide range, from conceptual studies of ethical reasoning to empirical studies of the social implications of management decision-making. He is author of *Conscience and Corporate Culture* (2007); *Regulation, Values and the Public Interest* (1980); *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century* (1979); and *Perspectives on Morality* (1976). His articles have appeared in a wide variety of professional journals, including the *Journal of Philosophy*, *Journal of Ethics*, *Environmental Ethics*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Thought*, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Harvard Business Review*, and others. His textbooks include *Ethics in Management* (1984) and *Policies and Persons: A Casebook in Business Ethics* (1985), up through its fourth edition, *Business Ethics: Policies and Persons* (2006), along with the *Instructor's Manual* on CD Rom. Goodpaster serves on the editorial boards of several journals in the field of business ethics, and has been active with the Minneapolis-based Center for Ethical Business Cultures and the Veritas Institute, both located at the University of St. Thomas; the International Society for Business, Economics, and Ethics (ISBEE); and the Better Business Bureau (BBB).

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Foreword

As the CEO of General Mills, I have seen firsthand the change in attitude toward corporate responsibility. Shareholders, customers, employees, and host communities today increasingly demand responsible, even enlightened, engagement in matters that go well beyond a corporation's earnings of the last quarter. I believe this interest is driven by a yearning for principled behavior – for clear and strong values – in all American institutions, including business. Stockholders still want to know about sales and earnings, of course. But today they also want to know that a corporation is committed to “doing the right thing,” as we say at General Mills. They want to know how we treat our employees, and how we are improving the health and safety of our products. They want to know our commitment to the sustainable use of resources in our products and about our engagement and support of the communities where we reside. They correctly see corporations as large and powerful institutions that should be engaged in the right behavior with respect to all of these issues. And they expect us to do the right thing, all the time. This book appears at a timely moment. Many business leaders are clearly rethinking what it means to be a truly socially responsible company, and this important work helps us understand not only the history of corporate responsibility, but also its evolving future.

General Mills' story largely parallels the history of corporate responsibility. The company began on the banks of the Mississippi River, where our founder, Cadwallader Washburn, built the canal that channeled the water power of St. Anthony Falls. His visionary investment spawned a milling industry that would become the largest in the world and would create the economic foundation of Minneapolis. Washburn's first mill, built in 1866, was one of the largest in the world and became known as “Washburn's Folly,” for surely even Washburn could not sell that much flour. In a post-Civil War era of fledgling milling companies and brutal competition, Washburn chose as his partner John Crosby, known for his reputation as “Honest John.” Washburn and Crosby expanded sales across the United States and into Europe.

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Then tragedy struck. In 1878, Washburn's second mill was destroyed in a devastating explosion, leveling several city blocks. According to eyewitnesses, not one brick was left standing on another – and eighteen men were killed. Amid the ruin, Washburn took a series of actions that helped form the foundation of the culture of General Mills. First, he created a fund to help the workers' families. He founded an orphanage to care for children impacted by this tragedy – an institution that continues in a form to this day. Then he committed his technical team to the study of grain dust, and they learned how to reduce the explosive risks of milling through innovative filtering systems. Finally, in the truest sense of corporate responsibility, to prevent future disasters, he gathered his competitors at the famous “Miller's Table” at the Minneapolis Club to share his new technology with each one. In each and every respect, he sought to do the right thing.

Over the years, the values of Washburn and Crosby became deeply embedded in General Mills. They inspired the General Mills Foundation through which General Mills invests nearly 5 percent of its profits annually through various forms of philanthropy. Their values live on in the more than 80 percent of General Mills employees and retirees who volunteer in our communities. They inspire us to *share* our technology by bringing small food processors to Africa to help local farmers increase their output and support them in a sustainable way.

Corporate Responsibility: The American Experience is a well-timed volume that explores such themes with depth and insight. It examines corporate responsibility with such impressive scope that it is certain to become a crucial resource for those passionate about the ability of business to make a difference in society. It will certainly stimulate discussion and critical thought for General Mills as we chart our own future. But this is not uncharted territory, as this volume makes clear. There are hundreds of examples over more than a century of companies large and small “doing the right thing” both in the context of their time and in the evolving future of corporate responsibility. Understanding the lessons of *Corporate Responsibility: The American Experience* will help show the way. We need only to rededicate ourselves to the wisdom and necessity of the task.

Ken Powell
CEO, General Mills

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Preface

“Has there ever been a robust history of corporate responsibility – a platform for looking toward the social and economic future?”

