**Letter from the Editor**

**Katie Perry**

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**Private Lives in the Public Eye**

In the opening remarks of his lecture Monday night in the Hogan Ballroom, Clarence Thomas said that when he was up for appointment to the Supreme Court, the president sat him down and asked him two questions: can you and your family withstand the scrutiny of the confirmation process and can you call them like you see them? These questions is, without a doubt, significant. The president’s first question was not about Thomas’ credentials and abilities. It was about his private life and his vulnerability to intense scrutiny. Questions about his ability to perform only came as an afterthought, as if they were less relevant in determining his fitness as a Supreme Court justice. When we look at him and have affairs with female appointees, I’m still on the right man for the job”, Of course not. It’s an ill-fated encounter with Anita Hill! Yet, which has had more impact on his work as a Supreme Court judge?

Certainly, the private lives of public figures are not entirely irrelevant, but to what extent must a public figure live his or her life in public? Sure, Clinton may have had affairs, and his relationship with Monica Lewinsky may be questionable at best, but what does that have to do with his life in the public eye? If he were trading business favors for sexual ones, it would be of the utmost importance to the country. Did Clinton inhale? Good Lord, then I don’t even need to know his stance on affirmative action. George W. Bush drank as a college student? I don’t even need to hear his plan to combat terrorism. He did cocaine too? Can I get him impeached?

As most of us would readily admit, the president’s platform makes far more of a contribution to the nation than his private life does, but, essentially, we vote for candidates who come from the nice neighborhoods with the prim and proper first ladies and the well-behaved children. Want to win an election? Don’t worry about the issues. Just create visions of Camelot and you’ll be all set. Damage that image, and you’re through.

Maybe it’s me, but we don’t seem to have our priorities straight. If we’re going to have a functional democracy, we have to have a strong foundation on which to build our decisions. Scandals are fun, but they don’t tell us much about a politician’s record, and ultimately, that’s what we want to judge him or her by. Private lives are only relevant when they impinge on a candidate’s ability to perform public duties.

Yet, we might ask ourselves, why do these men and women keep their skeletons in the closet? They evade us, they lie, they argue over the definition of “is” - doesn’t that tell us something important beyond that they have something to hide? If they’re dishonest about their private life, how can we trust them in their public role? I’d respect a politician who was honest about his indiscretions. At least you’d know he had some integrity in coming forward.

The American public always calls for honesty from its politicians, and never gets it. Is it because all politicians are corrupt? Hardly. Maybe Clinton should have told the truth from the get-go, but if he had, wouldn’t he have been ostracized for it? We call for honesty, but we would reject it if we came face to face with the reality of it. Would we have elected Clinton if he’d come out and said, “I’m a womanizer. I cheat on my wife. I expose myself on occasion”?

Peace will not be achieved while each side demands unilateral concessions from the other, and students are wrong to reduce the conflict to such simple terms.

As the situation in the Middle East continues to escalate, many argue that blame for the ongoing hostilities should be shared. Others maintain that one side is the victim of the other’s aggression. This is a complex conflict and not, students’ claims to the contrary, a black and white issue. Apartheid in South Africa, on the other hand, was quite literally a black and white issue, one that was rightly seen by students in America with clarity. But by demanding that their schools adopt the same policies that were used to isolate that racist regime in the 1980s, students today are making a comparison between apartheid South Africa and Israel, a comparison that is not apt.

Though the demonstrators on campus campuses couch their protests in terms of human rights, and alleged violations by Israeli forces, they make no mention of the terrorist acts perpetrated by Hamas and other anti-Israel organizations. The man who blows himself up on a bus or in a crowded café is apparently not part of the human rights equation. They neglect to point out that the terrorist acts Israel is responding to are results of the recent, deadly suicide bombings. Military action was taken to stop attacks on city streets.