

Unpatriotic? Whistleblowers have been speaking up, and suffering the consequences, from the beginning

Obama Administration ordered "hit-jobs" on whistleblowers

By Laura King, Los Angeles Times

Video by MSNBC

WASHINGTON — It was 1777. The Revolutionary War was raging, and a small band of officers and seamen in the Continental Navy faced a dangerous dilemma.

Their commodore was one of the most powerful men in colonial America. But his subordinates had seen him engage in “barbarous” mistreatment — torture, in their eyes — of captured British sailors.

Eleven years before the U.S. Constitution was ratified, the 10 worried sailors became the new republic’s first whistleblowers,

reporting what they had witnessed to the Continental Congress — and getting legal protection to shield them from retribution.

“Whistleblowing is really in America’s DNA — it’s as American as apple pie,” said Allison Stanger, a political scientist at Middlebury College whose book on the subject was published the same day last month that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, spurred by a whistleblower’s complaint, announced the impeachment inquiry into President Donald Trump.

The lonely individual speaking truth to power is an enduring American archetype. Whistleblowing — when an “insider” in government or a private company or organization draws attention to illegal or unethical activity — is codified in law, enshrined in history, immortalized in Hollywood movies and popular culture.


Whether celebrated or controversial, the recent roll call is long: from Karen Silkwood on nuclear power to “Deep Throat” in Watergate; from Frank Serpico in the New York Police Department to Erin Brockovich and water pollution in California; from Daniel Ellsberg in the Pentagon Papers to, his supporters maintain, Edward Snowden and government surveillance.

But a decision to come forward with damaging information can carry enormous personal costs. Virtually every whistleblower, according to those who study the phenomenon, is forced to confront the ugly flip side of a heroic image: Stool pigeon. Tattletale. Snitch. Rat.

Job loss and ruptured relationships are common consequences; so is grief over the loss of a once-shared identity. Whistleblowing

can end with ignominy, imprisonment or exile. Sometimes it is a secret carried to the grave, or nearly so.

“I didn’t, I couldn’t, even use that word about myself — whistleblower,” said Jacqueline Garrick, 56, the founding director of a Department of Defense suicide prevention program who said she ran afoul of Pentagon officials when she raised still-contested allegations, first internally and then publicly, of fraud and abuse.

 Daniel Ellsberg wearing a suit and tie: Activist Daniel Ellsberg attends the L.A. Press Club's Veritas Awards on Feb. 2, 2018 in Los Angeles.

© Alberto E. Rodriguez/Getty Images North America/TNS Activist Daniel Ellsberg attends the L.A. Press...

A former Army officer, Garrick likened her experience in the three years since she came forward to the post-traumatic stress sometimes suffered by combat veterans — sleeplessness and anxiety, isolation and despair. She went on to found a peer-support group, Whistleblowers of America, to help others deal with the psychological and practical consequences of making accusations of workplace wrongdoing.

“You just don’t realize at first,” she said, “that your life is never going to be the same.”

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The whistleblower at the center of the Trump impeachment inquiry, reportedly a CIA analyst temporarily assigned to the White House, probably had a better sense than most of what might lie ahead.

The individual's complaint, filed Aug. 12, landed like a bombshell in official Washington when the House Intelligence Committee made it public on Sept. 26.

Except for two blacked-out paragraphs in a classified appendix, the nine-page document spelled out in crisp, measured prose the writer's belief that Trump was "using the power of his office to solicit interference from a foreign country in the 2020 U.S. election."

The acting director of national intelligence, Joseph Maguire, told lawmakers that the whistleblower had followed the law "every step of the way" in submitting it to the intelligence community's inspector general.

Disclosure of the complaint prompted a response familiar in the annals of whistleblowing: attack the messenger.

The president denounced the whistleblower as a "partisan hack," a "Deep State" operative, "close to a spy," a betrayer of trust. Trump said the whistleblower should be unmasked — contrary to legal guarantees of anonymity — and demanded to personally confront his accuser.

Although federal rules do not require a whistleblower's information be firsthand, the president seized on the fact that the complainant acknowledged not having heard Trump's crucial July 25 telephone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, when Trump pressured the new leader to investigate his political rival, Joe Biden.

But the declassified White House memorandum of the call, essentially a rough transcript, appeared to confirm large parts of

the whistleblower's complaint.

Lawyers representing the whistleblower said over the weekend that a second individual had come forward, also from the intelligence community. That is also a well-worn whistleblower scenario — especially if the second individual brings firsthand knowledge that could bolster the original complaint.

On Sunday, 90 former national security officials — with service under both Republican and Democratic presidents — released an open letter calling for privacy and protection from retaliation for the person whose complaint set the impeachment inquiry in motion.

“A responsible whistleblower makes all Americans safer,” they wrote.

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The term “whistleblower” is of uncertain origin, thought to refer to a police officer's response when spotting a criminal, or to a sports referee calling out a foul.

But most researchers say its animating principle dates to medieval times, with recognition of the right of individuals, not only officialdom, to sound the alarm about wrongdoing.

In English common law, the writ of *qui tam* meant a private individual who assisted in an official prosecution was entitled to a share of the penalty paid. So it carried a connotation of bounty hunting, when a person was acting “for the king as well as for self.”

In the United States, the term “whistleblower” only came into wide use around 1975, with headline-grabbing cases such as the Pentagon Papers, which exposed White House deceit in the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal that brought down President Richard Nixon, and the work of crusading of consumer advocate Ralph Nader.

Stanger’s book, “Whistleblowers: Honesty in America From Washington to Trump,” details the case of the Revolutionary War seamen who won the legal protection of the Continental Congress when their wealthy and well-connected commodore, Esek Hopkins, sought to retaliate against them for reporting him.

