

September surprise

Oliver North cleared, not exonerated

U.S. District Judge Gerhard Gesell has pulled a September surprise.

On Monday, he dismissed all charges against Oliver North, the main player in the Iran-Contra scandal.

North happily said he was "totally exonerated... I've had my last hearing forever, I hope."

Monday's action may close the book on North's legal involvement in the affair, which involved the diversion to Nicaraguan rebels of profits from illegal U.S. arms sales to Iran.

But the political reality of North's actions remain ominous and on the fringes of a lively debate over covert operations with Iran by the Reagan administration.

The charges essentially were dismissed on a technicality. Independent prosecutor Lawrence Walsh said he decided to give up trying to get North's three earlier convictions reinstated. Those convictions were overturned last year when a federal appeals court decided that some of North's testimony came from information he gave to Congress under immunity during its investigation of the scandal.

North's charges have been dismissed; his guilt remains.

No legal action can change the fact that his role in the Contra resupply operation was in violation of the Constitution. The important question now is how broad the scandal was.

Throughout the 1986 Iran-Contra hearings, North tried to portray himself as a lone, noble warrior fighting for American ideals.

But later testimony from North's superiors revealed that he wasn't alone. How far up the chain of command knowledge of the scandal went has never been revealed. While the Reagan and Bush administrations have done their best to put the issue to bed, it keeps cropping up.

Currently, Iran-Contra is the key issue in the confirmation hearings of Robert Gates to lead the CIA. Gates, the No. 2 man at the spy agency when the diversion occurred, maintains that he knew nothing about it.

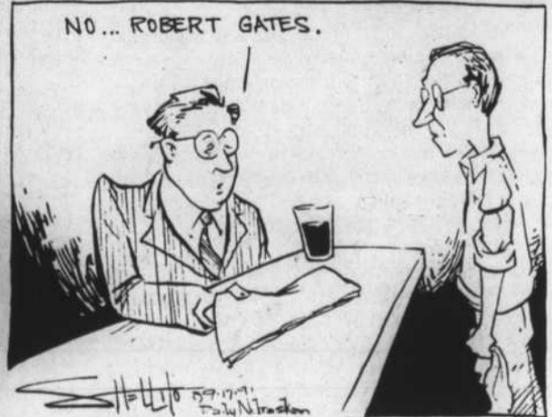
Some members of the Senate Intelligence Committee are not so sure. At one point Monday, Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D-Ohio, said Gates' contention that he didn't remember some events in the affair was a case of "willful ignorance."

Other Congressional Democrats, too, continue to make political hay out of the scandal by calling for an investigation of an alleged 1980 deal between Iran and Ronald Reagan, who was then a presidential candidate, to keep the U.S. hostages until after the election. The theory is that such negotiations, designed to avoid a Democratic "October surprise" freeing of the hostages, initiated a chain of covert operations with Iran that culminated in Iran-Contra.

Against that backdrop, the dropping of charges against North was a coup for the administration.

But his victory was merely symbolic. It does not clear North of blame, and it exonerates no one.

—E.F.P.



MICHAEL STOCK

Thomas a political bird

Will the real Clarence Thomas please raise his right wing. Or his left wing? Middle wing?

The Thomas who was nominated for the Supreme Court by President Bush because of his far-right politics appeared to have moved toward the middle in last week's confirmation hearings.

Thomas' supposed move, however, reeks of political opportunism. After years of touting extremely conservative politics, Thomas seemed to give way to the pressures of the Senate Judiciary Committee's Democrats.

Thomas said he believed in a strong separation of church and state, backed public housing and allowed that unmarried couples have a right to use contraceptives.

All of these admissions are opposed to anything Thomas previously said or wrote.

Even Thomas' strong defense of natural law and its inherent role in determining present laws seemed to have disappeared.

But Thomas' history is one of far-right tendencies, which are so deeply entrenched that it is hard to believe that he could shrug them all off in the course of one week with a group of grinning Democrats. All of this role-playing leaves me with a question:

How many Clarence Thomases are there?

