Tangled Webs: How False Statements are Undermining America: From Martha Stewart to Bernie Madoff

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Book Description Publication Date: April 19, 2011 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.

Tangled Webs: How False Statements are Undermining America: From Martha Stewart to Bernie Madoff Details

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From Reader Review Tangled Webs: How False Statements are Undermining America: From Martha Stewart to Bernie Madoff for online ebook

Steven says

This is a fascinating collection of stories about famous people like Martha Stewart and Bobby Bonds, and how they all got into trouble for lying. It’s an interesting lesson about values and a good reminder that the cover up (or lie) is often worse than the crime.

Laura says

It has been in the news repeatedly for the last decade, famous or in some cases, infamous members of our society lying under oath to protect themselves. Perjury has become an epidemic in this country and James B. Stewart writes about four case studies of this phenomenon in his powerful new book, Tangled Webs. These case studies include Martha Stewart, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, Barry Bonds, and Bernie Madoff. All of these cases shaped us as a nation over the past decade.

Each of these famous people could have taken Mark Twain’s advice, “If you tell the truth you don't have to remember anything.” By not telling the truth, they basically made things worse for themselves and badly affected a number of people. As Stewart states in the introduction, “This surge of perjury cases at the highest level of business, politics, media, and culture poses some fundamental questions: Why would people with so much to lose put so much at risk by lying under oath? Whatever they may have done, why would they compound their problems by committing an independent felony, punishable by prison? What were the consequences? And what price are all of us paying for their behavior?”

I enjoyed how Tangled Webs gave me a much better understanding of major events that have been in the news and what affects perjury has on our legal system.

For the rest of my review, please check out my blog at: http://lauragerold.blogspot.com/2011/...

Jenny says

The dedication for this book appropriately reads, "To those who seek the truth". In astounding and detailed fashion, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Stewart chronicles the true events of the scandals of Martha Stewart (insider trading), "Scooter" Libby (leaking the name of a CIA agent), Barry Bonds (using steroids), and Bernie Madoff (running a Ponzi scheme). What these individuals have in common, however, is not just that they were involved in criminal investigations, but that each of them committed perjury, lying under oath. The theme that weaves throughout Tangled Webs is that of the epidemic of perjury that has overcome America, which is, sadly, a broader reflection of the loss of values in our culture.

Tangled Webs was a riveting, cerebral, white collar true crime story. I struggle with trying to describe the writing style because it had a narrative quality but wasn't completely a narrative non-fiction. Rather, it had these elements combined with plain ol' great, journalistic "storytelling". Though this book does have a density that may be intimidating (it's long and there's a ton of information), it was an unexpectedly easy and engaging read. I was truly enthralled with the book, with the detailed information, with the points made by Stewart, with everything. I implore any of you who have the slightest interest in the topic to read this! I was so thoroughly impressed with this book, I can't even explain... I just constantly talk about it and all the things I learned from it. I want to share everything I learned!

Stewart organized each section superbly. Through interviews and reviews of grand jury transcripts, Stewart pieced together all the chronological detail of each story including the grand jury testimonies that occurred at the culmination of each scandal. He followed that up with what happened at the actual trial. Each section then ended with what each of the main "characters" is doing now. As I read, I found myself fascinated at times and saddened at times by people's lack of scruples. Each presented story illustrated the very sad fact that these successful role models, of sorts, were dishonest and/or tried to hide their wrongdoings. Sometimes they were completely brazen in their actions. I will say that I lost a lot of respect for the main characters in the book (well, at least of what little I may have had) but also for others that were involved. While there are "main characters" and, yes, they did lie, there were so many accomplices. There were also people who plain didn't do their jobs by following up where they should have. Of course, I acknowledge that I don't have their whole stories, but, for instance, Bernie Madoff could easily have been caught two years before he was which would have saved the public $45 billion in losses. And when I say easily, I mean, several people dropped the ball when only slightly more follow up would have busted the scheme right open.

Another thing I liked about Tangled Webs was the underlying point being that regardless of the actual crimes committed by these people, the act of perjury in itself was a crime; yet, there tends to be a high tolerance and lack of gravitas contributed to this issue. (Some of the issues presented were the thoughts of some individuals that criminally prosecuting someone for perjury was a waste and not important). In my short adult life as of yet, I have seen lying by people, including respected professionals, that so frustrates and discourages me. AND, the irony is that for these individuals, lying only made things worse! For instance, Martha Stewart may never have had any issues had she not lied. In fact, had she just left well enough alone, she would have lost monetarily what to the average middle-class person might be equal to $500 (this is relatively speaking based on the amount of money she makes). Scooter Libby may have had some serious repercussions, but nothing near what he could have had to endure (except for some rather lucky exceptions). In one part, Stewart quoted U.S. Attorney for Chicago, Patrick Fitzgerald's, responses about perjury as a crime.

