

What is Political Corruption?
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As George Marshall said in his toast to President Harry Truman, 'The full stature of this man will only be proven by history, but I want to say here and now that there has never been a decision made under this man's administration, affecting policies beyond our shores, that has not been in the best interest of this country. It is not the courage of these decisions that will live, but the integrity of the man.'

Truman was one of the few recent presidents to leave the White House no richer than when he entered. He retired to the same house that his mother-in-law had given to her daughter when they married. I think about him a great deal today when observing the unquestionably most corrupt White House we have seen, even exceeding those of Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, and the Harding administration of the Tea Pot Dome scandal.

In the coming year, with the much delayed hearings that will finally reveal the extent of corruption practiced by our president and most of his appointees, the word "Corruption" will be heard daily. We need a reminder of what corruption is, and why so many convicted of this crime go to prison.

President James Garfield (1877) noted: "Now more than ever before, the people are responsible for the character of their Congress. If that body be ignorant, reckless and corrupt, it is because the people tolerate ignorance, recklessness and corruption. If it be intelligent, brave and pure, it is because the people demand these high qualities to represent them in the national legislature. If the next centennial does not find us a great nation it will be because those who represent the enterprise, the culture, and the morality of the nation do not aid in controlling the political forces"

Wikipedia offers a good definition: "Political corruption is the use of powers by government officials or their network contacts for illegitimate private gain. An illegal act by an officeholder constitutes political corruption only if the act is directly related to their official duties, is done under color of law or involves trading in influence." I would also note that political corruption must involve money that enriches the power-holder. Richard Nixon was a crook, but not corrupt.

General Michael Flynn is the most recent blatantly corrupt official. When Flynn, fired by President Obama for his increasingly unstable behavior, who noted increasing instability is this once patriotic American, joined the Trump election campaign where he served as defense policy advisor he was seen at every rally, leading the horrifying chant "lock her up" about Trump's presidential opponent. Only Banana Republics consider locking up the loser of a political campaign.

But real corruption did not occur until shortly into this campaign, when Flynn praised the democratic demonstrations in Turkey against their Islamist dictator. He said (correctly) that it was in our national interest to support democracy wherever we could.

Several weeks after stating this position, he did a complete reversal, condemning the demonstrators, praising President Erdogan, and actually attempting to plan a kidnapping of an enemy of Erdogan, an old man who had received sanctuary and was living in Pennsylvania. The press outed this monstrous plot.

What happened to make him change course? He was paid a large sum of money by the Turks to do so. This fits the definition of corruption. He will go to prison for this. He was a willing agent of a foreign power for money.

Now, for the historic list of corrupt people in public life, we begin with Boss Tweed, the American symbol of inner-city political corruption. Tweed aided every constituent or business partner when paid. He went to prison.

Ray Blanton, a former member of the Tennessee House and elected governor in 1975, he granted pardons to 24 convicted murderers and 28 or other crimes for an exchange of money. He went to prison.

Other names for you to check out: Budd Dwyer, Edwin Edwards, Spiro Agnew, Carroll Hubbard, George Ryan, James Traficant, Randy "Duke" Cunningham, and Huey Long. Next week, we will explore Donald J. Trump, our most corrupt president.

685 words

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