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Who Is Craig Gillen?

The Office of Independent Counsel—OIC to the in crowd—has been a great benefactor of the media as it picked through the garbage of the Iran-contra affair during the past six years. Along the way OIC and its aged leader, 80-year-old Lawrence E. Walsh, dropped many hints of great things to come: the impeachment or indictment of Ronald Reagan, the imprisonment of Cabinet officers, the slaughter of top guns in the CIA. This was the stuff of bold headlines and great expectations. It inspired millions of words of copy and countless broadcast hours.

But in the end not much has come of it. "Little Light, but Much Work . . ." is the New York Times headline. What we know today about Iran-contra is what we knew five years ago at the conclusion of congressional hearings on the affair; nothing more. Walsh and his platoons of lawyers and FBI agents have hooked and landed no big fish. Reagan, the inspirer and spiritual patron of the operation, lives out his good life on the West Coast, unindicted and unimpeached either for lack of evidence or lack of will at OIC. The convictions of Oliver North and John Poindexter were invalidated by the courts because of the use of tainted evidence, an outcome that was not inevitable, according to Sen. Warren Rudman, if Walsh had played his cards in a different way. North may wind up as Virginia's newest senator. Plea bargains on misdemeanor counts extracted modest community service time for people like

Robert McFarlane and Elliott Abrams, who was also fined \$50. But no one has done or will do jail time except the long-forgotten Thomas Clines, who got 16 months for income tax irregularities.

The much-heralded prosecution of Clair George, the former "CIA spymaster," was an odd and singularly unenlightening episode. It bankrupted him but left the issue in doubt. His involvement in Iran-contra was shown to be peripheral, and the case against him—lying or withholding information from Congress—was so marginal it collapsed the first time around. A majority of jurors favored his acquittal on each of the nine counts in the indictment, forcing a mistrial. The press lost interest. There was no daily coverage of the retrial by such Iran-contra junkies as the New York Times and The Post. But this time the OIC lawyers got a conviction by the skin of their teeth; George was acquitted on five of the seven counts in his indictment. Even that minor victory evaporated Christmas Eve when President Bush pardoned George and five others, including former defense secretary Caspar Weinberger, who had yet to come to trial for withholding information from Congress.

For all that, it's been a good story for a long, long time and there is a very faint possibility of a socko windup. Walsh has made the president a "subject" for investigation. That has an ominous ring to it but may signify little more than Walsh's pique at the Bush pardons.

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In the meantime, the press could clear up for the rest of us one of the mysteries of OIC:

Who is Craig Gillen? He's been a major actor for several years in the affairs of OIC. The newspapers label him as Walsh's "chief prosecutor," as the "deputy independent counsel," as the "associate counsel"—in short, as the Number Two guy. That's all we know from the papers, except that he was once an assistant U.S. attorney in Atlanta and that a year ago Walsh told *Legal Times*, a Washington journal, that he had turned over to Gillen "decisional authority" in OIC.

People who attended the George trial were impressed by Gillen's technical skills. He was the architect of the case—and of its technical flaws—against Caspar Weinberger. But there are no extant profiles in the computers telling us about him—his family, his education, his career history, his talents, his ambitions, his beliefs. The *Wall Street Journal* claimed in an editorial—with no supporting evidence—that Gillen's aim is to be the governor of his home state, Georgia, and that OIC is merely a steppingstone for that ambition.

Nothing else is readily available except a poison portrait of Gillen contained in an interesting but maudlin and self-serving memoir by Elliott Abrams on his travails with OIC. The book makes clear that Abrams and his wife, Rachel, do not dislike Craig Gillen; they hate him. If WASPs were not supposed to be immune from bigotry, one could easily accuse them of that social sin. In

a letter to a friend, reprinted in the book, Rachel Abrams refers to him as "this specimen of [expletive deleted] and compressed lips, this pretty-boy, blond, Georgia WASP, this loathsome little toady of Lawrence Walsh's." Other passages in the letter are unprintable and reflect the obsessive belief that Gillen is a grand inquisitor seeking fame and high place by pursuing "this golden man, my prize"—Elliott Abrams. (She also pays her respects to the Fourth Estate, those "carrion-eaters of the press corps, who daily take their meals at the flesh of the fallen mighty.")

If Craig Gillen can inspire such passions he must be an interesting man. He is also an important figure in these final days of OIC. Lawrence Walsh spends most of his time at home in Oklahoma City. Gillen appears to be the de facto chief of the operation now, its driving spirit, its principal strategist. He will figure in any history of the Iran-contra case and its aftermath.

It is surprising that we know so little about him, surprising that he has retained his anonymity for so long. There are a lot of stories going around about his zealotry.

The last act of the Office of Independent Counsel in this affair will be the submission of a final report. It will be an important document affecting the reputations of many individuals and affecting, perhaps, future relations between Congress and the executive branch. Gillen will be one of its principal authors. Who is he?