

A Repeat of the Battle Athens, TN?



By Paul Engel

Edmund Burke said “Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it.” As I read the reports of questionable vote counting practices, if not actual fraud, I am eerily reminded of a part of our past I’m sure most Americans would not like to repeat.

In the small town of Athens, the seat of McMinn county in eastern Tennessee, an election was held in 1946. With a history of investigations into election fraud that were never resolved and multiple claims of vote tampering on both sides, the news could just as easily be describing the Presidential election of 2020.

Many veterans had returned from the battlefields of World War II to find that their county was being run by a corrupt political machine. After fighting for the rights of their fellow citizens abroad, they decided to fight for them again at home. Several of these veterans ran for political office in direct opposition to the county’s political machine. To say the least, the campaigns were contentious. Accusations of stuffing ballot boxes, bringing in people from other counties for assistance, and even calls to the federal government were part of the lead up to election day.

Trouble began early on election day, 1946, with the largest voter turnout in local history. Legally appointed poll watchers were arrested for protesting voting irregularities and people were denied the opportunity to vote while illegal

votes were allowed to be cast. Voting was even suspended in some precincts after poll watchers challenged illegal voting processes.

Trouble also began early on election day 2020. Even before election day, disputes over voting procedures, primary elections that were delayed due to problems counting votes, and even reports of ballots being disposed of or hoarded, all pointed to a challenging election day.

When the polls closed in 1946, county officials hid away in the jail in order to count ballots without any prying eyes. In certain counties in 2020, counters worked behind closed doors, had poll watchers removed, or prevented them from entering to observe the process. In one instance caught on video, the windows of the counting room were covered over to prevent the observation of the count. In Pennsylvania, several counties mixed late mail-in ballots with legitimate ones, in violation of a supreme court order, thus spoiling the entire election in that county.

In both 1946 and 2020, the election had turned into a powder keg just waiting for a match to set it off.

In 1946, several county officials locked themselves inside the jail and posted armed deputies outside to guard them while they counted the ballots. No poll watchers, no observers of any kind, were allowed into the jail during the vote count. Even if they were not changing any of the ballots, these violations of a free and fair election were intolerable and the veterans were sure that the election was being stolen. Not just their rights, but the rights of every citizen of McMinn county were being taken away in the county jail. While most people felt powerless to protect their rights, these veterans did not. As one of the organizers is quoted as saying:

You call yourselves GIs—you go over there and fight for three and four years—you come back and you let a bunch of

draft dodgers who stayed here where it was safe, and you were making it safe for them, push you around. ... If you people don't stop this, and now is the time and place, you people wouldn't make a pimple on a fighting GI's a**. Get guns!" Bill White – The Battle of Athens, American Heritage Magazine, Volume 36, Issue 2

If the election, their very right to self-government, was being stolen while other stood by and watched, these men decided to do something about it. The veterans armed themselves, surrounded the jail, and demanded that those inside come out with the ballots. At some point a significant firefright broke out. Around 2:30AM two of the three county officials in the jail escaped in an ambulance that the veterans had allowed in and out to evacuate wounded deputies. Finally, at 3:30AM, the remaining deputies surrendered. What was found inside were tally sheets reporting 15 to 1 for the machine's candidate for Sheriff. In an ironic twist, the veterans who had battled the deputies then had to guard them from the very townsfolk they had been terrorizing for years.

I fear Mr. Burke was right. Many of the county officials in America today have made the same mistakes those in McMinn county in the 1940s did. While the techniques may have changed, the allowing of illegal voting and the secret counting of ballots are reminiscent of what led to The Battle of Athens, TN. How long before some in America are so fed up with the secrecy and lies that they see no other option than to "get guns"? To hold their elected county officials accountable with force of arms? The truly sad thing about the disaster that the 2020 election has become is that it could have easily been avoided.

Just as in McMinn county in 1946, instances of voter fraud have been reported in elections for years. And while many in the media and politics claimed there was no evidence of widespread voter fraud, that small weed in the garden of liberty has grown to the point where it chokes out even the hardest

of our freedoms. Every fraudulently cast or destroyed ballot steals the right to vote from another American. Every count done in secret steals from the people the confidence in the election process. And every time one of those thefts is dismissed as unimportant, another brick is taken out of the bulwarks of our rights and liberties in America.

As I said earlier, this could have easily been avoided. The county election officials all work for the people of that county. Board members are elected, and they in turn hire and oversee poll workers. If you hired a store manager and found out they were allowing the employees to steal, wouldn't you fire them? Then why didn't the citizens of these counties fire these officials? When those in politics brushed off claims of fraud as unimportant, why didn't the people fire them as well? And when those in media suggested that claims of voter fraud were not worth dealing with, why did the American people ever listen to them again? Could it be that the American people just don't care? Could the siren song of "the ends justify the means" have lured us onto the rocks of utilitarianism? We have hired charlatans and frauds to work in our governments and to exercise sovereign power in our name. And now we are shocked, SHOCKED, that they steal and defraud us of our rights? That guilt may belong to those who are stealing our elections, but the responsibility rests squarely on the American people who have put them in position to do so. As James A. Garfield states at the nation's centennial:

Now more than ever before, the people are responsible for the character of their Congress. If that body be ignorant, reckless and corrupt, it is because the people tolerate ignorance, recklessness and corruption. If it be intelligent, brave and pure, it is because the people demand these high qualities to represent them in the national legislature ... If the next centennial does not find us a great nation...it will be because those who represent the enterprise, the culture, and the morality of the nation

do not aid in controlling the political forces. James A. Garfield – U.S. Centennial

Was Mr. Burke correct? Have we become so ignorant of our history that we are doomed to repeat it? There is a fight going on for the future of this nation. My question to you is, are you willing to fight it today at the ballot box, or will you doom our children to fight on the battlefield? Because history shows another quote from Mr. Burke to be just as true.

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. –Edmund Burke

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[BIO: No bio was provided from Paul Engel]