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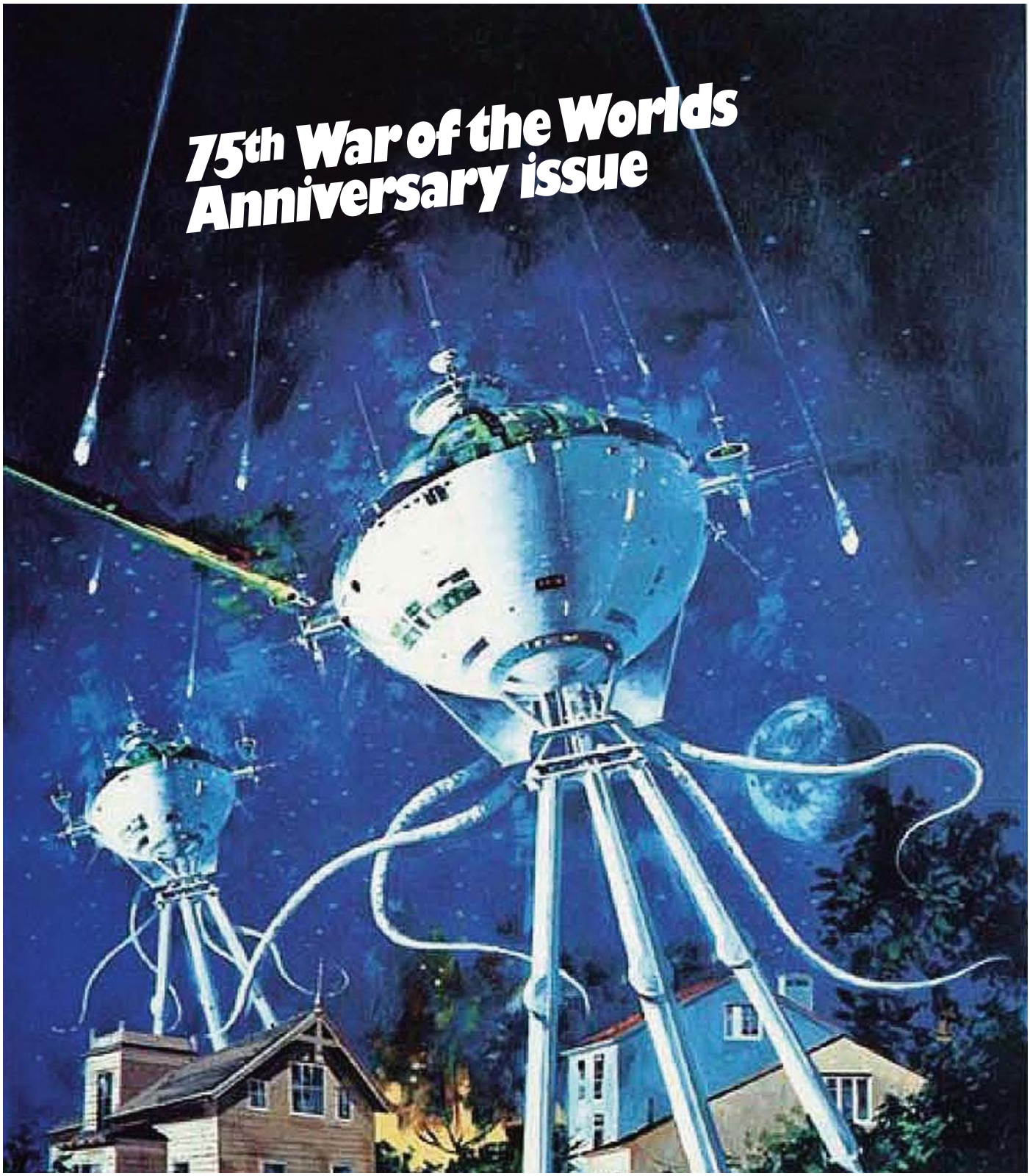


Radio Listeners in Panic, Taking War Drama as Fact

Many Flee Homes to Escape 'Gas Raid From Mars'—Phone Calls Swamp Police at Broadcast of Wells Fantasy

This article appeared in the New York Times on Oct. 31, 1938.

A wave of mass hysteria seized thousands of radio listeners between 8:15 and 9:30 o'clock last night when a broadcast of a dramatization of H. G. Wells's fantasy, *"The War of the Worlds,"* led thousands to believe that an interplanetary conflict had started with invading Martians spreading wide death and destruction in New Jersey and New York.

The broadcast, which disrupted households, interrupted religious services, created traffic jams and clogged communications systems, was made by Orson Welles, who as the radio character, *"The Shadow,"* used to give "the creeps" to countless child listeners. This time at least a score of adults required medical treatment for shock and hysteria.

In Newark, in a single block at Heddon Terrace and Hawthorne Avenue, more than twenty families rushed out of their houses with wet handkerchiefs and towels over their faces to flee from what they believed was to be a gas raid. Some began moving household furniture.

