Opinion
NCR Voices



A protester holds a sign drawing attention to the Epstein files scandal during a demonstration against President Donald Trump on Jan. 6, 2026, in Manhattan, New York. (Dreamstime/Cpenler)



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Over the course of history, our nation has handled scandals differently and also significantly changed what does, and does not, constitute a scandal.

Newspaperman James Callender published a story in 1802 alleging that President Thomas Jefferson kept a slave woman named Sally as his concubine. Callendar had once been an ally of Jefferson's but had bolted to the Federalists, who repeated the charge. We now know it was true, but there were no DNA tests in 1802 and Jefferson refused to answer any personal attacks. Jefferson sailed to victory in his reelection bid in 1804.

In the early 1920s, the unfolding Teapot Dome scandal forced the resignation of President Warren Harding's interior secretary (and poker buddy), Albert Fall. Congressional inquiries determined he or members of his family benefitted financially from the transfer of government owned oil leases without competitive bidding. Harding died before facing any political fallout.

In 1987, Judge Douglas Ginsburg had been nominated to the Supreme Court by President Ronald Reagan, but withdrew after it was revealed he had smoked pot with some students. The odor of marijuana was still sufficiently strong that in 1992, candidate Bill Clinton had to claim he "didn't inhale" marijuana when he tried it while a student at Oxford.

Also in 1987, Sen. Gary Hart's presidential bid collapsed after pictures of him with a woman who was not his wife were discovered by the press.

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The Epstein affair should outstrip any of these prior scandals. Reporter Julie K. Brown, whose reporting on Jeffrey Epstein led to his being charged, called attention to a 2019 Department of Justice memo that was released with millions of other

documents last month, but then scrubbed from the government's website. The memo suggests the DOJ was considering the indictment of 11 "co-conspirators" of Epstein. Brown says Donald Trump was on the list.

So far, however, the release of more Epstein files has had stronger consequences in Europe than in the U.S., as Politico noted. Former U.K. ambassador to the U.S. Peter Mandelson not only resigned his diplomatic post, but also relinquished his seat in the House of Lords. The scandal is even threatening the premiership of Keir Starmer in Britain, even though he never met Epstein, isn't mentioned in the files, and is only being faulted for having appointed Mandelson.

In the U.S., Trump simply denies wrongdoing and changes the topic. The Republican-led Congress is not going to risk the president's wrath by doing their constitutional duty of conducting oversight. Will there be any records left by the time Trump leaves office?

One of the things that defines a culture is what it will not tolerate in its leaders. No hero is without blemish. Unhappy is the nation that embraces prudishness in evaluating its public figures. Not everyone mentioned in the Epstein files did anything wrong. But we haven't gotten to the bottom of this scandal and no one gets a pass for participating in the rape of underage girls. It would be good for the republic if the culprits pay a price in this life and not only in the history books. Seeing as all of the men who befriended the creepy Epstein appear to be filthy rich, let them pay a price literally: Confiscate their property.

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