...we brought those cases because we realized that the truth is the engine of our judicial system. And if you compromise the truth, the whole process is lost. (p. 224)

If these facts are true, if we were to walk away from this and not charge obstruction of justice and perjury, we might as well just hand in our jobs. Because our jobs, the criminal justice system, is to make sure people tell us the truth. And when it's a high-level official and a very sensitive investigation, it is a very, very serious matter that no one should take lightly. (p. 224)

If nothing else, Tangled Webs, gives one a lot of thinking points when it comes to thoughts on treating lying and perjury in and of itself a crime as serious as the other alleged crimes (insider trading, etc.)

I also feel that through the descriptions of each of the aforementioned scenarios, I learned a lot about the stock market and the dynamics of the white house. Stewart did an excellent job of providing as much documented information as was relevant while still providing his own commentary, explanation, and summarization. I stayed up to speed with mostly everything, though the quoted parts of the Bernie Madoff section often read like gibberish to me. I was never good at economics or understanding stocks and bonds, and individuals in that arena speak their own language! But even so, Stewart explained everything well. Another commendation: he maintained a neutral stance politically. He pointed out wrongs of both political parties, when relevant, and didn't appear to side with any people over another except for as it related to who was truthful and who was not.

Have you gotten a feel for my thoughts about this book? Because if you didn't, I loved it! It was fantastic! I'm new to Stewart as an author, but he apparently has quite the impressive, best-selling back list. I will absolutely be checking out his previous books and hope you decide to read this one.

Taken from my blog at www.takemeawayreading.com

Jonah says

This book presents 4 case studies of major scandals of the past 10-12 years where the main legal consequence was the prosecution of perjury charges. The penalty of being a slow reader is that many of the outstanding issues with these cases are still pending, but it was still fascinating. The 4 cases are the Martha Stewart insider trading deal, the Scooter Libby "yellow cake" Joe Wilson scandal, the Barry Bonds steroids case, and, finally the Bernie Madoff Ponzi scheme. First of all, it was both helpful and frustrating to get into the legal weeds of these cases. We all heard about these in the news, but the author breaks down into detail what each of these cases, legally, was all about, which was essentially that during an important part of the investigation, a key witness decided to lie under oath about what happened. The case I had the most moral connection to, the Scooter Libby case, was the most frustrating. I still can't get my brain around what actually happened despite reading this section, but I do remember this case being the only prosecution being legitimately sought out in a legal court of law for ANY aspect of the Bush administration's conduct in pursuing the 2003 Iraq War. I remember hoping it would be a cathartic series of events, that finally, somebody would be held to account, not for necessarily deciding to invade (which apparently would just be an issue of moral consequence on behalf of the decision makers), but for the haphazard bullying way in which the evidence was presented to the public at large to invade. The messy reality, though, is that the issue wasn't some official leaking secret information to a reporter, but the defendant somehow not confirming or denying that he had talked to a reporter, who had heard the information about a leaked secret CIA agent from another reporter and just wanted someone to confirm that... or something. It REALLY gets complicated, with that and the other cases. But I think that was the author's point. There are so many moral transgressions that people go through in their personal and professional conduct, but the essential of a fair justice system is that, when a court puts you under oath, you give them full and clear information so they can completely prosecute the case. Is it a little nitpicky to have these victims go down for perjury, when they clearly thought they were entitled to commit greater sins and ought to not be punished for them? Maybe, but I argue that there isn't a truly moral court out there consistently punishing "bad" people (you might recall some recent cases on whatever side you are on proving that point), so perjury sometimes works because it is the purest way to reveal dishonest people that gum up the works of justice. But Tangled Webs also discusses the limits of that kind of justice. The final section, the shortest one oddly, plays out a little differently, as the agencies that were responsible for seeing the warning flags of Bernie Madoff pursued the most narrow of technical issues with what he was setting up, and decided, directly or indirectly, to ignore the larger implications of what he was doing, what his constant documented lies might be hiding. [Spoilers] 3-4 years after the financial regulatory agencies dropped the case, Bernie Madoff decided to confess, in the interim period stealing an addition 40+ billion dollars of investor money. Tangled Webs revealed in a complex way a flawed justice system, and those expecting the bad to be punished through a legal channel might have to rely on a more complicated formula of personal consciousness, collective moral punishments, honesty, and a slightly higher level of professionalism among government attorneys to receive any kind of satisfaction. Highly recommended... but keep a few supplemental news articles handy so you can know how some of these cases played out in recent years.

Book says

Tangled Webs: How False Statements Are Undermining America: From Martha Stewart to Bernie Madoff by James B. Stewart

“Tangled Webs” is an interesting look at how lies undermine the judicial process and hence America. Pulitzer Prize-winning and bestselling author, James B. Stewart showcases four cases: Martha Stewart, “Scooter” Libby, Barry Bonds, and Bernie Madoff. With a luxury of details and skilled writing Stewart does in fact untangle the webs of deception. This insightful 496-page book includes twelve chapters broken out by the four aforementioned cases, a conclusion, and notes and sources.