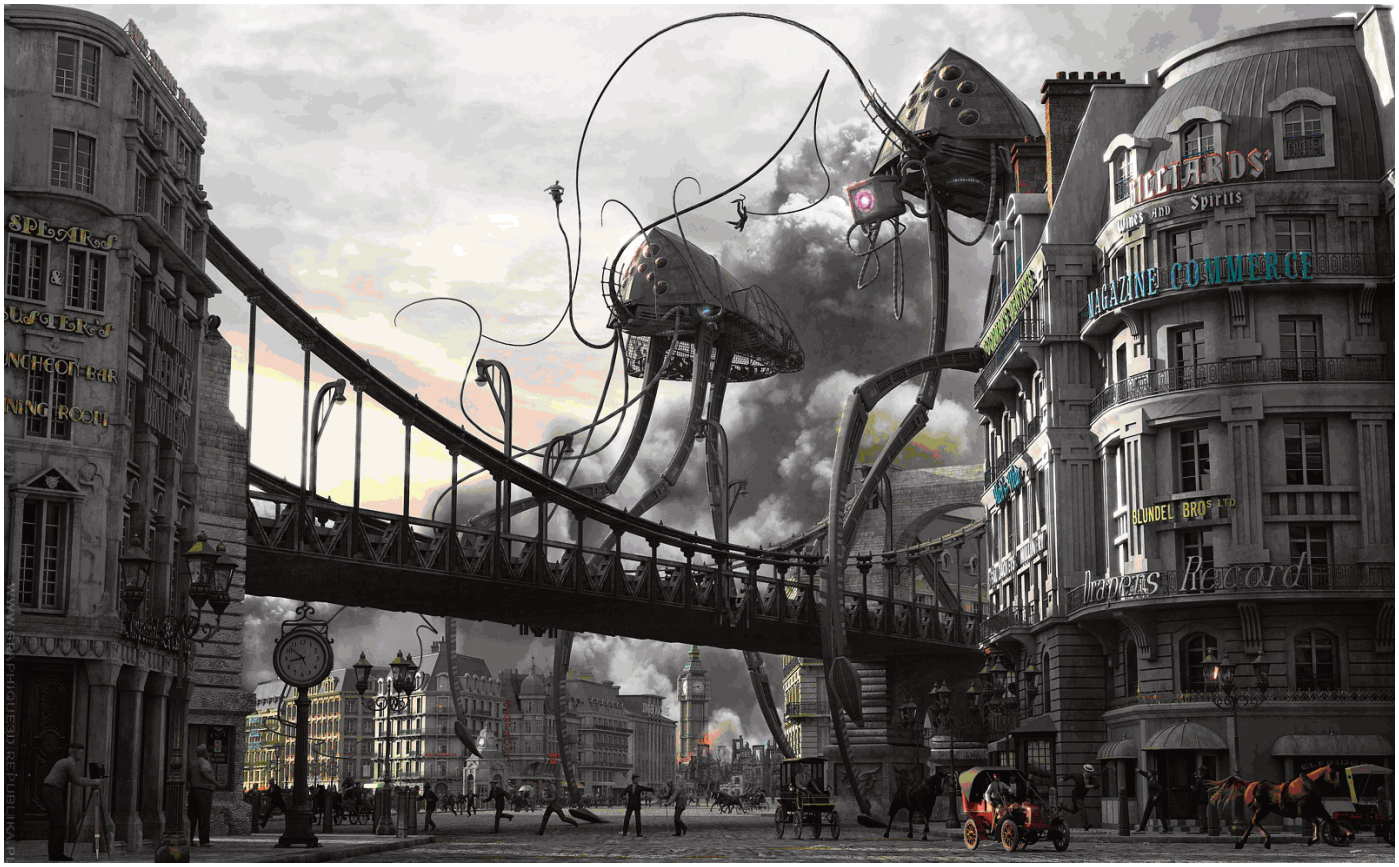
Throughout New York families left their homes, some to flee to near-by parks. Thousands of persons called the police, newspapers and radio stations here and in other cities of the United States and Canada seeking advice on protective measures against the raids.

The program was produced by Mr. Welles and the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* over station WABC and the Columbia Broadcasting System's coast-to-coast network, from 8 to 9 o'clock.

The radio play, as presented, was to simulate a regular radio program with a "break-in" for the material of the play. The radio listeners, apparently, missed or did not listen to the introduction, which was: "The Columbia Broadcasting System and its affiliated stations present Orson Welles and the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* in *'The War of the Worlds'* by H. G. Wells."

They also failed to associate the program with the newspaper listening of the program, announced as "Today: 8:00-9:00—Play: H. G. Wells's *'War of the Worlds'*—WABC." They ignored three additional announcements made during the broadcast emphasizing its fictional nature.

Mr. Welles opened the program with a description of the series of which it is a part. The simulated program began. A weather report was given, prosaically. An announcer remarked that



the program would be continued from a hotel, with dance music. For a few moments a dance program was given in the usual manner. Then there was a "break-in" with a "flash" about a professor at an observatory noting a series of gas explosions on the planet Mars.

News bulletins and scene broadcasts followed, reporting, with the technique in which the radio had reported actual events, the landing of a "meteor" near Princeton N. J., "killing" 1,500 persons, the discovery that the "meteor" was a "metal cylinder" containing strange creatures from Mars armed with "death rays" to open hostilities against the inhabitants of the earth.

Despite the fantastic nature of the reported "occurrences," the program, coming after the recent war scare in Europe and a period in which the radio frequently had interrupted regularly scheduled programs to report developments in the Czechoslovak situation, caused fright and panic throughout the area of the broadcast.

Telephone lines were tied up with calls from listeners or persons who had heard of the broadcasts. Many sought first to verify the reports. But large numbers, obviously in a state of terror, asked how they could follow the broadcast's advice and flee from the city, whether they would be safer in the "gas raid" in the cellar or on the roof, how they could safeguard their children, and many of the questions which had been worrying residents of London and Paris during the tense days before the Munich agreement.

So many calls came to newspapers and so many newspapers found it advisable to check on the reports despite their fantastic content that The Associated Press sent out the following at 8:48 P. M.:

"Note to Editors: Queries to newspapers from radio listeners throughout the United

States tonight, regarding a reported meteor fall which killed a number of New Jerseyites, are the result of a studio dramatization. The A. P."

Similarly police teletype systems carried notices to all stationhouses, and police short-wave radio stations notified police radio cars that the event was imaginary.

Message From the Police

The New York police sent out the following:

"To all receivers: Station WABC informs us that the broadcast just concluded over that station was a dramatization of a play. No cause for alarm."

The New Jersey State Police teletyped the following:

"Note to all receivers—WABC broadcast as drama re this section being attacked by residents of Mars. Imaginary affair."

From one New York theatre a manager reported that a throng of playgoers had rushed from his theatre as a result of the broadcast. He said that the wives of two men in the audience, having heard the broadcast, called the theatre and insisted that their husbands be paged. This spread the "news" to others in the audience.

The switchboard of The New York Times was overwhelmed by the calls. A total of 875 were received. One man who called from Dayton, Ohio, asked, "What time will it be the end of the world?" A caller from the suburbs said he had had a houseful of guests and all had rushed out to the yard for safety.

Warren Dean, a member of the American Legion living in Manhattan, who telephoned to verify the "reports," expressed indignation which was typical of that of many callers.

"I've heard a lot of radio programs, but I've never heard anything as rotten as that," Mr. Dean said. "It was too realistic for comfort. They broke into a dance program with a news flash.

Everybody in my house was agitated by the news. It went on just like press radio news."

At 9 o'clock a woman walked into the West Forty-seventh Street police station dragging two children, all carrying extra clothing. She said she was ready to leave the city. Police persuaded her to stay.

A garbled version of the reports reached the Dixie Bus terminal, causing officials there to prepare to change their schedule on confirmation of "news" of an accident at Princeton on their New Jersey route. Miss Dorothy Brown at the terminal sought verification, however, when the caller refused to talk with the dispatcher, explaining to her that "the world is coming to an end and I have a lot to do."

Harlem Shaken By the "News"

Harlem was shaken by the "news." Thirty men and women rushed into the West 123d Street police station and twelve into the West 135th Street station saying they had their household goods packed and were all ready to leave Harlem if the police would tell them where to go to be "evacuated." One man insisted he had heard "the President's voice" over the radio advising all citizens to leave the cities.

The parlor churches in the Negro district, congregations of the smaller sects meeting on

the ground floors of brownstone houses, took the "news" in stride as less faithful parishioners rushed in with it, seeking spiritual consolation. Evening services became "end of the world" prayer meetings in some.

