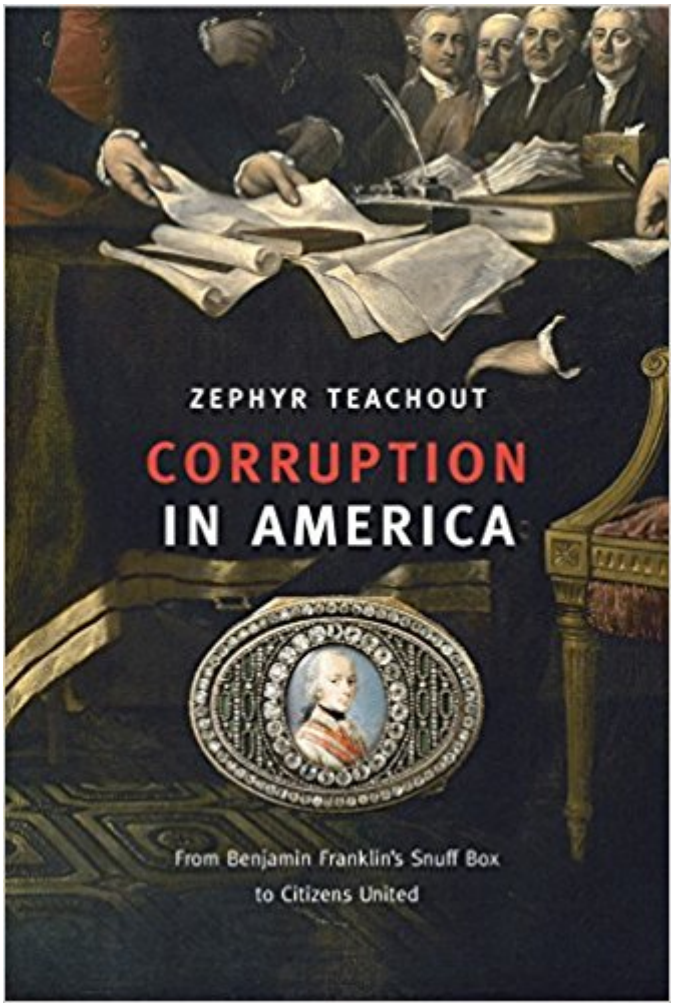
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Corruption In America: From Benjamin FranklinÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s Snuff Box To Citizens United



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Synopsis

When Louis XVI gave Ben Franklin a diamond-encrusted snuffbox, the gift troubled Americans: it threatened to corrupt him by clouding his judgment. By contrast, in 2010 the Supreme Court gave corporations the right to spend unlimited money to influence elections. Zephyr Teachout shows that Citizens United was both bad law and bad history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

At last someone has written a book that puts a name to what is perhaps the most significant factor shaping American politics today: corruption. In a masterly work of scholarship, Zephyr TeachoutÃ¢â ¬Â¦traces the history of American approaches to what was long considered a mortal threat to the republic. She demonstrates that recent jurisprudence, which has whittled down the definition of corruption to encompass only a contractual exchange between briber and public official, represents nothing less than Ã¢â ¬Ëœa revolution in political theory.Ã¢â ¬â„¢Ã¢â ¬Â¦ Teachout calls for a return to the FramersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ preference for across-the-board rules to help prevent corrupt acts before they are perpetrated, rather than relying on punishment after the fact. (Sarah Chayes Wall Street Journal 2014-09-26)In Corruption in America, an eloquent, revealing, and sometimes surprising historical inquiry, Teachout convincingly argues that corruption, broadly understood as placing private interests over the public good in public office, is at the root of what ails American democracy. (David Cole New York Review of Books 2014-09-25)TeachoutÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book is filled with colorful anecdotes about Americans getting away with all sorts of chicaneryÃ¢â ¬Â¦Corruption in America shows that it is possible to establish and maintain

