

Remembering The Battle of Athens (Tennessee)



by Armando Simón

“The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government.” – Thomas Jefferson

There is a little-known footnote of American history that deserves to be remembered these days: the Battle of Athens. The Battle of Athens did not take place in Greece, but in Tennessee (when Americans founded new towns, they often had a propensity of naming them after other cities (New Braunfels, Cairo, Paris, New York, New Amsterdam, Moscow), territories (New Jersey), and even countries (Palestine, Cuba, Norway)).

The Battle of Athens took place in 1946, but the groundwork took 10 years.

In 1936, the Democrats in Tennessee carried out voter fraud,

something that they have always been good at right to the [present](#), ever since Boss Tweed, though sporadically undertaken. The Democrat kingpin was an old fart named E. H. "Boss" Crump, and he chose Paul Cantrell to be "elected" sheriff of McMinn County by appealing to Democrats' traditional voter, the residents of cemeteries. Cantrell was then promoted (or "elected") to the state legislature in 1942 while his deputy, Pat Mansfield was promoted to sheriff. The Democratic legislature solidified its hold on the state by reducing the number of counties. Violent ex-convicts became deputies.

There was no organized opposition since the Democrats controlled the schools and the newspaper in McMinn County and elsewhere, so criticism was forbidden.

Throughout Democrat rule, there was a system in place where travelers on buses were pulled over, charged with a bogus offense (usually drunkenness) and fined. Over the years, the enormous sum (for the time) of \$300,00 was split up among the perpetrators. Illegal gambling and bootlegging were also permitted.

In 1946, for some reason, Cantrell and Mansfield were to switch places.

At the end of World War II, individual GIs would be either fined on bogus charges and/or ganged up on and beaten. A war veteran, Knox Henry, challenged Cantrell for the office of sheriff.

On election day, around 200 armed guards were present at polling stations. One poll watcher asked the ballot box to be opened prior to voting to make sure it was empty. He was arrested. Another man complained of irregularities and he was arrested. In the afternoon, an elderly black farmer was prevented from voting by one of the policemen who then hit the farmer with brass knuckles. The policeman then shot him in the

back.

A while later, Mansfield arrived and declared the voting over, and took the ballot box to the jail to be counted. Meanwhile, in another polling station an ineligible, underage girl was allowed to vote in spite of the poll watcher's objection. He was struck on the head with an object, kicked in the face while on the ground, and the ballot box taken to the jail.

At this point, the veterans began to arm themselves since citizens could own guns. Some others went to the nearby National Guard armory to arm themselves. That evening, several hundred assembled near the jail and demanded the return of the ballot boxes. The demand was refused and the GIs opened fire. The firefight lasted for hours. At one point, an ambulance drove up to the jail and the GIs halted fire; Cantrell and Mansfield escaped in the ambulance, leaving the rats to fend for themselves. The gunfire resumed.

Getting nowhere, dynamite was obtained and the door to the jailhouse blown open at which point the occupants surrendered.

Fraudulent ballots were discovered and when eliminated the opposition won easily. The former deputies either left town or were dismissed and the gambling dens destroyed.

Obviously, this event took place at a time when "toxic masculinity" was still acceptable.

Unfortunately, as so often happens, enthusiasm and determination for righteousness has a very short attention span. A few years later, Cantrell and Mansfield returned to the county and lived out their lives, without being held accountable for their crimes while "Boss" Crump continued his machinations. The Republican Party remained emasculated for many years.

Elsewhere, I have taken the minority view that the January 6 storming of the Capitol will ultimately be [seen](#) as having [been](#) America's Bastille Day.

I still do.

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