One man ran into the Wadsworth Avenue Police Station in Washington Heights, white with terror, crossing the Hudson River and asking what he should do. A man came in to the West 152d Street Station, seeking traffic directions. The broadcast became a rumor that spread through the district and many persons stood on street corners hoping for a sight of the "battle" in the skies.

In Queens the principal question asked of the switchboard operators at Police Headquarters was whether "the wave of poison gas will reach as far as Queens." Many said they were all packed up and ready to leave Queens when told to do so.

Samuel Tishman of 100 Riverside Drive was one of the multitude that fled into the street after hearing part of the program. He declared that hundreds of persons evacuated their homes fearing that the "city was being bombed."

"I came home at 9:15 P.M. just in time to receive a telephone call from my nephew who was frantic with fear. He told me the city was about to be bombed from the air and advised me to get out of the building at once. I turned on the radio and heard the broadcast which corroborated what my nephew had said, grabbed my hat and coat and a few personal belongings and ran to the elevator. When I got to the street there were hundreds of people milling around in panic. Most of us ran toward Broadway and it was not until we stopped taxi drivers who had heard the entire broadcast on their radios that we knew what it was all about. It was the most asinine stunt I ever heard of."

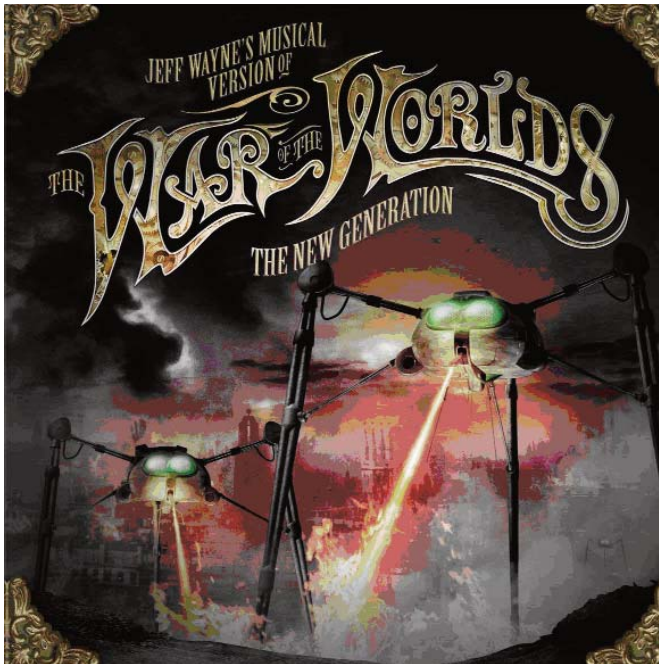
"I heard that broadcast and almost had a heart attack," said Louis Winkler of 322 Clay Avenue, the Bronx. "I didn't tune it in until the program was half over, but when I heard the names and titles of Federal, State and municipal officials and when the 'Secretary of the Interior' was introduced, I was convinced it was the McCoy. I ran out into the street with scores of others, and found people running in all directions. The whole thing came over as a news broadcast and in my mind it was a pretty crummy thing to do."

The Telegraph Bureau switchboard at police headquarters in Manhattan, operated by thirteen men, was so swamped with calls from apprehensive citizens inquiring about the broadcast that police business was seriously interfered with.

Headquarters, unable to reach the radio station by telephone, sent a radio patrol car there to ascertain the reason for the reaction to the program. When the explanation was given, a police message was sent to all precincts in the five boroughs advising the commands of the cause.

"They're Bombing New Jersey!"

Patrolman John Morrison was on duty at the



switchboard in the Bronx Police Headquarters when, as he afterward expressed it, all the lines became busy at once. Among the first who answered was a man who informed him:

"They're bombing New Jersey!"

"How do you know?" Patrolman Morrison inquired.

"I heard it on the radio," the voice at the other end of the wire replied. "Then I went to the roof and I could see the smoke from the bombs, drifting over toward New York. What shall I do?" The patrolman calmed the caller as well as he could, then answered other inquiries from persons who wanted to know whether the reports of a bombardment were true, and if so where they should take refuge.

At Brooklyn police headquarters, eight men assigned to the monitor switchboard estimated that they had answered more than 800 inquiries from persons who had been alarmed by the broadcast. A number of these, the police said, came from motorists who had heard the program over their car radios and were alarmed both for themselves and for persons at their homes. Also, the Brooklyn police reported, a preponderance of the calls seemed to come from women.

The National Broadcasting Company reported that men stationed at the WJZ transmitting station at Bound Brook, N. J., had received dozens of calls from residents of that area. The transmitting station communicated with New York and passed the information that there was no cause for alarm to the persons who inquired later.

Meanwhile the New York telephone operators of the company found their switchboards swamped with incoming demands for information, although the NBC system had no part in the program.

Record Westchester Calls

The State, county, parkway and local police in Westchester Counter were swamped also with calls from terrified residents. Of the local police departments, Mount Vernon, White Plains, Mount Kisco, Yonkers and Tarrytown received most of the inquiries. At first the authorities thought they were being made the victims of a practical joke, but when the calls persisted and increased in volume they began to make inquiries. The New York Telephone Company reported that it had never handled so many calls in one hour in years in Westchester.

One man called the Mount Vernon Police Headquarters to find out "where the forty policemen were killed"; another said he brother was ill in bed listening to the broadcast and when he heard the reports he got into an automobile and "disappeared." "I'm nearly crazy!" the caller exclaimed.

Because some of the inmates took the catastrophic reports seriously as they came over the radio, some of the hospitals and the county penitentiary ordered that the radios be turned off.

Thousands of calls came in to Newark Police Headquarters. These were not only from the terrorstricken. Hundreds of physicians and nurses, believing the reports to be true, called to volunteer their services to aid the "injured." City officials also called in to make "emergency" arrangements for the population. Radio cars were stopped by the panicky throughout that city.

Jersey City police headquarters received similar calls. One woman asked detective Timothy Grooty, on duty there, "Shall I close my windows?" A man asked, "Have the police any extra gas masks?" Many of the callers, on being assured the reports were fiction, queried again and again, uncertain in whom to believe.

Scores of persons in lower Newark Avenue, Jersey City, left their homes and stood fearfully in the street, looking with apprehension toward the sky. A radio car was dispatched there to reassure them.

The incident at Hedden Terrace and Hawthorne Avenue, in Newark, one of the most dramatic in the area, caused a tie-up in traffic for blocks around. the more than twenty families there apparently believed the "gas attack" had started, and so reported to the police. An ambulance, three radio cars and a police emergency squad of eight men were sent to the scene with full inhalator apparatus.

