

THE BCT
OPINION

BURLINGTON COUNTY TIMES

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GUEST VIEW

We can honor police heroics and fret about lethal force

Police officers routinely display selfless, life-saving heroism. That was apparent on the night of Sept. 17 at a mall in St. Cloud, Minnesota, where off-duty officer Jason Falconer confronted and shot to death Dahir Adan after the 22-year-old had stabbed 10 people. Falconer was widely and deservedly praised for acting quickly to save lives.

But one can revere this heroism while still having profound reservations about a police culture that seems far too tolerant of — and too quick to defend — the use of lethal force against unarmed people, often African-Americans. Another example came last week in Tulsa, Oklahoma, when police Officer Betty Shelby fatally shot Terence Crutcher, 40, who was unarmed and standing by his vehicle. In videos released Monday, there is no evidence that Crutcher was behaving in a threatening way, and Shelby has been charged with first degree manslaughter.

It was impossible not to think of the wrenching videos of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, men killed by police in Minnesota and Louisiana, respectively, in early July. The reaction of Crutcher's twin sister, Tiffany Crutcher, to video of an officer calling him a "bad dude" before he was shot was unforgettable.

"The big bad dude was my twin brother. That big bad dude was a father," she said. "That big bad dude was a son. That big bad dude was enrolled at Tulsa Community College, just wanting to make us proud. That big bad dude loved God. That big bad dude was at church singing with all of his flaws, every week. That big bad dude, that's who he was."

Now he's dead — for no reason at all.

The San Diego Union-Tribune

COMMENTARY

USUALLY MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL RULES, BUT...

Trump vs. Clinton will be a better game

Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton. New Orleans Saints vs. Atlanta Falcons. What does one choose for one's Monday night viewing pleasure?

Normally that's an easy one. Monday Night Football has ruled for decades.

But Trump vs. Clinton promises to be a better game.

And with estimates that television ratings for the U.S. presidential candidates' debate could rival some of the top-rated Super Bowls of all-time, it's likely many of you will feel the same way.

Normally I get really annoyed when drivers stare down an accident and cause a traffic slowdown. What's the point in staring at other people's misfortune? Don't you have someplace else you'd rather be? Aren't you tired of sitting in the car?

But this debate is a potential car crash I have to stare down.

I'm not sure which one of them is going to cause the crash. Both are eminently capable of imploding their own campaigns.

Clinton is spending days preparing. She's going over every possible scenario. She has stand-ins for Trump. Reportedly she is preparing for well-behaved Trump and for shoot-from-the-hip, anything-goes Trump. She's spent the past several days off the campaign trail preparing for what very well might be the most pivotal event in this election.

Trump is preparing in his own way. He believes that over-preparing can make a candidate seem stilted and unnatural. His preparations reportedly are on the plane between campaign stops. And he's right. One can overthink what might happen in such a setting. Paralysis by analysis definitely is possible.

It will be fascinating to see how the approaches play out on Monday. The approaches certainly fit the candidates' personalities. The studious, bookworm-ish Clinton. The brash, constantly moving-and-shaking Trump.

One of the residual effects I'm going to look at from this first of three debates is how the local candidates react. Few are waving Trump or Clinton flags as they campaign, choosing to stick to their own messages and at least

trying to distance themselves from the presidential candidates. I don't blame them. There's not a lot to hang your hat on with such negative ratings of the two of them.

We have conducted a few of our endorsement interviews, hour-long discussions with candidates about why they believe they are the best person for the elected office for which they are running. And the presidential race hasn't come up once. (We will start making those interviews available on our website and over-the-top television devices as both candidates in a particular race conclude their interviews.)

Normally, the down-ballot candidates don't mind having their names associated with the presidential candidates, particularly if a popular incumbent is running. In this race, the candidates seem to be driving like I do when I come across a car crash — looking away and looking for an opening so I can get down the road as fast as possible.

This debate very well could be a pivot point. Both candidates vow to limit the histrionics that have marked the discourse so far. Both say they want to talk policy and what their leadership will mean to the country.

Should that happen — count me among the skeptics — will candidates start trying to ride any bounce Clinton or Trump might get from a policy-dominated debate? Or is the damage done so far just too great for that to happen?

I'm not convinced the debates will change a lot of minds. I think most people already know for whom they will vote. What it might do is allow people to admit who they're voting for to folks at work, at a relative's house or at a cocktail party. In such settings recently, I have found a real reticence to admit they will vote for this damaged candidate or that damaged candidate.

No one is going to blame you if you watch the Saints and Falcons because Drew Brees or Julio Jones might help you win your fantasy football game. It's plausible the debate turns into an unwatchable waste of time. But I've got a feeling Trump vs. Clinton will be more compelling.

Shane Fitzgerald is executive editor of the Bucks County Courier Times, the Doylestown Intelligencer and the Burlington County (N.J.) Times. 215-949-4160. 215-345-3118. 609-871-8157. Email: sfitzgerald@calkins.com. Twitter: @sfitzg5.



