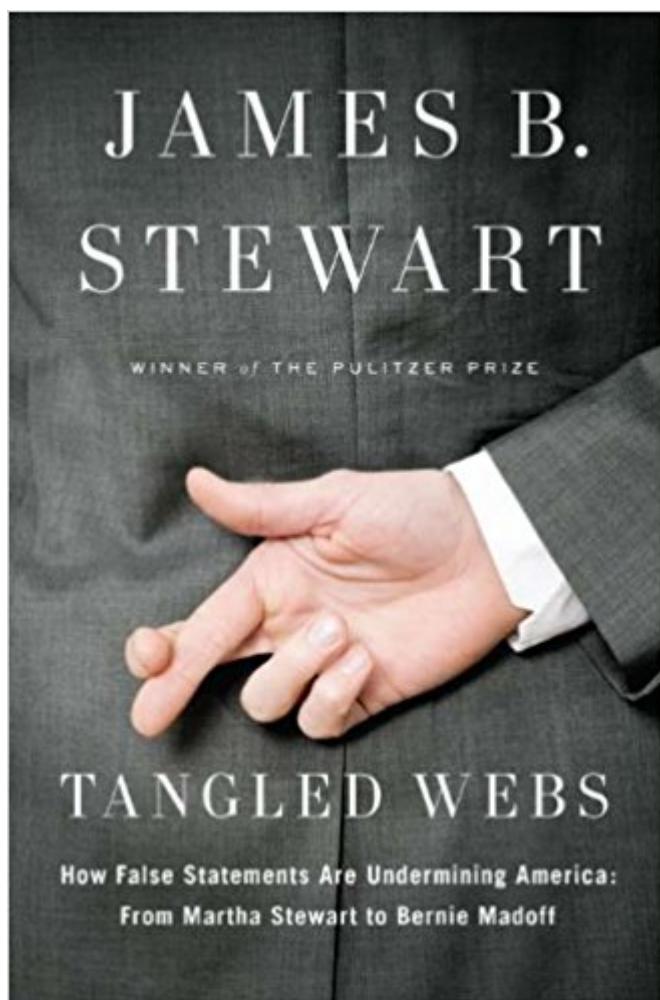


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Tangled Webs: How False Statements Are Undermining America: From Martha Stewart To Bernie Madoff



Synopsis

Bestselling author James B. Stewart's newsbreaking investigation of our era's most high-profile perjurers, revealing the alarming extent of this national epidemic. Our system of justice rests on a simple proposition: that witnesses will raise their hands and tell the truth. In *Tangled Webs*, James B. Stewart reveals in vivid detail the consequences of the perjury epidemic that has swept our country, undermining the very foundation of our courts. With many prosecutors, investigators, and participants speaking for the first time, *Tangled Webs* goes behind the scene of the trials of media and homemaking entrepreneur Martha Stewart; top White House political adviser Lewis "Scooter" Libby; home-run king Barry Bonds; and Wall Street money manager Bernard Madoff. The saga of Martha Stewart's conviction captured the nation, but until now no one has answered the most basic question: Why would Stewart risk prison, put her entire empire in jeopardy, and lie repeatedly to government investigators to save a few hundred thousand dollars in stock gains? Moreover, how exactly was the notoriously meticulous Stewart brought down? Drawing on the accounts of then-deputy attorney general James Comey and U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, Stewart sheds new light on the Libby investigation, making clear how far into the White House the Valerie Plame CIA scandal extended, and why Libby took the fall. In San Francisco, Giants home-run king Barry Bonds faces trial due to his testimony before a grand jury investigating the use of illegal steroids in sports. Bonds was warned explicitly that the only crime he faced was perjury. Stewart unlocks the story behind the mounting evidence that he nonetheless lied under oath. Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme is infamous, but less well known is how he eluded detection for so long in the face of repeated investigations. Of the four he is the only one who has admitted to lying. The perjury outbreak is symptomatic of a broader breakdown of ethics in American life. It isn't just the judicial system that relies on an honor code: Academia, business, medicine, and government all depend on it. *Tangled Webs* explores the age-old tensions between greed and justice, self-interest and public interest, loyalty and duty. At a time when Americans seem hungry for moral leadership and clarity, *Tangled Webs* reaffirms the importance of truth.

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Customer Reviews

James B. Stewart is the author of Heart of a Soldier, the bestsellers Blind Eye and Blood Sport, and the blockbuster Den of Thieves. A former Page One editor at The Wall Street Journal, he won a Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for his reporting on the stock market crash and insider trading. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Lying seems epidemic in American society. Stewart focuses his superb writing skills on the general problem of perjury and lying under oath by highlighting the cases of four celebrated liars: Martha Stewart (no apparent relation to the author), Scooter Libby, Barry Bonds, and Bernie Madoff. For each of these, he asks the same question: "Why would people with so much to lose put so much at risk by lying under oath?" Ultimately, the answer becomes obvious: "They thought they could get away with it." Stewart uses extensive sources for his own narration. Chief among these are notes from investigations, court proceedings, and personal interviews. Although the book is non-fiction, it's a page-turner, because the machinations of the perpetrators and their victims are suspenseful, ensnaring, and powerfully emotional. Each of the perpetrators would ultimately explain their deceipts as motivated by "loyalty," but this seems mostly self-serving and devious. Whatever loyalty they had in mind was to themselves, as all were readily prepared to let underlings and associates take hard falls to cushion their own. In the end, most of the celebrity liars recovered reasonably, with the exception of Madoff who will be in prison for a long time and has lost the love of his family and seen one of his sons commit suicide pursuant to the shame he showered on them. These continuing losses of Madoff as well as those of Bonds, recently convicted of obstruction of justice, aren't covered in the book which was written in 2010 although published in 2011. This book has several strengths, and perhaps just one weakness. The strengths are the readable and interesting writing, about larger-than-life "heroes" turned "villains." As he points out, these villains "evidently expect to be admired for this behavior." Meticulously researched and artfully written, the book provides considerable details, easily read and enjoyed. It also addresses a central problem "lying under oath