They found the families with wet cloths on faces contorted with hysteria. The police calmed them, halted those who were attempting to move their furniture on their cars and after a time were able to clear the traffic snarl.

At St. Michael's Hospital, High Street and Central Avenue, in the heart of the Newark industrial district, fifteen men and women were treated for shock and hysteria. In some cases it was necessary to give sedatives, and nurses and physicians sat down and talked with the more seriously affected.

While this was going on, three persons with children under treatment in the institution telephoned that they were taking them out and leaving the city, but their fears were calmed when hospital authorities explained what had happened.

A flickering of electric lights in Bergen County from about 6:15 to 6:30 last evening provided a build-up for the terror that was to ensue when the radio broadcast started.

Without going out entirely, the lights dimmed and brightened alternately and radio reception was also affected. The Public Service Gas and Electric Company was mystified by the behavior of the lights, declaring there was nothing wrong at their power plants or in their distributing system. A spokesman for the service department said a call was made to Newark and the same situation was reported. He believed, he said, that the condition was general throughout the State.

The New Jersey Bell Telephone Company reported that every central office in the State was flooded with calls for more than an hour

and the company did not have time to summon emergency operators to relieve the congestion. Hardest hit was the Trenton toll office, which handled calls from all over the East.

One of the radio reports, the statement about the mobilization of 7,000 national guardsmen in New Jersey, caused the armories of the Sussex and Essex troops to be swamped with calls from officers and men seeking information about the mobilization place.

Prayers for Deliverance

In Caldwell, N. J., an excited parishioner ran into the First Baptist Church during evening services and shouted that a meteor had fallen, showering death and destruction, and that North Jersey was threatened. The Rev. Thomas Thomas, the pastor quieted the congregation and all prayed for deliverance from the "catastrophe."

East Orange police headquarters received more than 200 calls from persons who wanted to know what to do to escape the "gas." Unaware of the broadcast, the switchboard operator tried to telephone Newark, but was unable to get the call through because the switchboard at Newark headquarters was tied up. The mystery was not cleared up until a teletype explanation had been received from Trenton.

More than 100 calls were received at Maplewood police headquarters and during the excitement two families of motorists, residents of New York City, arrived at the station to inquire how they were to get back to their homes now that the Pulaski Skyway had been blown up.

The women and children were crying and it took some time for the police to convince them that the catastrophe was fictitious. Many persons who called Maplewood said their neigh-

bors were packing their possessions and preparing to leave for the country.

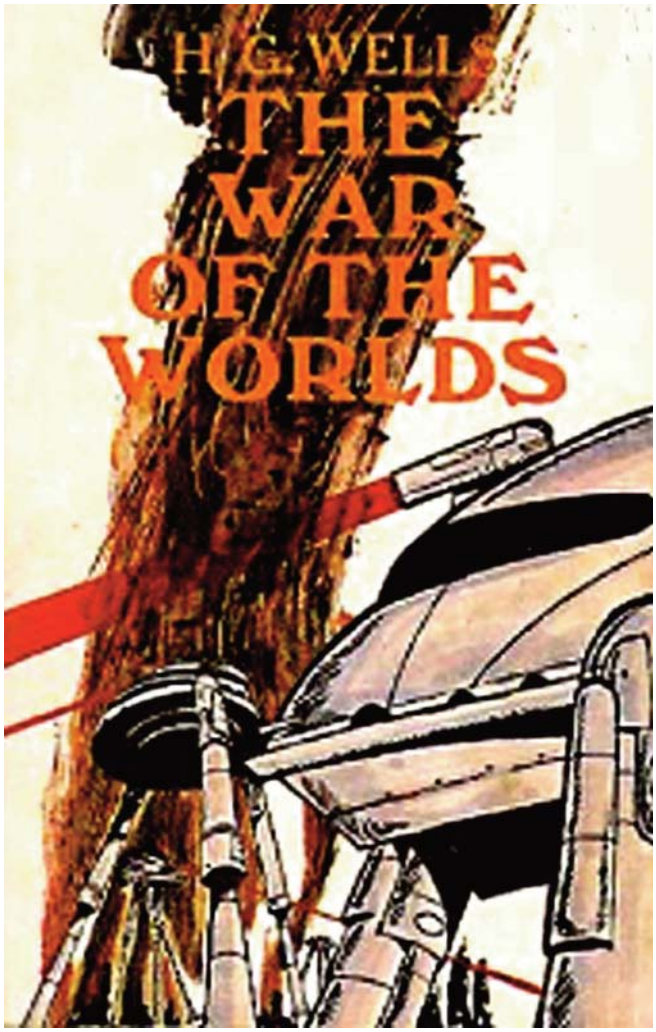
In Orange, N. J., an unidentified man rushed into the lobby of the Lido Theatre, a neighborhood motion picture house, with the intention of "warning" the audience that a meteor had fallen on Raymond Boulevard, Newark, and was spreading poisonous gases. Skeptical, Al Hochberg, manager of the theatre, prevented the man from entering the auditorium of the theatre and then called the police. He was informed that the radio broadcast was responsible for the man's alarm.

Emanuel Priola, bartender of a tavern at 442 Valley Road, West Orange, closed the place, sending away six customers, in the middle of the broadcast to "rescue" his wife and two children.

"At first I thought it was a lot of Buck Rogers stuff, but when a friend telephoned me that general orders had been issued to evacuate every one from the metropolitan area I put the customers out, closed the place and started to drive home," he said.

William H. Decker of 20 Aubrey Road, Montclair, N. J., denounced the broadcast as "a disgrace" and "an outrage," which he said had frightened hundreds of residents in his community, including children. He said he knew of one woman who ran into the street with her two children and asked for the help of neighbors in saving them.

"We were sitting in the living room casually listening to the radio," he said, "when we heard reports of a meteor falling near New Brunswick and reports that gas was spreading. Then there was an announcement of the Secretary of Interior from Washington who spoke of the happening as a major disaster. It was the worst thing I ever heard over the air."



Columbia Explains Broadcast

The Columbia Broadcasting System issued a statement saying that the adaptation of Mr. Wells's novel which was broadcast "followed the original closely, but to make the imaginary details more interesting to American listeners the adapter, Orson Welles, substituted an American locale for the English scenes of the story."

Pointing out that the fictional character of the broadcast had been announced four times and had been previously publicized, it continued:

"Nevertheless, the program apparently was produced with such vividness that some listeners who may have heard only fragments thought the broadcast was fact, not fiction.

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Written by Jay Hickerson December, 2012

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Hundreds of telephone calls reaching CBS stations, city authorities, newspaper offices and police headquarters in various cities testified to the mistaken belief.

"Naturally, it was neither Columbia's nor the Mercury Theatre's intention to mislead any one, and when it became evident that a part of the audience had been disturbed by the performance five announcements were read over the network later in the evening to reassure those listeners."