governmental institutions that shield us from our worst instincts. This was the goal of Madison and his peers, and it could still be achieved with a better public-election finance system, which could be constitutional under Citizens United if the system did not restrict private donations. Democrats who will be looking for a fresh agenda in 2016 should read TeachoutÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book carefully. (Max Ehrenfreund Washington Post 2014-09-21)A book that merits the large readership it may getÃ¢â ¬Â¦TeachoutÃ¢â ¬â„¢s narrative spans the history of the United States from its beginnings through Chief Justice John RobertsÃ¢â ¬â„¢s decision in McCutcheon v. FEC. (Scott McLemee Inside Higher Ed 2014-09-24)Zephyr Teachout argues that recent court decisionsÃ¢â ¬â ¢and a lax attitude toward corruptionÃ¢â ¬â ¢are putting private interests over the public good. Teachout complains of the revolving-door practice of congressional representatives retiring and becoming lobbyists. She says the policy breeds ethical conflicts and tainted decision-making. (Carl Campanile New York Post 2014-09-17)TeachoutÃ¢â ¬â„¢s beautifully written and powerful book exposes a simple but profound error at the core of the Supreme CourtÃ¢â ¬â„¢s McCutcheon v. FEC decision. The originalists on the Court forgot their history. This is that historyÃ¢â ¬â ¢and eventually it will provide the basis for reversing the CourtÃ¢â ¬â„¢s critical error. (Lawrence Lessig, author of Republic, Lost: How Money Corrupts CongressÃ¢â ¬â ¢and a Plan to Stop It)This is a wonderful and important book. Zephyr Teachout shows whatÃ¢â ¬â„¢s wrong with how the Supreme Court thinks about democracy and political corruption, how we got to this terrible place, and that it wasnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t always this wayÃ¢â ¬â ¢and doesnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t have to be. ThereÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a lot of learning and original synthesis here, and also an unmistakable voice, which blends a lively intelligence with passion for democracy as a way of life. (Jedediah Purdy, author of A Tolerable Anarchy: Rebels, Reactionaries, and the Making of American Freedom)You have probably heard pundits say we are living in an age of Ã¢â ¬Ëœlegalized briberyÃ¢â ¬â„¢; Corruption in America is the book that makes their case in careful detailÃ¢â ¬Â¦State governments subject to wealthy corporations? Check. Speculators in legislation, infesting the capital? They call it K StreetÃ¢â ¬Â¦And all of it has happened, Teachout admonishes, because the foundersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ understanding of corruption has been methodically taken apart by a Supreme Court that cynically pretends to worship the foundersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ every word. (Thomas Frank New York Times Book Review 2014-10-16)[Teachout] wrote [this] book, she says, primarily in answer to conservative members of the Supreme Court, who, in a series of decisions climaxing in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission in 2010, have successively narrowed the legal definition of corruption to the point that it now effectively includes only outright bribery. In Citizens United, for example, the majority struck down corporate spending limits in politics on the grounds that there is nothing