Positives:
1. High-quality book. It’s thorough, interesting and well written.
2. The fascinating topic of deception showcased by the following four real-life stories: Martha Stewart, “Scooter” Libby, Barry Bonds, and Bernie Madoff.
3. Stewart comes across as well connected, fair and determined to get the story right.
4. Excellent format. The book is broken out logically and it’s easy to follow. Stewart does a wonderful job of building up the intrigue of each case and how it unravels. He also provide a summation and a synopsis of where are they now.
5. Provides a fascinating sample in the introduction showing recent, famous cases of perjury.
6. Interesting insights into the background of Martha Stewart. “From humble beginnings in New Jersey, Martha Stewart had vaulted from stockbroker, to caterer, to cookbook author, to Kmart spokeswoman, to magazine creator and editor, to a one-woman lifestyle conglomerate. She was indisputably talented, with a keen aesthetic sensibility, unerring taste, and an encyclopedic command of household skills. She was also ambitious, a perfectionist, a workaholic, stubborn, and, at times, a harridan.”
7. The elements of criminal insider trading disclosed. “Criminal insider trading requires three major elements: the sale or purchase of a security, in breach of a fiduciary duty or relationship of trust, while in possession of material, nonpublic information about the security. Waksal’s trading and attempted trading obviously met all three criteria: he was an ImClone officer with a duty to shareholders and he knew about the adverse Erbitux decision.”
8. The eye-opening and staggering cost of Stewart’s decision, it’s truly mind-boggling. Read all about it.
9. The most interesting case of the four was that of “Scooter” Libby. The ramifications of his case reached the highest levels of Government.
10. Fascinating look at the convergence of politics, media and the public. “The Kristof article was still stirring controversy. Kristof’s assertions had developed into a steady drumbeat of articles questioning the accuracy of the State of the Union address, and specifically the sixteen words about uranium in Africa: “The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.” It was as if all doubts about the candor of the Bush administration, which by now were legion, were focused on that one sentence. Libby’s notes from June 9 indicate that President Bush himself was now asking about it. Apparently in response to a request from Libby, the CIA faxed him a classified report discussing Wilson’s mission. It referred to Wilson only as a former ambassador, but Wilson’s name was written in the margins, in what appears to be Cheney’s handwriting. That Sunday on Meet the Press National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice had been questioned about the uranium claim, and had come across as uncertain and badly prepared. The Kristof column had touched a raw nerve of suspicion among the White House, the State Department, the CIA, and the Defense Department, each fearful that another arm of the administration would try to blame it for the intelligence failure and resulting war.”
11. Political intrigue at its finest. “Washington loves a mystery, and this was the biggest leak mystery since the identity of Watergate’s Deep Throat: Who had revealed Plame’s identity and CIA role to Novak?”
12. Political dynamics and insights into the legal system. “The trial of I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby opened on January 23, 2007. The courtroom was on the sixth floor of the Prettyman building. It had taken four days to choose a jury. The defense team was looking for jurors who weren’t hostile to the Bush administration or the

Iraq War–no small feat in heavily Democratic Washington–and who were open-minded about the possibility of memory loss, which was already emerging as the centerpiece of Libby’s defense. The nine women and three men who filed in included a singer, an art historian, a postal worker, a retired math teacher, a Web page designer, and, curiously, a Washington Post reporter who had worked with Bob Woodward. Ten were white, an anomaly in the heavily African American District of Columbia. It was a well-educated, reasonably affluent group that pledged to weigh the facts with an open mind.”
13. Baseball and the Barry Lamar Bonds scandal.
14. The danger of steroids. “Steroids have been linked to psychiatric disorders, depression, and suicide; to heart and liver damage; and to sexual dysfunction. Steroid use can cause severe acne, especially on the back and shoulders, hair loss, mood swings, and fatigue, and it can be addictive. Human growth hormone, a synthetic or natural protein, encourages healing and tissue growth, and is often used in conjunction with a steroid regimen. It, too, has been associated with numerous adverse side effects.”
15. Steroid scandal in track and field. “In early June 2004, the USADA formally accused Tim Montgomery and three other sprinters–but not Marion Jones–of illegal use of performance-enhancing drugs and said it would seek to prevent them from competing in the upcoming Athens Olympics. The primary basis for the charges was the documents Novitzky had gathered in the BALCO raid, as well as the memo of Conte’s interview, in which he admitted providing Montgomery with steroids.”
16. An interesting look at the world of high finances.
17. Harry Markopolos’s significant role in Madoff’s scandal. “Markopolos said that a London-based fund-of-funds he spoke to was considering a Madoff investment, and asked to conduct a performance audit of Madoff’s returns. Madoff refused, saying only his accountant could audit the results in order to preserve the secrecy of Madoff’s model. “The number of hedge funds that have relied on fake audits has got to number in the dozens,” Markopolos pointed out. Markopolos was also troubled that apparently only Madoff family members were privy to the investment strategy, asking, “Name one other prominent multibillion-dollar hedge fund that doesn’t have outside, non-family professionals involved in the investment process. You can’t, because there aren’t any.””
18. The telltale signs that were clearly missed. “This should have been a red flag, since the failure to take a vacation is a classic symptom of fraud. Nearly all Wall Street firms require employees to take two consecutive weeks of vacation.”
19. A superbly written conclusion that captures the essence of the book.
20. Notes and sources provided.