Expressing profound regret that his dramatic efforts should cause such consternation, Mr. Welles said: "I don't think we will choose anything like this again." He hesitated about presenting it, he disclosed, because "it was our thought that perhaps people might be bored or annoyed at hearing a tale so improbable."

Scare Is Nationwide

Broadcast Spreads Fear In New England, the South and West

Last night's radio "war scare" shocked thousands of men, women and children in the big cities throughout the country. Newspaper offices, police stations and radio stations were besieged with calls from anxious relatives of New Jersey residents, and in some places anxious groups discussed the impending menace of a disastrous war.

Most of the listeners who sought more information were widely confused over the reports they had heard, and many were indignant when they learned that fiction was the cause of their alarm.

In San Francisco the general impression of listeners seemed to be that an overwhelming force had invaded the United States from the air, was in the process of destroying New York and threatening to move westward. "My God," roared one inquirer into a telephone, "where can I volunteer my services? We've got to stop this awful thing."

Newspaper offices and radio stations in Chicago were swamped with telephone calls about the "meteor" that had fallen in New Jersey. Some said they had relatives in the "stricken area" and asked if the casualty list was available.

In parts of St. Louis men and women clustered in the streets in residential areas to discuss what they should do in the face of the sudden war. One suburban resident drove fifteen miles to a newspaper office to verify the radio "report."

In New Orleans a general impression prevailed that New Jersey had been devastated by the "invaders," but fewer inquiries were re-

ceived than in other cities.

In Baltimore a woman engaged passage on an airliner for New York, where her daughter is in school.

The Associated Press gathered the following reports of reaction to the broadcast:

At Fayetteville, N. C., people with relatives in the section of New Jersey where the mythical visitation had its locale went to a newspaper office in tears, seeking information.

A message from Providence, R. I., said: "Weeping and hysterical women swamped the switchboard of The Providence Journal for details of the massacre and destruction at New York, and officials of the electric company received scores of calls urging them to turn off all lights so that the city would be safe from the enemy."

Mass hysteria mounted so high in some cases that people told the police and newspapers they "saw" the invasion.

The Boston Globe told of one woman who claimed she could "see the fire," and said she and many others in her neighborhood were "getting out of here."

Minneapolis and St. Paul police switchboards were deluged with calls from frightened people.

The Times-Dispatch in Richmond, Va., reported some of their telephone calls from people who said they were "praying."

The Kansas City bureau of The Associated Press received inquiries on the "meteors" from Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, Beaumont, Texas, and St. Joseph, Mo., in addition to having its local switchboards flooded with calls. One telephone informant said he had loaded all his children into his car, had filled it with gasoline, and was going somewhere. "Where is it safe?" he wanted to know.

Atlanta reported that listeners throughout the

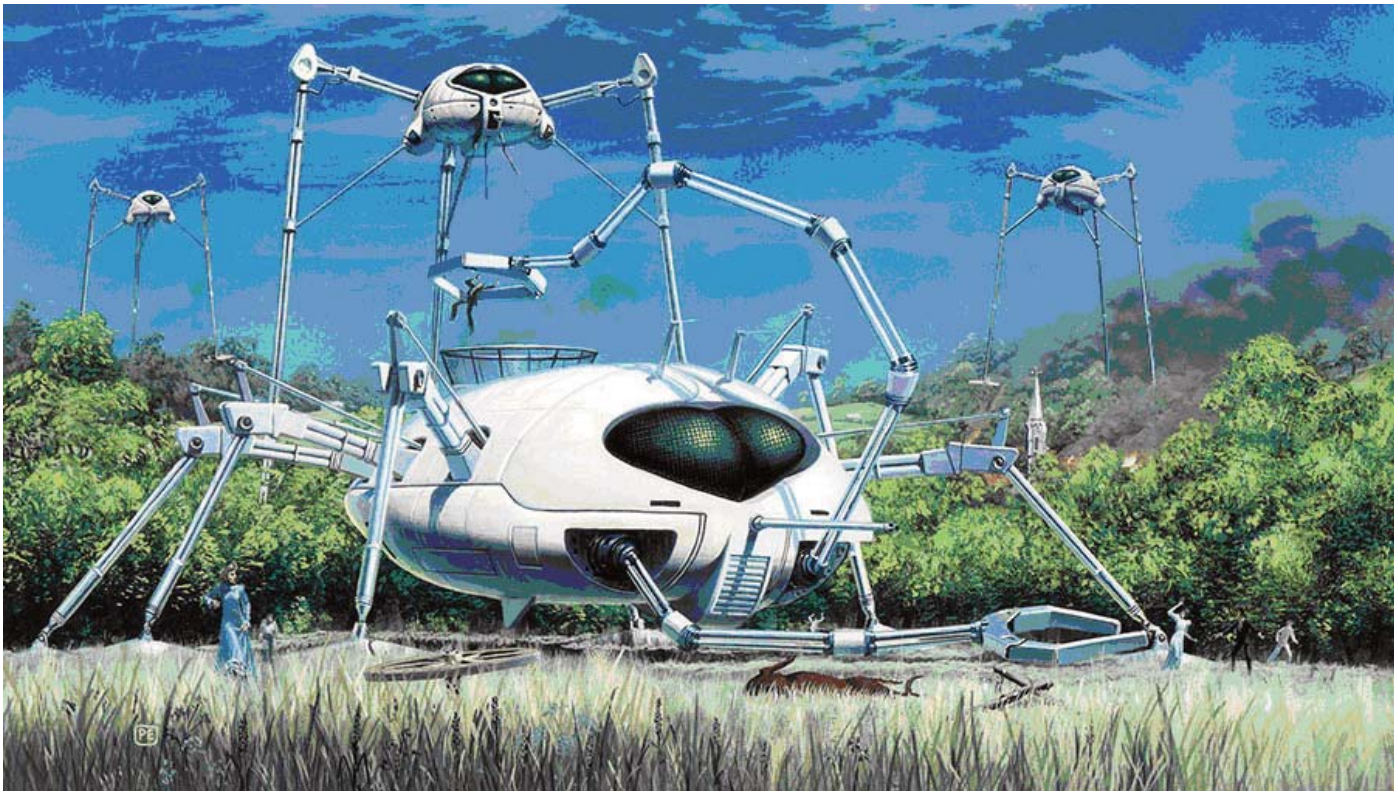
Southeast "had it that a planet struck in New Jersey, with monsters and almost everything and anywhere from 40 to 7,000 people reported killed." Editors said responsible persons, known to them, were among the anxious information seekers.

In Birmingham, Ala., people gathered in groups and prayed, and Memphis had its full quota of weeping women calling in to learn the facts.