“No, Harry,” I said, “I don’t think so, but I’ll confirm that for you if you like.”

“All right, and if you confirm it, would you consider actually doing such a history if I provide the resources and stay out of the way? It should be an objective, nonideological account of corporate responsibility. If business is going to be a driver for positive social change in the future, we have got to understand its past.”

“But Harry, I’m not a trained historian. I’m a philosopher.”

“Yes, I know,” he said, “but I would like you to consider taking this on nonetheless!”

A question, some reluctance, then persistence, acceptance, enthusiasm. This was the genesis in 2004 of the project that has led to this volume. It was born of the determination of a successful, tough-minded business leader and the eventual passion of a practical philosopher.

“Harry” was Harry Halloran, a Philadelphia entrepreneur whose philanthropic foundation gave a major gift to the University of St. Thomas in 2007 to make the history project possible.

The moment of acceptance, however, raised a bundle of questions:

The history of *what*?

- Was it to be a history of business or corporate *behavior*?
- Was it to be the history of an *idea* – “corporate responsibility”?
- Would it also be a history of certain academic disciplines?
- Was it to be a *world* history or an American history?

And how was “corporate responsibility” to be understood in relation to so many other terms and phrases that seemed to be similar: business ethics, corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate citizenship, corporate community involvement, stakeholder management, sustainability, and many more? Our answers to this last question can be found in the introductory chapter.

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The questions were intriguing – was it business *conduct* or a business *concept* that was at the center of our story? We questioned this “either–or,” believing that throughout our story, we would see ideas taking flesh in business behavior, and business behavior giving rise to new ideas about corporations, their governance, their legitimacy, and their place in what we came to call “the public square.” The metaphor of two strands of DNA captured this insight – that over the two centuries covered by our story, the “double helix” turned. The helix suggested two interactive narratives, one played out in the world of business decision-making and social responses to that decision-making – and the other played out as an evolution of thought and discourse about the nature of the corporation and its moral credentials. It was to be a history of *thought-in-action*, a history of the interaction between *thinkers* and *doers*. The focus would be the American experience, but a subsequent project was envisioned that would approach the history of corporate responsibility from a more global perspective. It would be a book for scholars, business practitioners, and thoughtful professionals worldwide.

The process

The Center for Ethical Business Cultures (CEBC)) at the Opus College of Business of the University of St. Thomas was a natural administrative home for this book project. Ron James, CEBC President, asked Vice President David Rodbourne to be the CEBC project director, and together we set the stage. David’s role throughout the years of this project can hardly be overstated. He has been budget manager, event planner, commissioner of outside research and practitioner interviews, image gallery guide, and co-presenter at conferences at which we shared the scope and content of the project. Throughout the process, he has been a constructive critic and advisor to the authors and to me, always pursuing a balanced and vibrant history.

In November 2007, after some preliminary research into existing literature, we convened a two-day national consultation at St. Thomas among scholars and practitioners. This was a splendid departure point for appreciating the value and magnitude of the task. Participants confirmed the idea of two volumes, one focused on the American experience and another, more global in scope to follow.¹

The choice of an author team was the next challenge. Happily, four excellent scholars at the top of my list answered the call to participate: Archie Carroll, well known for his work in CSR and management studies; Kenneth Lipartito, respected business historian; James Post, distinguished in the study of business, government, and society; and Patricia Werhane, a leading scholar in business ethics. These four became a team of

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colleagues with complementary expertise, passion, and the humility essential to the collaborative challenge that lay ahead. It was clear that for these authors, this was a *legacy project* that would need their considerable talents and their very best work. It was a project on which future scholars could build and in which future executives could find clarity and strength.

The team convened numerous times over the next four years, critically and constructively debating one another's abstracts, outlines, and (eventually) chapter drafts. The initial division of labor was a negotiation that unfolded smoothly. I asked each author to take *primary* responsibility for several intervals and *secondary* responsibility for several others. This contributed to a sense of shared responsibility across chapters and facilitated collaboration. Each author was given a research budget for graduate assistance and other expenses. *Project-wide* topics were identified that spanned multiple chapter intervals, and research papers were commissioned from knowledgeable scholars (the evolution of business law; the history of social investment; corporate philanthropy; corporate governance; economics; and small business).²

As the authors moved from topic and event lists to abstracts for each of the chapters, then to “digests” and first drafts, the energy in our dialogue increased. We encouraged one another to zoom *in* on the most significant actions and ideas in each historical subdivision, while at the same time zooming *out* to keep the “big picture” in mind.