Negatives:
1. James Stewart is a thorough author and his books require an investment of your time.
2. No neuroscientific angle on why people lie.
3. How false statements undermine America focuses more on the moral “feely” versus the hard quantifiable aspects of it.
4. The very first sentence of the introduction threw me off, “We know how many murders are committed each year–1,318,398 in 2009. We know the precise numbers for reported instances of rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and vehicle theft.” Was this false fact thrown in there as a joke or a factual error?
5. Lack of visual materials to complement the fine narrative.

In summary, the best complement I can give a book is that the areas of the book I intended to skip over like the Madoff scandal actually captivated me enough to read it in its entirety. That’s what good writing based on thorough research does. I’ve read enough about the Madoff scandal to skip it but Stewart like a good movie captured my attention. Of the four stories, the “Scooter” Libby was of most interest followed by Madoff, Stewart and least, Bonds. It requires an investment of your time but if you are interested in any of these four stories Stewart will provide high-quality insights. I recommend it!

Further recommendations: “Fair Game” by Valerie Plame Wilson, “The Politics of Truth” by Joseph Wilson, “Taking Heat” by Ari Fleischer, “The Prince of Darkness” by Robert Novak, “Game of Shadows” by Mark

Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams, “Juicing the Game” by Howard Bryant, “No One Would Listen” by Harry Markopolos, “The Madoff Chronicles” by Brian Ross, and “The Wizard of Lies” by Diana B. Henriques.

Jared says

The essence of a good novel, fiction or non-fiction, is the story. Is it a good one? Is it compelling? Do the words that you read across the page interest you enough that you wish to continue to the next word and the next word or are you so disinterested that you just skim whole pages until you stumble across an interesting passage? Sure, you can have beautiful language that is intelligent and thought provoking, but without a strong story component, you might as well be reading poetry.

James B. Stewart knows how to spin a yarn. I first learned about Mr. Stewart when my friend recommended his novel, Heart of a Soldier, which was about a guy who died in the World Trade Center on 9/11. He was a former military man who worked security for Morgan Stanley whose offices were in the towers and he sacrificed his life to save as many people as he could (almost 2,700). It was a great, heart-warming book that offered life lessons worth remembering. I don’t remember what they are off the top of my head, but I’m sure the valuable ones seeped into my brain through some kind of reading osmosis.

I was in the library looking for a new book and saw this one. I saw it was written by James B. Stewart. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize emblazoned on the cover, always a nice touch (he won for Den of Thieves). I read the back. The book, on the whole, looked boring. Some in depth analysis on four of the largest, most recent, criminal perjury cases. Martha Stewart, Scooter Libby, Barry Bonds, Bernie Madoff. Ugh.

But I started to read the first few pages of chapter one - I skipped the Introduction. Side note: I kind of hate Introductions, who needs a lengthy preamble, let’s just get on with it, shall we?

The first section is on Martha Stewart and her false statements surrounding her selling of Imclone stock based on insider information. Stewart (James B.) introduces the characters and gets right into the action meticulously recreating what happened. He draws you right in.

I didn’t know much about the whole Martha Stewart debacle (or any of the others detailed in the book). When it happened, I could care less. Just another example of the 24 hours new cycle inundating us with nonsense.

Did she do it? Did she lie?

Maybe it’s because I’m a skeptical realist, but I just assumed, of course, she did. It’s always people with power and influence who end up the recipients of insider stock information. You and I, lounging comfortably in Starbucks furniture are not going to be privy to buy now/sell now type secrets. It would be nice, though.

My own predilection towards ignoring major headlines was an initial factor in my non-interest in reading a book on this subject matter, too. But Stewart (James B., again) is just so good.

Like an experienced mystery writer he crafts the pieces together. It’s like watching a murder mystery with the benefit of seeing how it all came to be, the neatness of 20/20 hindsight. Watching it as it unfolds is pretty mesmerizing. How Martha and her broker, Peter Bacanovic, dig themselves deeper and deeper into a hole and take shelter within a flimsy house of cards, how the government agents charged with uncovering the truth struggle with the enormity of the lies, but sense that they are being misled and forge on, searching for that smoking gun, be it document, recording or witness brave enough to crawl out from under the thumbs of their successful and influential patrons who in turn apply serious amounts of pressure to stick to the rehearsed storyline.

And even when the lie is uncovered and staring at them in the face, they still deny and reject responsibility. In their words, it’s all one big misunderstanding.

Perjury, shown throughout Tangled Webs, is rampant. It’s an epidemic. When confronted with wrong-doing people will lie at the first, second and third instance. Anything to keep from admitting that they are not who they think we think they are. They are upstanding citizens. They are honorable, contributing members of society. Not the type of person who would illegally use inside information to save $70,000, or leak classified information about a CIA operative to discredit a harmful political opposition, or ingest banned substances to feed your ego and get an unfair advantage in sports, or create a parallel universe falsifying account statements and funneling a disastrous Ponzi scheme for decades.