In Indianapolis a woman ran into a church screaming: "New York destroyed; it's the end of the world. You might as well go home to die. I just heard it on the radio." Services were dismissed immediately.

Five students at Brevard College, N. C., fainted and panic gripped the campus for a half hour with many students fighting for telephones to ask their parents to come and get them.

A man in Pittsburgh said he returned home in the midst of the broadcast and found his wife



in the bathroom, a bottle of poison in her hand, and screaming: "I'd rather die this way than like that."

He calmed her, listened to the broadcast and then rushed to a telephone to get an explanation.

Officials of station CFRB, Toronto, said they never had had so many inquiries regarding a single broadcast, the Canadian Press reported.

Washington May Act

Review of Broadcast by the Federal Commission Possible

SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON, Oct. 30.—Informed of the furor created tonight by the broadcasting of Wells drama, "War of the Worlds," officials of the Federal Communications Commission indicated that the commission might review the broadcast.

The usual practice of the commission is not to investigate broadcasts unless formal demands for an inquiry are made, but the commission has the power, officials pointed out, to initiate proceedings where the public interest seems to warrant official action.

Geologists at Princeton Hunt 'Meteor' in Vain

SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES

PRINCETON, N. J., Oct 30.—Scholastic calm deserted Princeton University briefly tonight following widespread misunderstanding of the WABC radio program announcing the arrival of Martians to subdue the earth.

Dr. Arthur F. Buddington, chairman of the Department of Geology, and Dr. Harry Hess, Professor of Geology, received the first alarming reports in a form indicating that a meteor had fallen near Dutch Neck, some five miles away. They armed themselves with the necessary equipment and set out to find a specimen. All they found was a group of sightseers, searching like themselves for the meteor.

At least a dozen students received telephone calls from their parents, alarmed by the broadcast. The Daily Princetonian, campus newspaper, received numerous calls from students and alumni.

Mars Monsters Broadcast Will Not Be Repeated

Perpetrators of the Innovation Regret Causing of Public Alarm

WASHINGTON (AP) The radio industry viewed a hobgoblin more terrifying to it than any Halloween spook. The prospect of increasing federal control of broadcasts was discussed here as an aftermath of a radio presentation of an H. G. Wells' imaginative story which caused many listeners to believe that men from Mars had invaded the United States with death rays.

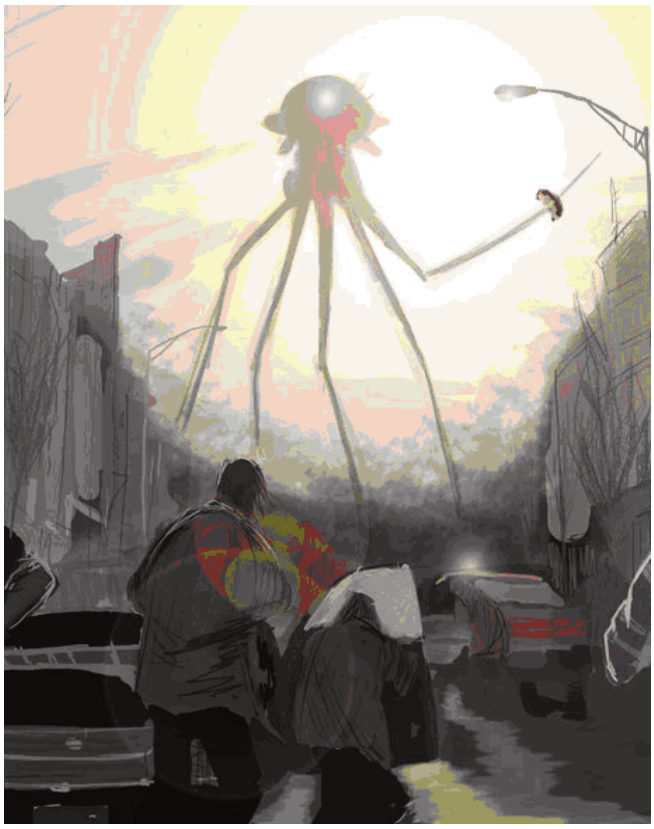
When reports of terror that accompanied the fantastic drama reached the communications commission there was a growing feeling that "something should be done about it." Commission officials explained that the law conferred upon it no general regulatory power over broadcasts. Certain specific offenses, such as obscenity, are forbidden, and the commission has the right to refuse license renewal to any station which has not been operating "in the public interest." All station licenses must be renewed every six months.

Within the commission there has developed strong opposition to using the public interest clause to impose restrictions upon programs. commissioner T. A. M. Craven has been particularly outspoken against anything resembling censorship and he repeated his warning that the commission should make no attempt at "censoring what shall or shall not be said over the radio."

"The public does not want a spineless radio," he said.

Objection to Terrorism.

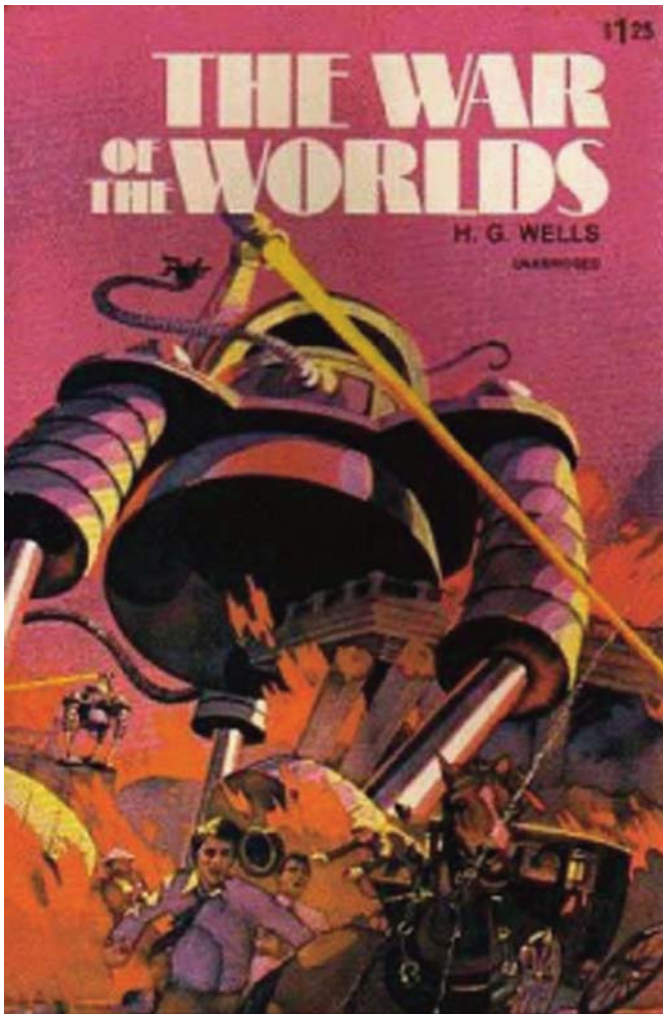
Commissioner George Henry Payne recalled that last November he had protested against broadcasts that "produced terrorism and nightmares among children" and said that for two years he had urged that there be a "standard of broadcasts. "



Saying that radio is an entirely different medium from the theater or lecture platform, Payne added: "People who have material broadcast into their homes without warnings have a right to protection. Too many broadcasters have insisted that they could broadcast anything they liked, contending that they were protected by the prohibition of censorship. Certainly when people are injured morally, physically, spiritually and psychically, they have just as much right to complain as if the laws against obscenity and indecency were violated."

