



# CENTER CITY

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MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

OCTOBER 23, 1974

## Happy Birthday Mr. Crump

(OCTOBER 2, 1874)

by  
Don Donati

Edward Hull Crump, the spirit of Memphis, was indeed in a real way Memphis itself. Today his life grows to legendary proportions; his legend continues to amuse, inspire, anger and perplex the inhabitants of this town.

Crump was a true Southern specimen; his nascent state was steeped in the agony of an impoverished Old South. In the lethargic color of Northern Mississippi his bucolic genius was nurtured on hard work, paternal protection, courtly propriety, combativeness and a dramatic demeanor. For the ambitious young Crump who was bent on a mercantile existence, the rural reins of Mississippi did not adequately provide opportunity for his boundless energy. Consequently, like generations of adventurous Southerners before him, Crump was lured to the lustre of the luxurious and prosperous metropolis of Memphis.

### ORDER WITHIN DISORDER

In 1894 Memphis was still riding the industrial boom which had miraculously raised the debilitated city from the near mortal blow of the yellow fever epidemics. The world that Crump entered when he arrived at the Poplar Depot was a chaotic one. Memphis was in flux, wildly expanding in a directionless and leaderless manner. The easygoing river town had always had a violent flair, but in the 1890's, with the movement of thousands of rural

emigrants into an urban atmosphere, lawlessness so exasperated the COMMERCIAL APPEAL that it decried: "...Killing is the most thriving industry in this part of the country."

The inevitability of the union between Crump and Memphis seems readily apparent: there was an irresistible affection and dependence, one upon the other. The rowdy, graft-ridden river town was craving leadership and direction. The analytical, efficient Crump, obsessed with the struggle of wresting order from disorder, was challenged by his nature to meet the tasks of the city. His lifelong obsession with order and efficiency is best expressed in his favorite aphorism: "Plan your work and work your plan."

### MR. CRUMP

In the 20's Crump tactfully consolidated his organization by selecting capable, respected citizens to become the titular leaders of his political apparatus. He was now Boss--the benevolent despot. At this time his public mystique began to evolve from the fiery, impulsive "Red Snapper" to the deliberate, judicious "Mr. Crump."

During the Crump era, the muddled head of officialdom was noticeably absent. His organization smoothly solved the collective and individual woes of Memphians without the cumbersome bureaucratic morass which so often is government.

The system was understood: all power ultimately rested with and flowed from Mr. Crump, not the people.

Memphians willfully acquiesced to his grandiose plan. Despotism was abnegational: apathetic obeisance was the tenor of the people. Citizens were satisfied with the treats of Crump's benevolence—low taxes, budget surplus, honesty, good schools, excellent parks and economic growth.

Peace reigned over the Memphis plantation, the citizen-slaves were gleeful, and the Boss was majestic.

Whenever citizens were downtown on a busy streetcorner they anticipated a meeting with the tall, erect, dandified boss, who like a chronic walker would stroll around his domain with a grandpappy grin, exchanging the pleasantries of "Hi ya, boy," and "Mornin' Miss Sue." His white mane which once flamed in orange terror now cascaded about the contours of his owlish facade, fronted by black, bushy brows that would rise in scorn and descend in disdain. On any of these walks a citizen could easily catch the ear of the amiable Boss to air a complaint, which the Boss would soothe with decisive and often ruthless action.

Mr. Crump was a public spectacle, and he loved to stage public spectacles which would placate and endear his fiefdom through vicarious enjoyment. There was "Crump Day" at the fair, "Crump Day" at the circus, boat excursions for the confined, sporting events at Crump Stadium, and in the Spring of 1940, there was "Memphis Day" at the races. Mr. Crump rented a thirty-one coach train, filled it with a thousand Crumpites and journeyed to Hot Springs for a day of fun and chance. The Crump caravan was such a uniquely blatant affair that LIFE MAGAZINE was prompted to produce a four page pictorial essay of the Crump carnival.