When you get trapped in a lie, you tell another. The last one feeds off the one before. Did you take banned substances? No. What about this calendar with your name on it next to letters associated with banned substances? That’s not mine. We found banned substances your trainer’s refrigerator, did he ever give some to you? That’s his stuff, I don’t know what he does with his own stuff. We have a recorded conversation where your trainer mentioned giving you these substances and that they would be untraceable. I don’t know about that. We have testimony that you took this substance. Oh, that’s just Flaxseed Oil, that’s what he said it was, I didn’t ask him. Sir, you’re an elite athlete and your body is your livelihood. You didn’t inquire any further into what you were consuming? No, he knows what he’s doing, I trusted him. I trusted the wrong people.

That’s what you have to do when you give false statements and press on with the lie, you have to flip it around: there’s only one victim here, you.

The other argument is that you’re too smart to cheat and lie so shamelessly. Why would you do it? You’re an uber-successful person. What’s the point of lying when, if it were discovered, it could ruin your credibility, everything that has gone into creating your success. But it doesn’t matter, people will lie through their teeth. Marion Jones, she lied and lied and lied. And when people finally started telling the truth and exposing those lies, we couldn’t trust those statement because they were coming from people who had previously lied. And you can’t believe a liar.

It’s like that social psychology experiment where completely normal/sane people check themselves into insane asylums and as soon as they were admitted everything they did was classified as ‘insane’ behavior. If you chilled on the couch by yourself, your activity was labeled as 'antisocial’. If you told the attendants that you were normal and this was just a joke, they labeled you as 'delusional’. It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy. Once a liar always a liar. So how do you parse out the truth from the fiction?

In discussing the cases against Martha Stewart, Scooter Libby, Barry Bonds and Bernie Madoff, James B. Stewart takes you through each step, letting you see where the wheels began to unhinge. The freeze frames where these titans of society chose subversion and obfuscation instead of admitting their wrong-doing and facing the music.

We know those moments, too. If there’s even a glimmer of chance that you’ll get off unscathed, if the proof is buried so deeply that as long as you keep a straight face you’ll escape punishment, you’ll perpetuate the myth.

We’re setting the wrong example in society.

We’re deceiving ourselves.

Lies on top of lies.

[Note: I originally wrote this review back in August 2012]

Paul says

Actual rating: 2.5 stars.

I heard a five-minute interview with the author on NPR, in which he advanced his central thesis that lying and perjury in civil and criminal trials was damaging our judicial system and society at large. That's what I expected this book to be about.

Al Gore's 2007 book, The Assault on Reason, is about the growing trend of non-scientific, non-critical, irrational thinking in America today, and how the resulting assault on reason is hurting America in the world. Gore uses examples to illustrate his argument, but the argument, not the examples, is the core of his book. Stewart, on the other hand, gives us excruciatingly detailed and dryly legalistic recapitulations of the investigations and subsequent trials of Martha Stewart, Scooter Libby, Barry Bonds, and Bernie Madoff, with just a few speculative paragraphs about the consequences of lying and perjury ... his argument is swallowed up by his examples.

Stewart doesn't offer any evidence to back up his assertion that perjury is harming America. Is it? All four of people he focuses on were caught out in their lies and punished for committing perjury. From what little I know, as a reasonably-aware citizen who pays attention to the news, people who lie on the stand are quite often caught and prosecuted.

So: a detailed recap of four well-known investigations and trials; some editorial tsk-tsking about the impact of perjury on the judicial system and society, not backed up with evidence.

Gore delivers what he promises to the reader. Stewart doesn't. He gets lost in his examples and not only doesn't prove his point, doesn't seem to make any effort to do so. Disappointing ... but is it perjury?

Chris Ramirez says

I've read a couple of other books from this author and I always love the way he tells stories. In this book, a fascinating look into the stories of lies from Martha Stewart, Scooter Libby, Barry Bonds, and Bernie Madoff.

In the conclusion he mentions how Clinton committed perjury and GWB condoned it but commuting Libby's prison sentence. He called and the Obama administration, Democrats and Republicans to "hold accountable those who commit perjury false statements." He was so optimistic. Look where we are now.

Kurtbg says

What may seem as a philosophical study on the effect of false statements is actually a detailed account of four separate public stories which involves lies. At least two of them will be mostly known: Martha Stewart's sales of Imclone stock, and Bernard "Bernie" Madoff. The other two are about Barry Bonds drug enhancements and Scooter Libby's role in "outing" a CIA operative.

JBS provides detailed accounts of what actually transpired (as can be mostly known) regarding this separate instances. I will provide my own assessment below (spoiler alert!):

1. Stewart sells imclone stock based on insider trading. Doesn't wall street soley work based on insider trading? It's naive to think not. Stewart chronicled this in his book "Den of Thieves" about 80's LBO's, junk bonds, etc. Don't major investors and stockholders have the ability to call and speak with CEO's? Don't they all travel in the same circles? Go to the same galas?

Here's a test:

Your broker (who also handles the owners of Imclone) calls you and says the owners of Imclone are selling their stock.

versus:
your broker calls you and tells you the owners of imclone are selling their stock because a drug they were betting on will not be approved by the FDA.

