

President's mud sticking to U.S.

My reading of presidential history has taught me there is nothing new about extramarital affairs in the Oval Office. While I would like to believe a president is an exemplar of personal character, I know that, like the rest of us, he is disappointingly human.

The real shame of the last seven months is that Bill Clinton has the potential to be much better than average as a president. But now it is questionable whether he wields the moral credibility among his staff, cabinet, congressional allies and, above all, the American people necessary to govern the affairs of the nation.

To be sure, whether Clinton is guilty of poor judgment and perjury are important issues, but more important are the issues that created this latest scandal:

■ Why hasn't the state of Maryland made Linda Tripp accountable for wiretapping her phone conversations?

■ How could the Justice Department allow Kenneth Starr to continue an investigation that has been excessively intrusive and has failed to uncover any criminal wrongdoing?

■ Are the media even capable of drawing the line between inflammatory gossip and the truth in a society obsessed with conspiracies, infidelity and scandal?

■ Can one person be expected to carry out the complex, demanding duties of the presidency while leading a fishbowl existence?

When these questions are considered, perhaps Bill Clinton's greatest sin was being elected in the post-Watergate era.

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