Shane Fitzgerald

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trump taking us back in time is scary

It pains me to think of the intellectual and emotional gymnastics needed for some Americans to convince themselves that Donald Trump is fit to be president of the United States.

The notion that he is the one who will "make America great again" puzzles me. I wonder just when in our history the "again" was? Apparently, his ardent supporters know when "again" was. So it was during the time slavery was the driving force in our economy or when women couldn't vote? Or was it when Jim Crow laws dominated the South and more subtle practices dominated the North? Maybe it was when workers had no rights and when gays and lesbians were routinely degraded? Or could it be the time when all eyes were closed to illegal immigrants as long as lettuce, tomatoes and the like arrived in our supermarkets at reasonable prices? Or could it be when women were denied reproductive rights over their own bodies?

The answer to the question is that there never was an "again." We have always been great, not because we were what we think we were, but because we keep on moving forward to become what we think we are.

We can thank the genius of our Founding Fathers for giving us the means to do so. It's been a messy journey, but slowly, and many times with much kicking and screaming, we are creating

one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The thought that the likes of Trump will take us back to some "again" that never existed is very scary. We are bound to get lost as a nation on our way back.

Constance Milligan
Mount Laurel

Ockanickon continues to improve kids' lives

I am on the board of directors and I chair the Financial Development Committee at YMCA Camp Ockanickon Inc. in Medford. It is a privilege to be a volunteer for Camp Ockanickon, because I feel strongly about the importance of giving back to an organization that gave so much to me and four generations of my family.

In 1937, the inaugural year of our girl's camp, Camp Matollionequay, my grandmother, Lillie Brown, was a counselor. Since then, my father and later my mother, my uncles, my brother and I, all my cousins and all of our children have attended camp and benefited from many of the programs. My camp family does not end with just my relatives. Most of my parents' and my friendships that still exist today began here at Ockanickon. I even met my husband here.

Why did our family keep returning year after year for almost 80 years? Well, camp is fun. And we learned stuff. We learned how to swim, paddle a canoe, build a fire, make a lanyard. And

while we were doing all those fun things, we were also strengthening our characters, gaining independence, overcoming shyness, learning to live with others, meeting people from all walks of life, and building lifelong friendships.

In the summer of 1955, my father was 15 years old and was a relief counselor (what we might now call an assistant counselor) at Camp Ockanickon. He was called home because his father passed away unexpectedly. After a few days, when the funeral was over, he chose to return to camp to help him grieve his loss. He recalled to me that it was the right thing to do, that his village chief, Dave Mitchell, and all his camp friends helped him through his difficult time.

When I was a painfully shy 7-year-old, my folks sent me to Matollionequay to help teach me how to not be so afraid of everything. And when my sister-in-law asked my advice on how to give her daughter confidence in a house full of brothers, the first thing I said was "send her to camp." My niece just completed her fourth summer at Matollionequay and is as confident as can be (and a green feather camper, too).

This camp was and still is our prescription for normalcy, safety, acceptance and confidence, and the experiences we had enhanced our lives in a profound way.

Why is my YMCA Camp Ockanickon story relevant? Because there are so many children, teens and families right here in our community and beyond who

would love to have these same experiences, who need them and deserve them, but cannot because they can't afford to do so. Therefore, it is our goal to raise \$293,000 this year to ensure that everyone, regardless of means, can experience the magic of camp through scholarships, financial assistance, military discounts and our specialty camp programs.

The annual Giving Campaign allows YMCA Camp Ockanickon to improve our community through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. As we kick off our campaign for 2016, know that the donations to camp have worked and will continue to work to enhance the lives of children, youths and families in our community and beyond.

To donate, contact suzette@ycamp.org or call 609-654-8225. Lynne Stanwood-Leadbeater YMCA Camp Ockanickon Inc. Medford

Letters to the Editor

Letters submitted to the Burlington County Times must include the name, address and daytime phone number of the writer. Letters may be edited for length, clarity and taste. Because of space limitations, letters should be limited to about 300 words.

To submit a letter by mail, address it to: Letter to the Editor, Burlington County Times, 4284 Route 130, Willingboro, NJ 08046.

To fax a letter, dial 609-871-0490.

To submit a letter by email, send it to bctletters@calkins.com

THE VENT

Send your comments of 25 words or less via email to bctletters@calkins.com with the subject of BURLINGTON VENT. Comments may also be mailed to the address under "Letters to the Editor." Full names and hometowns required.

If the thrice-married Donald Trump gets elected (God forbid), will Melania be called the third lady?

Richard Zanoni, Edgewater Park

Bayer purchased Monsanto. I guess if you call your doctor, he'll tell you to eat an ear of corn and call him in the morning.

Chuck Taylor, Hainesport

Donald Trump, the GOP's 2016 version of Sarah Palin, proving, without any reasonable doubt, you can't fix stupid.

Harvey Sackner, Willingboro

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