

COMMENTARY

The name game



Well, well, well, well. Sheriff Michael Joseph Scott and Senator Barack Hussein Obama. What's in a name? A lot. We know about Sen. Obama, but let's take a look at what Sheriff Scott tells us about himself. Born here. Father a general contractor. Went to North Fort Myers High School and the University of South Florida (political science degree). Grandfather was a Yankee terrorist who invaded Lee County from New York 98 years ago, in 1910. "People could say running for sheriff took either courage, ignorance, or a combination of both," Sheriff Scott announces on a Web site, www.sheriffleefl.org. Maybe. But ignorance is being uneducated, unaware or uninformed, and courage is the capacity to face danger, fear or vicissitudes with self-possession, I'm told. Neither comes equipped with morality or ethics. There were courageous Nazis and courageous Japanese soldiers, and they committed horrific crimes. Osama bin Laden has courage (narrowly defined). But as for Sheriff Scott, there is nothing about appearing in front of people that seems to scare him, so doing it is not a test or a proof of his courage.

On the contrary, he relishes public life, from what I can see. That started early, the Web site says. "He joined the Lee County Sheriff's Office in 1988, serving as a public information officer and Southwest Florida CrimeStoppers coordinator until he resigned in April 2003 to run for sheriff. He also served as motorcycle deputy in the Traffic Unit." In those jobs he had to look good. And Sheriff Scott does look good. Good and eccentric, with his teeth and his top-head gleaming like a Hollywood night above the green polyester of the sheriff's department uniform. The Web site also offers this comment: "I have every intention of doing a job that I can be proud of." Great. But that's his business. We should be able to feel proud of him whatever his level of self-esteem. He works for us, and we pay him about \$151,000. Apparently the sheriff is very well educated. The Web site biography takes the voice of the third-person singular, a classic, 2,000-year-old rhetorical technique: "He didn't always want to be in law enforcement, though; he had intended on becoming a dentist, until advanced chemistry classes at the University of South Florida made him think otherwise." Clearly, Sheriff Scott retains an appreciation for glittering dental architecture. But the larger point is that Julius Caesar did this, too, in his famous book, "The Gallic Wars," in which he came, he saw and he conquered. If Sheriff Scott wrote the Web site copy about himself, like Caesar, it suggests he is not ignorant. But back to the third-person singular: "Scott later earned his master of business administration degree from IMPAC Uni-

versity." IMPAC stands for Improved Management Productivity and Control. It was founded as a corporation beginning in 1972, according to its Web site, and it became a "university" in 1998 — one called IMPAC, LLC (Limited Liability Corporation), a distance-learning outfit based in Punta Gorda. IMPAC lost its accreditation in March from the Distance Education & Training Council, but was allowed to continue claiming accreditation until it can challenge that ruling. For leadership inspiration, Scott says he "looks to" Rudolph Giuliani, Colin Powell and H. Norman Schwarzkopf. That's good. Uniform-wearers in two cases, like Scott. And honorable ones, for the most part (Mr. Powell lied to the U.N. for President Bush about WMDs in Iraq, and then he quit, ushering in the Rumsfeld catastrophe, an ignominious conclusion to an otherwise honorable career). Sheriff Scott also cites with pride the tenures of former sheriffs Flanders "Snag" Thompson, Frank Wanika and John McDougall. Sheriff McDougall, Sheriff Scott's one-time boss, knew how to get the national spotlight, like Sheriff Scott. He was an anti-abortion activist who used his office to appear on the Today show and voice his opinions. Finally, Sheriff Scott has earned some "accolades" over the years, his Web site says. The language is classic management stock, praising him for "implementation of," "formation of," "to combat," "to reduce," "to respond to," and "for a county-wide team approach." Unquestionably, he's very good at all of that, which is good for us. But nowhere does it say, "Standing tall and alone, Sheriff Scott shot Black Jack Hussein McQuack and 16 of his heavily armed

companions in the left kneecaps with his Colt .45, even though it only held 10 rounds. Then he brought them to justice, where he insisted they receive a fair trial from a jury of 12 good Americans and true." And it does not say that when a mob invaded the jail, Sheriff Scott defended Black Jack Hussein McQuack, and would have died defending him even though his little lady threatened to leave town if he did. Well, that's all right. Neither did Sheriff J.E. Albitron, on May 25, 1924, when Sheriff Scott's family had already been in Lee County for 14 years. That was the day two black boys, R.J. Johnson and Milton Watson, ages 14 and 15, were tortured, castrated, dragged through town and lynched from a tree near what's now the STARS complex on Edison Avenue. Then they were shot. That was on a rape claim from a passerby, who saw them swimming in a farm pond with two friends of theirs, white girls. Many eyewitnesses confirmed the atrocities but no one was ever charged with a crime. One of the boys was kidnapped from the jail, which Sheriff Albitron surrendered to the mob after being "overpowered," according to news reports at the time (other reports said the sheriff was conveniently absent). They were two of about 3,450 blacks who were lynched in America between 1882 and 1968, almost 2,800 of them in the South, according to Encyclopedia Britannica. As a correspondent aware of this history wrote to me last week, "Odd. Why would a white, Southern, sheriff in uniform think that there is anything objectionable about calling out a black man by his full name in what is clearly a mob scene?" He's another educated guy, and a Southerner, just like Sheriff Scott. Also a war veteran (Vietnam). Why indeed? ■



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