Combativeness was a Memphis passion and it was a true Crump *forte*. Mr. Crump was the *maestro* of the art of invective and abuse. He skillfully gratified the mass' combative needs with vitriolic barrages of verbal vehemence cast callously with a comic irony on political opponents. The Boss entertained neither innuendo nor aspersion; never mincing words nor wasting breath, his efforts were jugular, calculated for fatality.

An awesome power of recollection provided Crump with his most potent manipulative weapon: psychological terror. The story persisted—no doubt furiously fostered by the machine—that Crump maintained an intricate system of spies to report to him on the activities, especially the voting actions, of every Shelby Countian. The amazing recall of his memory lent credence to the imaginative design of cloak and dagger intrigue. Daily, perplexed

citizens would marvel at his surname greetings to hundreds of people. They reasoned that a surveillance scheme must exist since no mortal is endowed with such powers. Despite the popular belief, no system of spies seems to have existed; however, the public fear did exist.

Mr. Crump was inflexibly willful, even obstinant. The Boss would never desert a friend nor forgive an enemy. He would "go to the bridge" —all the way—for a friend; however, if he sensed that he had been forsaken, he would mercilessly send the Judas to political or social oblivion.

Throughout his public life Mr. Crump continuously "went to the bridge" for Memphis. He did so honestly, but despotically; yet, he never forsook Memphis for avarice. And Memphis never abandoned the Boss for the troublesome burden of full political participation.



Edward Hull Crump  
"The Red Snapper"

# The Trial of Wm. Peterson

## Part 3

by J. T. L. Sneed, Esq.

Reprinted from the MEMPHIS DAILY APPEAL  
November 29, 1855.

In the conflict of mind between his commiseration for the father and sisters of Peterson, and his eagerness to bring to punishment the murderer of his brother, he determined still further to investigate the matter before he had Peterson arrested; and the purpose of his seeking him was to examine his wardrobe, and if possible still further to satisfy himself of his guilt. About eleven o'clock at night, the party alighted at the hotel at Grenada, where Peterson was said to be sojourning. Peterson had retired to bed, and they were shown to his room; the light shone instantly upon his face as the party entered, and he was discovered to be apparently asleep – this, however, upon closer inspection of his half-closed eyes and trembling eye-lids, was evidently feigned. He was touched by one of the party and told that they had come to arrest him on a charge of murder, committed in the city of St. Louis. He instantly arose and said he was prepared to answer the charge. His eyes, in glancing upon the faces of the party, fell upon the pallid and excited face of William Merriweather, whom he had never seen before, upon which his gaze for a moment was fixed – then his head dropped upon his breast, and he sighed deeply. Mr. Merriweather asked him for the key of his trunk, which he gave him; the trunk was opened, and Mr. Merriweather proceeded to inspect the articles it contained. He recognized at once a pair of pantaloons of rare texture, and some shirts and a vest which he believed to be his brother's. But fearing still that he might peradventure be mistaken in opinion, he determined still further to look into the contents of the trunk, when he found a pair of socks resembling a pair his brother had taken with him, one of which was marked with his own initials, and the other with those of his brother. Upon the discovery he was overwhelmed with the conviction that he was in the presence of the murderer of his brother—actuated by a sudden and natural impulse of resentment, he drew a pistol from his bosom and placed the muzzle at the heart of Peterson, exclaiming, "You, sir, have murdered my poor brother," but instantly collecting himself, he observed, "but no, vengeance belongs to God and to the law; your blood shall not be upon my skirts!" William Peterson was then arrested upon the charge of murder. The person and the trunk of the

prisoner were then carefully searched for the knife of the deceased, but it could no where be found. Nothing was said to him however, in reference to the knife—and it was at no time intimated to him that the deceased had a knife when he left his home. Upon the person of the prisoner was found about one hundred dollars in money, and a promissory note for twenty-five dollars, executed to him in part payment for the horse by the gentleman who had purchased him. Some pistols were also found in his possession, one of which had an octagon barrel. The prisoner stoutly denied the killing of Merriweather, but said he knew who did it; and although he was indirectly concerned in it, yet he was eight miles from the scene of the murder when it was committed.