One Thomas has neatly risen above the ranks of oppression of blacks. He kisses babies, asks how the rest of the family is and might quote a passage from the Bible. He is Ronald Reagan's man, adamantly promising not to take any job bound to racial issues. This Thomas, a successful product of affirmative action, has spent his career denouncing it.

Now there is a new Thomas. He is a man for the middle. Welfare is no longer so bad. Neither is public housing. Non-marital sexual relationships exist in this Thomas' world, and contraceptives are fine. Even the idea of abortion is looked at "with an open mind."

Which Thomas is the Senate confirming?

Thomas' story also is one of contradictions.

You've all heard the story. This week's Newsweek traces his growth from under his grandfather's roof and



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shadow. Thomas' grandfather was the sharecropper who eventually founded the Anderson Fuel Company. It is this Horatio Alger "rags-to-riches" story that Thomas supporters cite as justification for giving him a seat on the highest court.

After his admission to Yale, Thomas' conservatism became clear. He was chosen as the product of a new affirmative action program requiring that minorities make up one-tenth of each class.

Thomas knew this, and despised the fact.

"You had to prove yourself every day because the presumption was that you were dumb and didn't deserve to be there on merit," Thomas said of his law school experience in a 1980 interview printed this week in Newsweek.

This, apparently, was the beginning of an ideology.

Thomas seemed to abhor the idea of being given different treatment because of his color. To him it was being "rewarded," or, some kind of treatment that wasn't deserved.

To Thomas, affirmative action made blacks dependent on government, rather than on independent enterprise.

But Thomas fails to take into account the individual who doesn't receive the good fortune that he has. I'm not condemning the individual's desire for a Horatio Alger happiness. I am critical of Thomas for denying

minorities the extra, often-needed support that affirmative action programs allow.

In February 1980, Reagan offered Thomas a position on the White House policy staff responsible for determining energy and environment policies. Thomas declined the position, admitting that it was a tempting offer.

This was Thomas' area of expertise, focusing entirely on issues not related to race. Immediately before Reagan's inauguration, Thomas told a Washington Post reporter of his plans and what he would not do, Newsweek said.

"If I ever went to work for the EEOC or did anything directly connected with blacks, my career would be irreparably ruined. The monkey would be on my back again to prove I didn't have the job because I'm black."

Four months later, Thomas was hired as head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission—the very position Thomas declared he would never fill.

Once again, Thomas has been chosen for a position because of his color. And again, Thomas doesn't seem to mind. Replacing the only black Supreme Court Justice—Thurgood Marshall—with another black is an obvious political move.

Thomas supporters seem to weigh his skin color as a determinant of his dedication to minorities' rights, of his ability to succeed the liberal Marshall reign. The problem lies in the fact that the public considers what he is and not who he is.

He is black. He is the self-made grandson of a poor sharecropper. However, his opinions on public policy, even his publicly espoused beliefs, tell a different story.

Thomas is a politician. The face he has been wearing for the last week is only one of many. It is one handily crafted in the guise of an acceptable Supreme Court justice to please Democrats.

I hope Joseph Biden's bunch in the Senate realize they only are hearing what they want to hear, not what the real Clarence Thomas believes.

Stock is a senior English major and a Daily Nebraskan A&E senior reporter and columnist.

Cutting classics negative, disrespectful of history

I am really surprised by the latest developments regarding the budget cuts and the devastating effects on the departments of speech communication and classics. Both offer unique studies and have contributed to the good name of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Erasing the classics department from the academic map indicates an action that has no respect or appreciation for the past.

UNL has many excellent programs and departments that should not be affected by the cuts, but eliminating

an area that is still under heavy archaeological and literary study will be a negative step in the history of this university. Athens has been called the "cradle of civilization" and Rome the "eternal city," and their civilizations influenced people, ideologies and systems for thousands of years. Simply, I can't believe that an academic institution such as UNL has can forget history.

George Vatzias
graduate student
animal science

LETTER POLICY

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Anonymous submissions will not be considered for publication. Letters should include the author's name, year in school, major and group affiliation, if any. Requests to withhold names will not be granted.

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