The commission called upon Columbia Broadcasting system, which presented the fantasy, to submit a transcript and electrical recording of it. None of the commissioners who could be reached for comment had heard the program.

The broadcasters themselves were quick to give assurances that the technique used in the program would not be repeated. Orson Welles, who adapted "The War of the worlds,") ex-



pressed his regrets.

Told Story Imaginative.

The Columbia network called attention to the fact that on Sunday night it assured its listeners the story was wholly imaginary, and W. B. Lewis, its vice president in charge of programs, said: "In order that this may not happen again, the program department hereafter will not use the technique of a stimulated news broadcast within a dramatization when the circumstances of the broadcast could cause immediate alarm to numbers of listeners."

The National Association of Broadcasters, through its president, Neville Miller, expressed formal regret for the misinterpretation of the program. "This instance emphasizes the responsibility we assume in the use of radio and renews our determination to fulfill to the highest degree our obligation to the public,"

Miller said. "I know that the Columbia Broadcasting system and those of us in radio have only the most profound regret that the composure of many of our fellow citizens was disturbed by the vivid Orson Welles broadcast. The Columbia Broadcasting system has taken immediate steps to insure that such program technique will not be used again."

Chairman Frank R. McNinch, of the communications commission, declaring that he would withhold judgment of the program until later, said: "The widespread public reaction to this broadcast, as indicated by the press, is another demonstration of the power and force of radio and points out again the serious responsibility of those who are licensed to operate stations."

Demand Investigation.

NEW YORK (AP). Urgent demands for federal investigation multiplied in the wake of the ultra-realistic radio drama that spread mass hysteria among listeners across the nation with its "news broadcast" fantasy of octopus-like monsters from Mars invading the United States and annihilating cities and populaces with a lethal "heat ray."

While officials at the Harvard astronomical observatory calmed fears of such a conquest by space devouring hordes from another planet with the wry comment that there was no evidence of higher life existing on Mars—some 40,000,000 miles distant—local and federal officials acted to prevent a repetition of such a nightmarish episode.

As for the 22 year old "man from Mars" himself, Orson Welles, youthful actor manager and theatrical prodigy, whose vivid dramatization of H. G. Wells' imaginative "The War of the Worlds" jumped the pulse beat of radio listeners, declared himself "just stunned" by the reaction. "Everything seems like a dream," he said.

The Columbia Broadcasting system whose network sent the spine chilling dramatization into millions of homes issued a statement expressing "regrets" and announced that hereafter it would not use the "technique of a simulated news broadcast" which might "cause immediate alarm" among listeners.

Military Lesson Taught.

WASHINGTON (AP). Military experts here foresee, in time of war, radio loudspeakers in every public square in the United States and a system of voluntary self-regulation of radio. This is the lesson they draw from Sunday night's drama about an invasion by men from Mars armed with death rays.

What struck the military listeners most about the radio play was its immediate emotional effect. Thousands of persons believed a real invasion had been unleashed. They exhibited all the symptoms of fear, panic, determination to resist, desperation, bravery, excitement or fatalism that real war would have produced. Military men declare that such widespread reactions shows the government will have to insist on the close cooperation of radio in any future war.

The experts believe this could be accomplished by voluntary agreement among the radio stations to refrain from over-dramatizing war announcements which would react on the public like Sunday night's fictional announcement. They recall that the newspapers adopted voluntary self-regulation during the World war and worked in close co-operation with the government.

Moreover, since radio admittedly has so immediate an effect, the experts believe every person in the United States will have to be given facilities for listening in if war ever comes. Consequently radios with loud speakers will have to be installed in all public squares, large and small. Persons not having radios in their homes can listen in through those.

Canada to Take No Action.

TORONTO (Canadian Press). Gordon Conant, attorney general of Ontario, said his department did not plan action over the broadcast of a realistic radio drama which, emanating from the United States and re-broadcast here, caused widespread alarm. "I don't know of any action we could take," Conant said. "The difficulty is that only after these things happen can it be decided that they are not in the public interest. It is certainly not in the public interest that such broadcasts should be allowed."

Radio Chain Heads Called

Broadcast Problem Raised by the Welles Program.

WASHINGTON (INS). Presidents of the nation's three major broadcasting chains were invited by Chairman Frank R. McNinch, of the federal communications commission, to a conference here late next week to discuss the use of the newspaper term "flash" on radio programs. McNinch issued the invitations to the

presidents of the National Broadcasting company, the Columbia Broadcasting company and the Mutual Broadcasting system, he said, to discuss "especially the frequent and, at times, misleading use of the newspaper term 'flash.'"

This step was taken by the FCC chairman in connection with last Sunday night's broadcast, "The War of the Worlds." The word "flash" was used in the broadcast to dramatize the H. G. Wells' imaginative story of an attack on this planet by "monsters from Mars." Many protests were received by the commission against the broadcast. The commission will meet in secret session next week to listen to a reproduction of the dramatization as recorded on discs. The conference with the radio chain chieftains will follow.

In announcing the conference, McNinch said: "I have heard the opinion often expressed within the industry as well as outside that the practice of using 'flash,' as well as 'bulletin,' is overworked and results in misleading the public. It is hoped and believed that a discussion on this subject may lead to a clearer differentiation between bonafide news matter of first rank importance and that which is of only ordinary importance or which finds place in dramatics or advertising."

Book Excerpts, by Prof. David L. Miller

David L. Miller, a professor of sociology at Western Illinois University, has given me permission to include some excerpts from his recently published book, "Introduction to Collective Behavior and Collective Action" (Waveland Publishing, Inc. (2000), ISBN 1-57766-105-2). The book devotes several pages to a discussion of the War of the Worlds broadcast, which Miller says has been a "sociological hobby" of his for nearly 30 years. Miller believes (and says he is not original in this view) that "in the days following the broadcast, the print media greatly exaggerated the nationwide reaction. In part, this was because it was a darn good story, but also because the print media were greatly concerned with the degree to which radio was cutting into their preserve of reporting the news."

