

2021 DCR Awards Recognize Three Teams Protecting American Democracy

The **2021 David C. Rothman Award for Protecting American Democracy** recognizes the accomplishment of teams fighting the concentration of power and its corrupting effects on American democracy. The awards recognize the work of **Noah Bookbinder, Matt Keller, Jordan Lebowitz, Shruti Shah, Donald Sherman, Laura Sherman, and Fred Wertheimer** to fight corruption in multiple ways: by drawing attention to the quiet corruption of political appointees, creating a public index of ethics laws across the United States, and bringing religious leaders together to demonstrate the moral foundation of ethics in democracy.

Working at **Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)**, the team of Noah Bookbinder, Donald Sherman, and Jordan Lebowitz helped protect the 2020 election from potentially backroom corruption by Louis DeJoy. The position of US Postmaster General has rarely been considered one of political import; the CREW team showed the foresight to recognize the possible threat when DeJoy was appointed to this role during the unique circumstances of an election that would have more mail-in ballots than ever in history. Thanks in part to their efforts, the public became and political leaders increasingly aware of DeJoy's potential to corrupt the election, the U.S. Senate held hearings into DeJoy's proposed actions, and the mail-in ballots in the 2020 election were safe from interference.

Working at the **Coalition for Integrity**, Shruti Shah and Laura Sherman tackled corruption from a different angle. They created the online SWAMP Index comparing the scope, independence, and power of state ethics rules to provide for transparency and disclosure in state government. North Dakota and New Mexico passed constitutional amendments creating ethics commissions following their poor showing in the first SWAMP index. In Virginia, C4I's challenge to candidates led to greater transparency in state races. States should be laboratories of democracy, and by creating a clear metric for comparing states on this count, C4I is driving change that can raise the level of ethics in government across the country.

Working at **Democracy 21**, Fred Wertheimer and Matt Keller have worked to highlight and facilitate greater public involvement and voice in the electoral system. The DCR Award recognizes their work on Faithful Democracy. Through this effort, Democracy 21 brought together faith leaders and state legislators, emphasizing the moral core of democracy. An echo of the civil rights efforts of the 1960s, this work is helping to demonstrate that democratic values and religious values go hand in hand, and that protecting democracy is the work of leaders in all different public venues.

David C. Rothman was a lifelong believer in the power of democracy. Born in 1929, David was a child of the depression who grew up with great faith in the centrality of a well-functioning democracy to a healthy society. His father had come to America in 1920, escaping the "White Laws" put in place when an anti-Semitic fascist leaders came to power in Hungary.

A lawyer and businessman, David's political activity came largely through his charitable giving and expression of political views. In the years before his death, he expressed growing concern over the ways in which concentration of power corrupted its possessors and could undermine democracy.

In his own work, David was a pioneer in the field of pension planning and had carefully saved funds for a long retirement. When he died in 2020, he left behind funds which will now be used to carry on his memory by supporting efforts that he would have believed in.