[that] undermines civilization itself." If the book has a weakness, it would be its failure to look at the bigger picture in order to frame the problem more usefully, to bring it perhaps closer to an appropriate remedy. The bigger problem, in my opinion, is that lying is rampant throughout all of society, not just at the level of criminal investigations and judicial proceedings. While it's true that celebrities routinely lie to protect their wealth and status, the problem seems far more extensive. We have in the US a system rigged for the rich and powerful, whether individuals or corporations, that rewards lying as "business as usual." Why is that? Two reasons, primarily: (1) lying pays and (2) liars are not punished. That might sound hard to believe, if you've not actually investigated it. However, there are few laws against lying, they are usually not enforced, and in many cases--such as politics--the Supreme Court protects liars. The Court has ruled that politicians can routinely lie and broadcasters must be willing (if they are not already eager) to sell to the liars and their campaign organizations advertising time to carry those lies to as many people as they can possibly infect. So, when Stewart suggests that fixing this problem "requires a capacity for moral outrage," he's right, but as a remedy that prescription falls far short. To bring the epidemic under control, we are going to need to invent and employ new solutions. For example, Snopes on the Web publicizes some lies ("urban myths") and many people check Snopes before they pass lies along. PolitiFact and FactCheck, two other Web sites, investigate political lies and policy lies. New products such as Wolfram Alpha, StateOfTheUSA, and numerous regional indicators projects aim to provide curated and reliable answers to important questions. Wikipedia enables many people to edit and polish statements, hopefully bringing them rapidly to a state of truth. A new organization, TruthSeal.org, offers means for people and organizations to affix seals of truth to their vetted claims and to offer bounties for people to present falsifying evidence. In these and other ways, we might create stronger incentives for truth telling and stimulate social networks of people to ferret out lies in the public information commons. By changing the incentives, rewarding truth tellers and punishing liars, we could hope to begin to change the course of this rampant social disease. Without some change to the rules of the game, we should continue to expect the same outcomes, over and over. In fairness to Stewart, he wanted to tell a compelling story and get people thinking seriously about how our society encourages obviously sociopathic behavior. He does that extremely well. Another book will be required to look at the bigger, more general problem, consider the situation from a problem-solving point of view, and lay out the best courses of action for implementing remedies. Readers who might be interested in my own study of that problem and proposed recovery plan should consider *TRUTHINESS FEVER: How Lies and Propaganda are Poisoning Us and a Ten-Step Program for Recovery*.

No one is better than James Stewart as a financial feature reporter. He gets to the bottom of a complex series of events and explains them with unsurpassed clarity and objectivity. If you are interested in the subject he's describing, there is no better source for learning about it. And those skills are on display in the four lying-related scandals he discusses here: Martha Stewart, Scooter Libby, Barry Bonds (and other BALCO defendants) and Bernie Madoff. In each story, Stewart's focus is on the lies the subject told to official investigators, and since such lying is much closer to the heart of the Stewart and Libby scandals than to the Bonds and Madoff events (for the latter two, official lies were more of an interesting sidelight than the core of what will put them in the history books), I found those portions of the book the most interesting and enlightening. Indeed, for Martha Stewart and Scooter Libbey, *Tangled Webs* should stand as the definitive treatment. Read this, and you'll "get it." In opening and concluding sections, the author ties the four stories together by shucking his customary objectivity for a jeremiade against perjury and official lying. He has passionate feelings on the subject that no doubt were part of the source of his energy that allowed him to so meticulously record these events. While I am more than sympathetic to his views on this point---in my case he is preaching to the choir---I did not find those parts of the book particularly persuasive; they are not the reason to buy it. This may be in part because of the very excellence---the irrefutable, closely documented objectivity---of the main body of the book. This is one book where reading just the first and last chapters is the exact opposite of what you should do.

It's good to have someone who unflinchingly looks at complex issues taht hte press glosses over. This was a great dissection of these cases that explains the details of what happened in a way that makes the media circus hash of these complex tales comprehensible. THe detail is tremendous and I can only imagine the hours and hours of research that went into this book. I am very impressed and feel enlightened. Great, great book.

Yes, I bought it twice. So good am passing it along to others. Here is what I said in my first review: This book is compelling, and excellent read. He takes 4 case studies, and breaks down the events. Martha Stewart, Barry Bonds, Libby Scooter, and Bernie Madoff. Fascinating turn of events. I also thought Martha Stewart was an innocent "victim" of sorts, but no longer! And Bernie Madoll - how did the government screw that one up so badly? Barry Bonds and cohorts, what a disappointing discovery to see how tainted the athletics system is. Amazing read.

I stopped reading this when I got to Barry Bonds, because just at that moment, the en banc court of the Ninth Circuit threw out his conviction. That's not the fault of the author, and perhaps all the more reason I should read that chapter. I also have heard so much about Bernie Madoff that I am uncertain whether to read that chapter either. But I read the first two and thoroughly enjoyed and was enlightened by them. Is it fair for me to give a review to a book that I have only half read, and not decided whether to finish? I have decided yes because the first two chapters on Scooter Libby and Martha Stewart were alone good enough to give the book five stars.

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