inherently corrupting about corporations trying to buy influence with politicians so long as there is no explicit quid pro quo. Teachout spends much of her book showing just how naive, dangerous, and, frankly, anti-American the Founding Fathers would have considered such reasoningÃ¢â ¬Â¦It is certainly refreshing to watch Teachout remind jurists who pretend to wrap themselves in the mantle of strict construction just how at odds their views of human nature and the role of government are with those of the framers. (Daniel Bush Washington Monthly 2015-01-01)[Teachout] has written an intelligent, stimulating, and wide-ranging retort to the Roberts CourtÃ¢â ¬â„¢s constrained view of corruption. In Corruption in America, she argues that for democracy to thrive, we need a far more capacious characterization of this key conceptÃ¢â ¬Â¦Her book in part [is] a greatest hits of court cases and laws dealing with bribery and lobbying, full of corrupt land deals and railroad intrigueÃ¢â ¬Â¦While there is obviously plenty to debate and disagree over in how we might define and delineate corruption, the broad unsettledness of the concept is perhaps TeachoutÃ¢â ¬â„¢s point. She has some ideas on how we might think about corruption, and she highlights othersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ ideas as well. But mostly, she just wants us to debate and discuss corruption more, to view it as a controversial issue, and not to let the Roberts Court sweep it away into a marginal corner so that it can then declare it irrelevant, thus clearing the way for unlimited campaign contributionsÃ¢â ¬Â¦TeachoutÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book may be just the rousing call to arms we need for the fight ahead. (Lee Drutman Democracy 2015-02-01)After a thorough and almost agonizingly detailed grand tour of dozens of often conflicting federal and state court decisions differing on the precise legal meaning of Ã¢â ¬Ëœcorruption,Ã¢â ¬â„¢ Teachout ends up with a book that should become required reading in constitutional law classes. (Michael Hirsch Indypendent 2015-04-01)Teachout explores case law and controversies before the 1970s and finds that many generations of jurists and politicians had a much broader conception of political corruption and a richer sense of civic duty and viewed any sort of gift-giving from private citizens to public officials as ethically dubious and undermining of democratic legitimacy. Though there was quite a bit of public corruption in the old days, there was also a respect for public virtue for which modern jurisprudence has little patience. The Supreme CourtÃ¢â ¬â„¢s dramatic turn away from an older tradition leaves Congress unable to regulate lobbying and campaign spending wisely, should it chose to do so. With public confidence in government low and Washington politics driven by the agendas of corporations and the wealthy, TeachoutÃ¢â ¬â„¢s argument is timely, compelling, and important. (R. M. Flanagan Choice 2015-08-01)This is an important book. (Mark G. Spencer Times Literary Supplement 2016-01-22)[A] groundbreaking book. (John Nichols The Nation 2016-06-30)A serious scholarly take-down of the American campaign finance system. (Zach Carter Huffington Post 2016-09-24) --This text refers to

an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Corruption in America is a very timely and insightful book. It provides a valuable perspective on Trump’s "populism" which, in my opinion, is a very thinly veiled assault by the U.S. Oligarchy on American society and its Government. Using his "art of the deal" techniques, Trump has won his way to the White House on a populist wave whose members will soon be severely disillusioned when they see that Trump’s entire agenda centers on improving the lot of the already very rich on the premise that their betterment must mean an improved lot for the middle and lower classes. My only disappointment in Teachout’s book is that it is written in "legalese" and is, therefore, perhaps not accessible to the non-lawyer reader. This is a book that deserves a very wide audience and the prose Teachout has selected to use will only narrow its impact.

If youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re among the four out of five Americans who decry Citizens United as a tragic misstep, law professor Zephyr Teachout will show you just how far outside the bounds of precedent and tradition the Supreme Court stepped when it produced this misbegotten ruling.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“This new legal order,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Ms. Teachout writes, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“treats corruption lightly and in a limited way. It narrows the scope of what is considered corruption to explicit deals. It reclassifies influence-seeking as normal and desirable political behavior.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Teachout attributes the CourtÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s logic to a loss of confidence in democracy, though I might question whether the Right-Wing ideology that holds sway on todayÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Court has ever held any brief for democracy. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The Court has become populated by academics and appellate court justices, and not by people with experience of power and politics, who understand the ways in which real problems of money and influence manifest themselves.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•For two centuries, the prevailing view in American legislatures and courts was that factually demonstrable, quid pro quo bribery and extortion were unusual phenomena ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • that the potential for political and judicial corruption was far broader and rested on the cultivation of personal relationships that could grow on the strength of financial support. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“By corruption, the early generations meant excessive private interests influencing the exercise of public power.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Thus, until the 1970s, it was broadly taken for granted that large corporate contributions could distort the policymaking process. Then, in 1976, in Buckley v. Valeo, the Supreme Court overturned the campaign spending limits that

