

Corporate Responsibility in the Global Village: The British Role Model and the American Laggard

Susan Ariel Aaronson

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SUSAN ARIEL AARONSON

As they enter the 21st century, the United States and close ally Great Britain have much in common. Both nations have made the painful transition from energy-intensive heavy industries to new sectors, such as services and high-tech. Both have economic, social, and political cultures that reward innovation. And both are home to many of the world's largest, most powerful firms.

Yet the two nations could not be more different in their attitudes toward shaping the behavior of such global firms. This article describes how Britain and the U.S. promote global corporate responsibility. The British government has a coordinated and "ambitious" strategy.¹ CSR policies are accepted and supported by business, civil society, and policymakers in the legislative and executive branches. In contrast, the United States has a wide range of often contradictory and unconnected initiatives. These initiatives lack consistency, coherence, clearly articulated principles, and long-term funding. In the United States, CSR issues such as the human rights responsibilities of international business are

Susan Ariel Aaronson is the Senior Fellow and Director of Globalization Studies at the Kenan Institute in Washington. With grants from the Ford, UN, and Levi-Strauss Foundations, she is examining what the U.S. government can do to promote global corporation responsibility. In 2001–2002, with grants from the Ford, Rockefeller, and Boeckler Foundations, Aaronson, along with her colleague James Reeves, explored what European governments are doing to promote global corporate responsibility.

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