

Stanger, Allison *Whistleblowers: Honesty in America from Washington to Trump*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019. 290. Hardcover, \$27.50.

Allison Stanger begins her book, *Whistleblowers: Honesty in America from Washington to Trump*, with a paradox. If U.S. ideals elevate whistleblowers by commending them for “speaking truth to power” (p. 9), why is it that whistleblowers are also punished for committing themselves to the truth? While whistleblowers are celebrated when their revelations of abuse hit the news, whistleblowers face retribution through marginalization, demotion, and dismissal when media attention wanes. Many carry the stigma of whistleblowing for life. How to make sense of this paradox frames Stanger’s work as we move from revolutionary times to the era of Trump.

Stanger begins her history of U.S. whistleblowing by examining how the first law protecting whistleblowers emerged from the exposure of corrupt acts by the Commodore in Chief of the Continental Navy. This begins an internal struggle within the U.S. about what constitutes corruption, what protection should be afforded whistleblowers, and who should be afforded this protection.

The Civil War gave rise to its own forms of corruption as the war machines in both the north and south sought large stores of food, weapons, uniforms, etc. The scale of corruption during the war led Congress to pass the False Claims act “under which whistle blowers could bring ‘qui tam’ actions on behalf of the government,” (p. 38) entitling them to a share of damages collected by government agencies.

After the war, a developing country saw a growth in possibilities for prosperity. While many exploited the potential of the era toward honest ends, others did not. In what is referred to as the first Gilded Age, exposure of the excesses of Tammy Hall created public outrage and action at the local and state levels. Congressional complicity in the crony capitalism associated

with the development of the transcontinental railroad did the same at the national level. During this era corruption “took three principal forms...fraud or false claims...skimming or graft (and)...a variant of quid pro quo” (p. 52).

The perceived existential threat of the rise of Russian communism led to the passage of the 1917 Espionage Act and the 1918 Sedition Act which defined previously acceptable speech and action as treasonous. With the rise of the Cold War, the 1947 National Security Act, and its 1949 amendments placed additional restrictions on U.S. citizens. With the passage of the COMINT Act in 1950, sharing any U.S. secrets (including information that exposed corruption and embarrassing information about the government) was deemed treasonous. And though President Eisenhower warned of the threat posed by the rise of the “military-industrial complex” (p. 82), it is not until the corruption of the Nixon Administration that Congressional reforms embodied in the Sunshine Act (1976), the Ethics Act (1978), and the Presidential Records Act (1978) allowed greater scrutiny of government actions.

For Stanger, this openness begins to reverse with the Reagan Administration’s move to privatize an array of government services. The federal government’s embrace of business blurs the distinction between public service and the pursuit of profit. As more and more senators leave office to become lobbyists (more than 50 percent in the modern era), motivations for oversight, and the curtailment of corrupt practices diminish. All the challenges posed by secrecy and corruption in early U.S. history are dwarfed in the post 9/11, digitized, globalized internet age of today. Stanger explores the deficiencies of laws crafted for a pre-digital age as they are applied today in the world of Snowden, Wiki-leaks, and Donald Trump.

This is a well-research and well-documented study. Stanger consulted and cited hundreds of published works and government documents in the book to provided nuanced

insights into the dynamics and consequences of whistleblowing. Stanger's review of existing literature is complimented by interviews of extant sources (e.x., Snowden). The result is an engaging and informative manuscript. It is accessible to academic and non-academic readers.

This book would be appropriate for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses which explore government policy, corruption and social justice. It is a must-read for individuals looking for a wide context to interpret the action of the current U.S. administration and for those who wish to understand what is at risk when citizens engage in or refrain from revealing the corrupt and illegal acts by those in their places of employment.

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