The Civil War ushered in incentives for exposing graft associated with the procurement of military supplies. In modern times, landmark legislation included the Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989 and several major updates in the following three decades.

But advocates say federal workers, and especially members of the intelligence community, still lack sufficient protections if they expose wrongdoing.

“To truly protect whistleblowers, there’s a lot of unfinished business,” said David Colapinto, general counsel for the National Whistleblower Center.

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The Hollywood image of a feisty firebrand spoiling for a fight is rarely reflected in reality, according to Tom Mueller, who said he interviewed 200 whistleblowers for his book on the subject.

Many whistleblowers believe their own organization will fix whatever wrong they brought to light, and are shocked and disillusioned when that doesn't happen.

And although a few may be disgruntled employees — another popular assumption that clings to whistleblowers — many more are motivated by personal values, Mueller said.

Elin Baklid-Kunz said her upbringing in Norway, with its societal emphasis on equality and the common interest, led her to complain of serious financial misconduct at the Florida hospital where she worked, including overbilling Medicare and paying kickbacks.

"I just wasn't raised to think I was better than anyone else, or to think it was all right to take advantage of others," said Baklid-Kunz, who appeared with Mueller at a recent panel on whistleblowing at a Washington bookstore.

The crowd groaned at the description of hospital officials performing a bizarre "money dance," with rap lyrics and costumes festooned with dollar signs, to convey the message that extracting cash, not patient care, was the top priority.

Mueller's book, "Crisis of Conscience: Whistleblowing in an Age of Fraud," takes a Martin Luther King Jr. quotation as its epigraph — reflecting, he said, a worldview that many who blow the whistle finally, reluctantly, take to heart.

"A time comes," the civil rights icon told a New York City congregation in 1967, the year before his assassination in Memphis, "when silence is betrayal."

[Whistleblower - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whistleblower)

< <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whistleblower>

A **whistleblower** (also written as **whistle-blower** or **whistle blower**) is a person who exposes secretive information or activity that is deemed illegal, unethical, or not correct within a private or public organization.

[The New Attack on Whistleblowers - CounterPunch.org](https://www.counterpunch.org)

◁ <https://www.counterpunch.org/2016/02/17/the-new-attack-on-whistleblowers/>

The New Attack on **Whistleblowers**. "In the Tamm case, the government didn't even attempt to charge him with misconduct. His activities were legally protected. In the Bernabei case, the Department of Labor rejected the same charges when General Electric tried to censor Ms. Bernabei's advocacy for the **whistleblower** in government proceedings.

[The Whistleblower Protection Programs | Whistleblower ...](#)

< <https://www.whistleblowers.gov>

OSHA's **Whistleblower** Protection Program enforces the **whistleblower** provisions of more than 20 **whistleblower** statutes protecting employees from retaliation for reporting violations of various workplace safety and health, airline, commercial motor carrier, consumer product, environmental, financial reform, food safety, health insurance reform, motor vehicle safety, nuclear, pipeline, public ...

[Government Protects Criminals by Attacking Whistleblowers](https://www.infowars.com/government-protects-criminals-by-attacking-whistleblowers/)

↳ <https://www.infowars.com/government-protects-criminals-by-attacking-whistleblowers/>

Specifically, the Obama administration has prosecuted more **whistleblowers** than all other presidents combined. Government employees also goes out of their way to smear **whistleblowers**, threaten reporters who discuss **whistleblower** information and harass honest analysts. Indeed, even high-level government employees are in danger.

[Whistleblowers' mental health attacked by firms - Phys.org](https://phys.org/news/2016-05-whistleblowers-mental-health-firms.html)

↳ <https://phys.org/news/2016-05-whistleblowers-mental-health-firms.html>

Whistleblowers' mental health attacked by firms. Organisations demonise **whistleblowers** leaving some suicidal in an attempt to paint them as mentally ill and discredit their claims, according to new research. **Whistleblowers** are protected by law in the UK so they shouldn't be treated unfairly or lose their job,...

Attacking the whistleblower: the abuse-enabling culture is ...

◁ www.lmschairman.org/2018/09/attacking-whistleblower-abuse-enabling.html

Attacking the whistleblower: the abuse-enabling culture is alive and well In the current phase of the Church's crisis, we are focusing as much or more on the enablers of abuse, than on the abusers themselves.

[Reminder: Benghazi "Whistleblowers" Confirm Lies, Deceit ...](#)

◁ <https://politichicks.com/2019/09/benghazi-whistleblowers-confirm-lies-deceit-cover-ups/>

Witnesses (aka "**whistleblowers**") Greg Hicks, Eric Nordstrom and Mark Thompson, gave their testimony on Wednesday in the beginning phases of the Benghazi hearings. Their sometimes-explosive statements exposed what most of us already believed: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Ambassador Susan Rice and everyone in between lied and tried to cover up the fact that Benghazi was an Islamic terrorist attack.

[Meet The 9/11 Whistleblowers : The Corbett Report](#)

◁ <https://www.corbettreport.com/meet-the-911-whistleblowers/>

Whatever one thinks of the attempt to equate talk of the moon landing with documentable lies and omissions in the 9/11 commission report, or the logical fallacy implicit in this argumentum ad ignorantium, there is an even more fundamental flaw in this argument. Namely, it assumes that there have in fact been no 9/11 **whistleblowers**.

[Obama's War on Whistleblowers - Mother Jones](#)

◁ <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/06/obamas-whistleblowers-stuxnet-leaks-drones/>

Obama's War on **Whistleblowers** ... In May 2011 the Pentagon declared that another country's cyber-attacks—computer sabotage, against the US—could be considered an "act of war."