He was asked what were his purposes of life, if he had not been detected in this robbery; he replied with a cruel *naivet*, that he had intended to continue the business until he had accumulated a fortune, and then retire from the practice. About two days after his arrest, William Merriweather took out his own knife in the presence of the prisoner, and held it up by the blade before him, in silence. The prisoner gazed earnestly at it for a moment, and observed, "that is not your brother's knife, sir." Soon afterwards he was taken to Shelby county to be lodged in jail to await his trial. In passing by the scene of the murder he was observed to turn deadly pale, and to gaze fixedly in an opposite direction from that in which the body had been found. He was indicted in the Circuit Court at Raleigh not as accessory, but as the actual murderer of Thomas Merriweather. The bill of indictment contains but one count, alledging the homicide to have been committed with a knife. When put upon his trial and charged upon the bill of indictment he plead not guilty thereto, and a jury was empanelled to try the issue.

In trials of so grave a character, the law in its mercy, requires the proof of every circumstance necessary to constitute the guilt of the accused, to be established so clearly in the minds of the jury as to exclude every possible hypothesis of his probable innocence. In the mutilated condition of the body when found, which had been exposed for five or six weeks in the open wood, to rough weather and furious rains, with its head severed from it, and every bone well nigh denuded of flesh—the proof of its identity became a most delicate question. The testimony of William Merriweather, who had exhumed and examined it, as to his belief that it was the body of his brother, from the color of the hair and the appearance of the plugged teeth, but who also testified that several of the

## THE TRIAL OF WM. PETERSON, CONTINUED

front teeth had been lost since he had seen his brother living, and could no where be found, was wholly insufficient for this purpose, and tended rather to obscure than to elucidate the point in question.

*(To be continued next week.)*

## Announcements

October 29, Joe Sills will speak at 200 Clough Hall on the Southwestern Campus.  
(Anniversary of Founding of United Nations)

“Meet Me In The Middle”  
UT Student-Alumni Center Auditorium

October 30, Rev. Christine Hollingsworth on  
“Is Discrimination A Sin?” at noon;  
November 6, Ms. Pamela Hazen on  
“The Dynamics of Rape” at noon.

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October 24, United Nations Day, has been designated by the U.N. this year as World Population Day. A group of concerned citizens and organizations, such as Planned Parenthood, the League of Women Voters, Boys Club, the Sierra Club, the YMCA, Le Moyne Owen's Center for Environmental Studies, and the U.N. Association, are planning activities to focus public attention on the world overpopulation and food scarcity problems. There is to be a gathering for a speech by a population expert at City Hall Plaza at noon, October 24.

### *Center City*

First Presbyterian Church  
166 Poplar Avenue  
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

## Memphis Film Series

UT

October 25 – “Klute”

Memphis Public Library

October 25 – “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari”

MSU

October 28 – “The Three Sisters”

Lyceum Film Theatre

October 29 – “One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich”

UT

November 1 – “Jules et Jim”

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### CIVIC CENTER COMMUNITY CULINARY CLUB

*Serving from 11:30 to 1:00*

*First Presbyterian Church, 166 Poplar Avenue*

*PRICE: \$1.25 per serving, including drink*

**MENU FOR October 24 - November 1**

**THURSDAY, October 24**

*Corned Beef, scalloped cabbage, buttered potatoes, corn bread*

**FRIDAY, October 25**

*Beef stew, tossed salad, and corn bread*

**MONDAY, October 26**

*Chopped steak with onion gray, whipped potatoes & green beans & rolls*

**TUESDAY, October 29**

*Macaroni & cheese, turnip greens, corn on the cob, beets & onions & corn bread*

**WEDNESDAY, October 30**

*Spaghetti, cole slaw and French Bread*

**THURSDAY, October 31**

*Turkey & Dressing, English peas, cranberry sauce & rolls*

**FRIDAY, November 1**

*Meat Loaf, potatoes au gratin, lima beans & rolls*

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postage paid at  
Memphis, Tennessee*