Apparently only one of these falls into the category of inside trading.

Lesson learned from this story: minimize the people involved to insure success. (Stewart's broker was on vacation and a newbie acted as a go-between. The newbie became guilty. Oh, it also didn't matter that the owners of Imclone were basically hucksters and had worked in other pharma companies by claiming they had drugs that they didn't and faked data).

2. Scooter Libby

Valerie Plame is outed as a CIA operative, but who outed her? In a twisting timeline that distorts who said what when (puts FOX news to shame in how it generates it's own "news stories). Generally, in the end it comes down to who benefits the most and motive. Did Scooter? nope. Did his boss, Rove? Yep. Richard Armitage at the US Dept. admitted to being one of two leaks, but that was ok. Despite the President saying he backed finding the culprits Armitage got off clean. Libby, on the other hand, tried to misdirect and protect his superiors under grand jury testimony. He tripped up and was found guilt of perjury.

Lesson: Never take the fall for your boss, because they will leave you floating in the wind - unless your friends with the president. Then you get a free pass.

3. Barry Bonds

Testified he never took illegal enhancement drugs. His girlfriend, his trainer, and the apparatus that supplied drugs to athletes across sports, including olympians, all pointed to him having done so. The name they referred to the substance was "flaxseed oil" so it's ok.

Lesson: never call illegal substance and activities by their illegal names. Plausible denial!

4. Bernie Madoff

Bernie liked to do everything himself and created a company that only employed his family.
He was considered a wizard by always beating wall street. It turns out he took money from people and counterfeited statements and reports for decades. Amazingly, this sounds exactly like early Warren Buffet. Everything caught up to the B-man when the market tanked and people began asking for money. Do you think he was the only one to come up with this ponzi scheme?

Lesson: When you found a really good thing, be conservative. Otherwise, people will eventually figure out it actually wasn't - unless you have the POTUS as a friend (see #2).

In the final analysis the book presented that as long as lying is tolerated in the justice system without penalties there is no justice system. In a culture of "getting all you can" and "it's right until you get caught" that's a tall order.

Sarah says

I found this book to be tedious and lacking much concise argument to back up the title. It is basically 4 case studies with a brief few-page summary to try and tie them together at the end (which fails). I wish the author would have summarized the examples and spent more time on his core thesis: what it means about our culture (does this happen in other countries, since his very title implies it is just us?), shown an example or two from the past (is this really a new and expanding phenomenon?), and perhaps talked about a few non-high profile cases to show whether perjury is really affecting things across the board.

Although it is supposed to be about how lying to investigators is bringing down the country, it seemed to me a book about how the enforcers of our laws are bumbling/incompetent and take so long to get an investigation done (3+ years) that it is a wonder anyone can remember anything they did on the day in question. There are so many people, dates, and long verbose quotations that I kept having to flip back to figure out how people connected, what they already said, and when. Perhaps compelling to a budding lawyer, I found the extensive transcripts of interviews and multi-page opening court statements to be tiresome.

Also, with so many conflicting versions of events, I kept wondering how the author could be so certain that he himself was correct about what had happened. That alone undermined a lot of his conclusions and bold judgements about who was most at fault in the various stories.

I don't discount that we need people to be truthful to achieve justice, but I couldn't help thinking we are spending a LOT of time and money pursuing technicalities in people's statements that distracted from the actual wrongdoing we were supposed to be correcting.

Lobstergirl says

Oddly enough, James Stewart begins this book on perjury - the very first sentence - with quite a false statement of his own. He writes, "We know how many murders are committed [in the United States] each year — 1,318,398 in 2009." As Sissela Bok noted in her *Washington Post* review, he's off by a factor of 100, counting all violent crimes, rather than just the murders. Oops! Hopefully that will be corrected in the next printing.

If you can get past that blooper, the book is quite good and engrossing. I could barely put it down. I notice that some other reviewers have criticized it for not being what they expected, or what it advertised itself to be - an analysis of how perjury damages our judicial system and the entire society. They criticize the book for being all examples. To me, the book being mostly examples is its strength. Stewart does a very good job of telling a story, of weaving in all the strands of a narrative so that they cohere and make sense. This is no small skill. I feel that the book would have suffered from containing more analysis and less descriptive material on the cases and trials.

The CIA leak case section is the best of the four, the most coherent and thorough. The other cases Stewart looks at are the Martha Stewart case (read about how Martha had monogrammed cushions made for the first rows of the courtroom where her friends and supporters would be sitting), the Barry Bonds/BALCO case, and the Bernie Madoff case. The Bonds section covers Bonds' testimony in the BALCO case, but not his actual perjury trial, which hadn't happened when the book went to press. (He was indicted on four counts, convicted on obstruction of justice, and the jury hung on the three perjury counts.) Madoff gets the shortest shrift, considering how serious and complex his crime and coverup was and how it went so long undetected (though not uninvestigated) by the SEC. If Madoff is of interest to you, I recommend whistleblower Harry Markopolos's book. Stewart's primary source here is the SEC Inspector General's report.

