

Public Morality, Private Pain

In the great tidal-wave of frustration, anger, and disgust engendered by the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, the central question to be asked is what is the root cause of the problem.

To begin at the beginning, a special prosecutor was set up in 1994 to look into the involvement of then recently- elected President Clinton and his wife, in the real-estate venture called Whitewater.

This investigation was purely a political vendetta between Democrats and Republicans, as most such investigations have come to be. Starting with Watergate investigation, which had real criminal acts to deal with, the two rival parties have used both the special prosecutor inquiries and the congressional investigations as the continuing battle of political power. It is criminal, as well as disgusting, to have public money spent on political rivalries of the main political parties. Whitewater investigation has been the worst example of this. Four years and forty-million dollars later, all that the prosecutor has found is a possible perjury in the adulterous connection between the president and Lewinsky, an area of inquiry which had nothing to do with the basic investigation it was assigned.

Human beings commonly lie when their private, and especially socially tabooed, affairs are made public. Adulterous affairs are the best example of this. If President Clinton lied about his liaison with Lewinsky, it was almost expected, given the overwhelmingly high - publicity glare under which a U.S. president lives. Would presidents John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Ronald Nixon, and George Bush, just to name some of the recent presidents, have testified truthfully in their possible adulterous relationship investigations? Most likely not—given what is at stake.

The motivation behind the Starr investigation is simply to get President Clinton and the First Lady—to drive them out of office, to gravely tarnish their reputations, to painfully humiliate them. It does not take one to have many neurons in one's skull to comprehend that Mr. Starr finds Bill and Hilary Clinton pathetically immoral, indecent, and ungraceful. While he has every right to hold to his views, he is immoral in proving out his theories by public money and on public time, and is harmfully disturbing a duly elected government. This playing out of his private passions on public resources and watch is one of the most sordid displays of selfishness and fraud in modern political history. Republicans have been pursuing White House reclamation on tax-payer dollars and peace of mind.

The investigation has been uncivilized, brutal, and devastating to presidency and government. The presidency has been dismantled of its insulation to petty legal challenges , the environment of trust necessary for its high-level functioning, and the privacy of the person holding it. It has further diminished the idealism and stateliness of the office for the bright, young, public-service minded people who might have aspired to it. Mr. Starr's blindly zealous pursuit of Bill and Hilary Clinton has done irreparable harm to it.

Though often denials are made that the investigation is not about the sexual-life of the president, but without it it would not have had the explosive force and drama that it has acquired. We are living in an age of sexual-liberation, where an adulterous affair (which is as old as the mankind itself), even in the first-family, should not come as a surprise. But the fact that it does tells us how hypocritical people are—while reportedly eighty percent people indulge in it and yet when public-people are discovered to do the same they are looked down upon. Clinton was forced to apologize for his adultery, but many of his tormentors may be living with their adulteries peacefully. This nation is still in the kindergarten-stage in public-morality assessment of its politicians.

One of the most dramatic happenings of the entire episode has been the unshakability of the popular opinion on the worthlessness of the sexual-scandal

probe. Some seventy-five polls in the last seven months have with remarkable consistency declared the whole Whitewater investigation as unwholesome and unproductive and maliciously-motivated. Public-commentators, political-pundits, and talk-show celebrities have been at loss to understand the public reaction. But it is no surprise to psychologists, social thinkers, and philosophers. A common man is relatively unpretentious, illusion-free and inhibition-free, and inclined to see things as they appear to be, regardless of unsophistication and unfashionableness of their perceptions. It is the smart-people, the believers, the pseudo-intellectuals, who often miss the reality for the trappings.

This nation has to vastly amend the special prosecutor law to the effect that a special prosecutor gone out of control can be easily replaced, without an attorney-general or a president having to risk his political career in doing so, and that the witnesses are not harassed and burdened with legal fees. Furthermore, the functioning of the government should not be impaired at anytime.

The Whitewater investigation is a story of the feud of the two political parties, of a prosecutor who lost the perspective of the situation and went out of control, of media wanting to have a presidential knockout after a long dry spell after Watergate, of a first-couple who was forced to display its private dirt in public.