We noticed the recurrence of questions like “To whom?” and “For what?” are corporations responsible – with evolving differences in the answers. We asked each other whether – by analogy with persons – corporate *responsibilities* carried with them corporate *rights*.

We observed in the nineteenth century and in the pre-World War II period many controversies that have since been highlighted under the banner of corporate responsibility: civil rights in the workplace, healthy working conditions, fair wages, women's rights, environmental impact, safe products and truth in marketing, calls for professionalism in management, charges of undue interference in the public sector by the private sector – and charges of undue interference in the other direction as well.

Finally, we noted the *tenacity* with which American society held on to the free enterprise system, despite frequent disillusionment. Indeed, the demand for “corporate responsibility” emanating from the American public square is in many ways the embodiment of that tenacity, of confidence that the system can be made to work in an ethically acceptable way – finding remedies without revolution.

The members of the team held one another to high standards at each of our meetings. The diversity among the disciplines around the table actually served as an insurance policy when it came to critical questioning and joint learning about both thinkers and

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doers. It also meant, of course, that there were differences of scholarly norms and writing styles that would call eventually for editorial “smoothing.” The interpersonal dynamics were truly impressive, revealing the selfless spirit of the contributors in the inevitable back-and-forth critiques that each was asked to offer of the others.

During the drafting of the chapters, the author team, David Rodbourne, and I made a number of presentations at professional meetings and conferences, describing the project, its aspiration, and its anticipated completion. These included panel discussions at the Society for Business Ethics Annual Meeting in 2009 and at the Vincentian Business Ethics Conference in 2010. Uniformly the responses were enthusiastic, reinforcing our conviction (and the benefactor’s vision) that this work was timely and of value to scholars and practitioners alike. We were also able, under the generous terms of the grant from Halloran Philanthropies, to stimulate research by initiating five-year commitments to the Business History Conference as well as the Management History Division and the Social Issues in Management Division of the Academy of Management, to sponsor annual “Best Paper” awards on themes in the history of corporate responsibility.

During the fall of 2010, the team became aware of a history of the state of Minnesota that had just been published by the University of Minnesota Press.³ The historian who had designed the striking image galleries in that book, which we had admired very much, Kirsten Delegard, was interested in our project. So we engaged Dr. Delegard to work with our author team and to research, annotate, and help design the image galleries in this volume.

The next step was to work with a developmental editor to help harmonize the writing styles of the authors, seeking as much as possible a unified narrative voice. We were very fortunate to engage the services of Mary Child, an editorial consultant who, until July 2011, was based in Hong Kong. Her insight and skill immeasurably enriched the continuity and the clarity of the completed manuscript as well as the captions in the image galleries. Working with Mary Child was my Research Associate Pati Provinske. Her work in creating a style guide for the Endnotes and References provided a foundation for the technical details in the editing and publishing process as we sought to maintain continuity of voice.

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xx PREFACE

First, of course, we must recognize the inspiration and generosity of Mr. Harry Halloran, and with him Mr. Tony Carr who headed up the Halloran Philanthropies in Philadelphia, PA. We can now answer affirmatively Harry's original question "Has there ever been a full-scale history of corporate responsibility – a platform for looking toward the economic future?"

We wish further to acknowledge in Minneapolis, Dean Christopher Puto of the Opus College of Business, University of St. Thomas, and Ron James, president of the Center for Ethical Business Cultures, both of whom provided encouragement, advice, and resources to support the project. Ron James also reviewed early drafts of the manuscript and contributed the perspective of a business executive to our work. T. Dean Maines of the Opus College Veritas Institute worked on the initial platform for the grant from the Halloran Philanthropies, while CEBC's Terri Hastings, Judy Olson, and David Rodbourne worked extensively with the Office of the Dean on the budgeting process. Staff members at St. Thomas deserving special mention include CEBC administrative assistant Judy Olson, who arranged for meals, travel, and accommodations for the team both in Minneapolis and elsewhere, and who pursued the permissions and high-resolution images for the gallery; and my administrative assistant Jill Erolin, who provided support throughout, preparing drafts of the manuscript for each of our dialogues. Special thanks go to the staff at all of UST's Libraries.

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We hope that this work will inform business leaders, present and future, and become a valued resource for scholars. It furthers the central mission of the Center for Ethical Business Cultures (CEBC), which was founded in 1978 by Minnesota business leaders who were committed to corporate responsibility and who were dedicated to passing that commitment forward to leaders of the future.

Kenneth E. Goodpaster
Executive Editor
Minneapolis