were a centerpiece of the 1974 campaign finance reform legislation passed with broad bipartisan support in the wake of Watergate. Basing its reasoning on Buckley, the Roberts Court in 2010 then, in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, overturned a consensus that had lasted for two centuries by opening the floodgates to unlimited corporate campaign spending.Teachout, who recently ran an insurgent campaign for Governor of New York against incumbent Andrew Cuomo, explores the history of views on corruption from colonial times to the present. She cites the seminal legal and political thinkers whose views shaped those of the Founding Fathers ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • chiefly Montesquieu ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • and details the evolving legislative and judicial treatment of bribery, extortion, and more subtle forms of corruption within the American political system.Teachout demonstrates that corruption was one of the FoundersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ overriding concerns when they framed the Constitution. The fundamental separation of powers into executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • a concept taken whole from Montesquieu ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • and the bicameral design of the legislature were adopted in response to the potential for corruption inherent in unchecked power.Is it ironic ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • or merely further proof of hypocrisy on the Right ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • that the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“conservativeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• jurists who dominate todayÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Supreme Court view themselves as strict constructionists limited by the FoundersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ intentions, except when the FoundersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ views clash with their pro-corporate ideology?ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s time for us to return to first principles. An important early step might be to take a fresh look at Montesquieu, who ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“put citizens at the center of the thriving republic. For him, the true danger in a republic is mass disaffection with public life, when society turns away from trying to influence government and citizens instead turn toward their own preoccupations and examining how they can personally benefit from particular laws. Montesquieu argued that government breaks down when citizens do not care about it.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•In that light, what might we think about the most recent Federal elections, in which, as Time Magazine wrote, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Only 36.4% of eligible voters voted . . ., down from 40.9% who voted in 2010, according to preliminary analysis by Michael McDonald at the University of Florida. The last time voter turnout was that low was 1942, when only 33.9% of voters cast ballots, according to the United States Elections Project.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•As Time notes, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The last time voter turnout for a national election was as low as it was on Nov.4, Hitler was still in power, and Mitch McConnell was only nine months old.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• What does that say about how much US citizens today care about our government?

Prof. Teachout grapples, successfully I think, with the hard-to-define concept of corruption and its implications for America. Notwithstanding her scholarship, she does have a strong point of view: the Founding Fathers got many things right, and for a democracy to flourish citizens must have confidence their elected officials are acting in the best interests of all their constituents. She argues for campaign contribution reform, and particularly alarming, in her view, will be the downstream consequences of Citizens United.No matter which side of the corruption argument you're on, this is an important work.

Teachout starts with the concerns the founding fathers had about the corruption they saw in Europe and how they sought to avoid it in the US. She then explains how instances of egregious corruption led to laws aimed at curbing that particular type of corruption. When the Supreme Court threw out those protections in Citizens United, it is clear that they ignored two centuries of law aimed to discourage the oligarchy of the rich that we see tainting the entire political process. The author then explores ways this can be reversed. This is a clear, well written eye opener and a call to action.

During this tempestuous election, every American should read this detailed treatise on how the morality of our founding fathers has been eroded systematically over the United States' two-century + existence to where we now have an "anything goes" attitude toward legalized bribery among our elected officials and the prevailing attitude, "They all do it!" It has been systematic, determined and aggressive and has changed our democratic republic into a nation run by the wealthy for the wealthy.

Don't get me wrong, the critique of this book has nothing to do with the book itself. I truly enjoyed reading her book, and found it very thought-provoking and well-written. However, when I ordered this from , there was some sort of goop, for lack of a better term, on the bottom of the book, and it caused the pages to all stick together while reading, which drove me absolutely mad. Not sure how it happened, but hope it hasn't happened to anyone else who has ordered this recently!

Corruption, like pornography, defies verbal definition but we all know what it is when it happens. Of course, there are those that press the case in court and usually win because of the inability to actually define corrupt behavior in a pure legal sense. Corruption has been part of human society and will continue to be regardless of how much we claim to hate it.

With a focus on Supreme Court decisions and influences on the US Constitution Teachout shows the political theory of corruption goes far beyond bribery laws. There is a rich history of corruption law that opens the mind to one of the most fundamental problems in government today.

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