Stewart doesn't have unlimited space, so naturally aspects of each case go unmentioned, for example, what the CIA leak case revealed about the sad state of the high-profile media - how so many Pulitzer Prize-winning reporters could have gotten so many things wrong, how Tim Russert's idea of reporting was to wait for the phone to ring, rather than go out and hunt for the story himself. The trial shed an unflattering light on *Meet the Press*, where the Vice President's office usually tried to get itself booked because Russert wouldn't ask the truly tough questions. Still, those aspects of the story have been covered in other places - in articles and blog posts, if not in books. For an excellent, short book placing the CIA leak in the context of the run-up to war, read Marcy Wheeler's Anatomy of Deceit: How the Bush Administration Used the Media to Sell the Iraq War and Out a Spy, published before Libby had been found guilty and his sentence commuted.

Tangled Webs does contain some information that was new to me, such as prosecutors' frustration with Dick Cheney's interview. They had the definite sense that Cheney was evasive and hedging, claiming not to have clear recall of events and conversations. Also unknown to me was the fact that after Patrick Fitzgerald decided not to indict leakers Richard Armitage and Karl Rove, he wrote a letter to President Bush summarizing the evidence against each of them. "He invoked a rarely used exception to grand jury secrecy, which permits disclosure in cases involving national security. To Fitzgerald, the fact that Bush still employed two people who had apparently divulged the identity of a covert CIA agent was an issue of national security. The message was implicit: Rove and Armitage wouldn't be indicted, but the president could still do the right thing and ask for their resignations." After all, Bush had declared early in the investigation that if anyone in his administration was found to have leaked, they would be fired. Fitzgerald never heard back, and both men continued in government service. (The notoriously tight-lipped Fitzgerald was a source for Stewart, to my knowledge the first time he has served as a source on these matters.)

Typos: Robert Grossman for Marc Grossman, p. 239; in the index, Novack for Novak, Waskal for Waksal, Kay Bailey Hutchinson for Kay Bailey Hutchison.

Michele Weiner says

Tangled Webs has the thesis that the American justice system has been undermined by the tendency of the accused to lie. What a revelation. The American justice system, which is basically a game to see which of the gladiators (lawyers) can fool the jury the best, has always been dysfunctional. It's not a search for the truth and an attempt to find justice, but an exercise in which lawyer is the best con man. And you better have some money.

Martha Stewart, Scooter Libby, Barry Bonds, Marian Jones and Bernie Madoff are all liars. They did the underlying crime, and most will do some time. What I learned from this book is that lying doesn't get you acquitted, but lying often gets you better results and less jail time than not lying. If you don't lie, then everyone involved KNOWS you are guilty and they throw the book at you. If you lie through your teeth, even with overwhelming evidence, nobody is ever totally sure. Your loyalists can always argue that justice was miscarried or the underlying crime was never proven. Even though it wasn't proven because you lied. Catch-22.

Anyway, it was interesting to read about the different high-profile cases. I didn't buy his thesis that lying is more prevalent now, but I do wonder why juries aren't wiser than they used to be. Will you always be able to fool some of the people all of the time? I guess so.

Kirsti says

Examination of what perjury is, why it’s difficult to prove, and whether it’s becoming more widespread. The author looks at four recent cases: Martha Stewart, “Scooter” Libby, Barry Bonds, and Bernard Madoff.

I didn’t think I would care about the Stewart case, but this account was riveting. The papers mostly portrayed it as two rich people (Stewart and her broker) believing they could do whatever they wanted. And it *was* about that, but it was also about Stewart’s assistant and the broker’s assistant--two intelligent and not-at-all-rich people who decided that they would not lie, no matter what the cost.

As so often happens with trials, small details apparently had a pivotal effect on jurors. The defense lawyers contended that Stewart’s assistant was jealous of her and acted hatefully, but it’s hard to believe that about a woman who breaks down and sobs uncontrollably on the witness stand when reminded of her boss’s Christmas gift (a plum pudding).

The defense lawyers pointed out that Stewart and her broker were highly intelligent, successful, driven people. So why couldn’t they get their story straight? The broker’s assistant makes an astute guess: Neither Stewart nor her broker could listen worth a damn. It’s a fact that they met secretly before the charges came down, but they most likely spent that entire meeting talking past each other.

Oh, and the stock that Martha dumped? It turned out to be a winner. She would have made an additional $10 a share (and stayed out of prison) if only she’d held onto it.

Some quotes from this very interesting book:

About the Libby case: “Remarkably, it didn’t occur to anyone at a White House purportedly focused on national security that identifying a CIA officer might be a breach of security.”

Patrick Fitzgerald about the Libby case: “If these facts are true, if we were to walk away from this and not charge obstruction of justice or perjury, we might as well just hand in our jobs. Because our jobs, the criminal justice system, is to make sure people tell us the truth. And when it’s a high-level official and a very sensitive investigation, it is a very, very serious matter that no one should take lightly.”

Barry Bonds during testimony: “I was born in this game. Believe me, it’s a business. Last time I played baseball was in college. I work for a living now.”

Bonds explaining to the jury why he didn’t do much to reward his trainer, who went to jail rather than testify against him: “I’m black. And I’m keeping my money. And there’s not too many rich black people in the world. . . . And I ain’t giving my money up. That’s why. And if my friends can help me, then I’ll use my friends.”

Judge William Alsup, on jailing Bonds’s trainer for contempt of court: “We will wait and see how loyal he wants to be to someone other than his government, his country.”

“Well, she’s gonna be my wife. I guess I have to let her have one.” –Bonds, explaining to his girlfriend that another woman had just moved into his house and that he would probably have another child at some point. The girlfriend continued dating him until years later and broke up with him only when he threatened to kill her.

Nat Simons, a hedge fund manager, in an email years before Bernard Madoff’s Ponzi scheme collapsed: “Not only are we unsure as to how HCH makes money for us, we are even more unsure how HCH makes money from us; i.e., why does [Madoff] let us make so much money?” Simons got his fund’s money away from Madoff.

It’s been estimated that Madoff’s fraud directly affected 3 million people and contributed to the worldwide economic collapse. And that’s important. But I was more interested in the fact that he owned three boats, called *Bull, Sitting Bull,* and *Little Bull.* Talk about a finger in the eye!

John Kues says

A very interesting read. Shows how difficult it is to lie well, and some results of telling lies and trying to maintain them. Covers the cases of Martha Stewart, Scooter Libby, Barry Bonds, and Bernard Madoff. The amazing parts to me were the oversights, laziness, ineptitude of some of the investigators. Madoff lied for over 20 years, and when investigated he simply avoided answering and talked about all of his experience. They had letters, tips, saying that he was running a Ponzi scheme, but did not act on them. The investigators were so close, and then they failed to follow through. If they had followed through the losses would have been $15 billion dollars instead of the final total of over $60!

Martha Stewart was a billionaire and could have admitted wrong and avoided jail time and paid a relative small sum for her. She has recovered fairly well, all things considered, but the hit her empire took was huge because it was based for the most part only on her.

Our legal system is largely based on people telling the truth, but perjury runs rampant and is often not prosecuted. This is the frustrating part of the stories, how the ball gets dropped time after time. When reading something like this or watching tv about testifying and being able to come up with what one said when or where they were at a specific time I often wonder if I could come up with such details if I was involved. I read this book faster than I usually am able to read non-fiction. James Stewart has compiled an amazing amount of data and case history to write this book, and he has made it very interesting in the process.

Holly Morrow says

“Tangled Webs” is a sort of random but really interesting look at perjury in the US justice system – seen through the lens of four cases: Martha Stewart, Scooter Libby, Barry Bonds, and Bernie Madoff. All lied extensively while under investigation (actually, as the author admits, that is least convincing for Scooter Libby). If you’re a vengeful law-and-order type of personality, like me, then you’ll find yourself fuming as you read this book – reading about the SEC concluding multiple investigations into Madoff resulting in only minor technical infractions, as whistleblower letter after whistleblower letter comes into the SEC and as Madoff brazenly lies to them, is so frustrating. The SEC came so close so many times to uncovering Madoff’s Ponzi scheme, and then just whiffed – didn’t make the one call they needed to make, didn’t follow up on a major discrepancy in his story that they noticed, just didn’t do the minimum they needed to do. Madoff later recalls his own amazement that the SEC didn’t pick up on obvious things or pull on the obvious thread. Or reading about all the tradeoffs the prosecution makes in the BALCO case, so that among a cast of extraordinarily sleazy characters, none of them really got what they deserved. Bonds, who is so clearly guilty – of steroid use, of lying to investigators, and of being a first-rate asshole – suffers basically no consequences. The Martha Stewart case is the most satisfying – an effective prosecution that exposed her lies about insider trading and punished her accordingly. The book re-inflamed my long-held secret desire to be a District Attorney or an FBI agent – when I was at the State Dept, I was working with the FBI on a Chinese embezzlement case, and I remember feeling like I had missed my calling - cracking complicated cases, locking up bad guys. It would be so fun, and honestly – I think I’d kick ass. There are moments in this book that are heart-pounding as the investigators close in on a crucial piece of evidence or get a crucial confession. The Scooter Libby case is actually the least interesting – he clearly WASN’T guilty of the crime for which he was originally investigated (leaking Valerie Plame’s identity to Bob Novak), and the ultimate case against him hinges on whether he lied about a conversation he had with Tim Russert, which had nothing directly to do with the leaking of Plame’s identity. The case was criticized at the time as a fishing expedition, and reading it again in detail, that’s how it feels – it doesn’t have the compelling narrative and clear villain the way the others do. The author clearly got extensive access to some of the key players in these dramas, and recounts the cases in almost minute-by-minute detail – which is occasionally thrilling and occasionally makes you feel like you’re in the jury box straining to follow precise sequences of events. The moral of the story is – if you’re caught, confess, because you do more damage trying to cover your tracks. The other moral is – be nice to the people around you! The cases against several of these guys were built on the cooperation of “little people” that had been spurned along the way – abused assistants, discarded mistresses, fired employees. Being a crook AND a jerk is a dangerous combination.