CHAPTER 5 MASS HYSTERIA

Hadley Cantril's (1966) study of the War of the Worlds broadcast and Donald M. Johnson's (1945) study of the Phantom Anesthetist are considered to be classic studies of mass

hysteria. [...]

Probably the most widely known event to be generally considered a mass hysteria occurred on Sunday evening, October 30, 1938. Orson Welles and his CBS Mercury Theater group presented an adaptation of one of H. G. Wells's then lesser-known short stories, "The War of the Worlds," which described a nineteenth-century Martian invasion of England. The Mercury Theater adaptation was set in the present (1938) and took place in the United States. Perhaps Welles's most consequential decision was to use an "open format" during the first half of the show. Instead of using the conventional dramatic format of background music, narration, and dialogue, the first announcements of the Martian invasion took the form of simulated news bulletins, interrupting a program of dance music. Welles's second most consequential decision was to use the names of actual New Jersey and New York towns, highways, streets, and buildings when describing the movements and attacks of the Martians.

These two decisions, plus the fact that most listeners tuned in eight to twelve minutes late and therefore missed the Mercury Theater theme and introduction, set the stage for what was to follow. Thousands of people across the United States assumed they were listening to real news bulletins and public announcements. A substantial portion of these listeners became very frightened and attempted to call police, the National Guards, hospitals, newspapers, and radio stations for information. In addition, people tried to contact family members, friends, and neighbors. By the time Mercury Theater's first station break came, informing people they were listening to a CBS radio drama, most of the broadcast's damage had been done.

The next day, newspapers across the country carried stories of terrorized people hiding in basements, panic flight from New Jersey and New York, stampedes in theaters, heart attacks, miscarriages, and even suicides. During the months that followed, these stories were shown to have little if any substance, yet today the myth of War of the Worlds stampedes and suicides persists as part of American folklore. One

clear and certain result of the broadcast, however, was a number of Federal Communication Commission regulations, issued within weeks of the broadcast, prohibiting the use of the open format in radio drama. [...]

Cantril's (1966) study of "The War of the Worlds" broadcast concludes that about 20 percent of those listening to all or part of the broadcast exhibited hysterical panic reactions. [...]

Without question, listeners were frightened by the War of the Worlds broadcast; Mattoon residents were convinced their dizziness and nausea were caused by the phantom's gas; workers were hospitalized for days with rashes, rapid heart beat, and nausea during the June bug epidemic; and farmers were convinced their cattle had died in a mysterious manner. Those who studied these events from the standpoint of mass hysteria described these reactions as psychogenic or mass sociogenic illness. In other words, from the standpoint of mass hysteria, fear reactions to the War of the Worlds broadcast were abnormally severe, given the nature of the show. Likewise, it was concluded that the physical symptoms reported in the Riverside emergency room, during the Stairway of the Stars concert, and during the phantom anesthetist and June bug episodes had no organic cause. It was also concluded that the mysterious cattle mutilations were either totally imaginary or the work of scavengers combined with normal decomposition. [...]

The weakness of the psychogenic explanation is perhaps most obvious when we consider the reactions to the War of the Worlds broadcast. Again, we should emphasize that the War of the Worlds was not an ordinary radio drama. As mentioned above, the first half of the show used an open format in which the entire story line was developed through the use of simulated news bulletins and on-the-scene reports. The second half of the show used a conventional dramatic format. Many discussions of the War of the Worlds read as if listeners panicked at the very beginning of the broadcast and remained terrorized throughout the show and much of the evening. In fact, a ten-minute segment in the first half of the broadcast caused most of the trouble.

In the days following the show, newspaper columnists and public officials expressed dismay at the "incredible stupidity," "gullibility," and "hysteria" of listeners. Many popular accounts claim that the broadcast was interrupted several times for special announcements that a play was in progress. Listeners, however, had apparently been too panicked to notice them. These extreme psychogenic assumptions are, for the most part, unwarranted and inaccurate. For example, other than Mercury Theater's one-minute introduction (which most listeners missed), the station break at the middle of the broadcast, and the signoff, there were no announcements, special or otherwise, to indicate that a play was on the air. Further, Mercury Theater was being presented by CBS as a public service broadcast, and there were no commercials from which listeners might conclude that they were listening to a drama (Houseman 1948).

Cantril (1966) and Houseman (1948) indicate that most listeners, and virtually all of those who became frightened, tuned in Mercury Theater about twelve minutes after it began. These listeners joined the broadcast during an on-the-scene news report from a farm near Grovers Mill, New Jersey-an actual town located between Princeton and Trenton-where a

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large meteor had landed. Welles's careful direction meticulously created all the character of a remote broadcast, including static and microphone feedback and background sounds of autos, sirens, and the voices of spectators and police.

Twelve minutes from the beginning of Mercury Theater newscaster Carl Phillips (played by radio actor Frank Readick) was concluding a rather awkward interview with a Mr. Wilmuth, the owner of the farm where the meteor had landed. Phillips broke off his interview with the annoyingly inarticulate Mr. Wilmuth by providing listeners with a detailed description of the meteor. During this description, Phillips called the listeners' attention to mysterious sounds coming from the meteor, and fought to maintain his composure as he described the incredible and horrible creatures emerging from the pit where the meteor had landed. Background sounds of angry police and confused, frightened, and milling spectators provided a brilliant counterpoint to Phillips's stammering narration. At this point, Phillips signed off temporarily to "take up a safer position" from which to continue the broadcast.

For what seemed a very long time, a studio piano played "Clair de Lune," filling in the empty airspace. Finally, an anonymous studio announcer broke in with, "We are bringing you an eyewitness account of what's happening on the Wilmuth farm, Grovers Mill, New Jersey." After more empty airspace, Carl Phillips returned. Apparently unsure of whether he was on the air, Phillips continued to describe the monsters. The tempo of his reporting increased until Phillips was almost incoherent. In the background, the sound of terrified voices, screams, and the monsters' strange fire weapon merged into a chaotic and hair-raising din. Then, abruptly, there was dead silence. After an unbearably long period of empty airspace, the studio announcer broke in with, "Ladies and gentlemen, due to circumstances beyond our control, we are unable to continue the broadcast from Grovers Mill. Evidently there is some difficulty in our field transmission" (Cantril 1966:17-18). This segment of the broadcast lasted less than five minutes, but,


DAILY NEWS
FINAL
FAKE RADIO 'WAR' STIRS TERROR THROUGH U.S.
"War" Victim
"I Didn't Know"

according to later interviews, it caused most of the fright.

The technical brilliance of the broadcast aside, how could an event as seemingly unlikely as a Martian invasion be readily interpreted as real? Part of the answer to this question lies in the fact that the monsters were never clearly identified as Martians until several minutes after Carl Phillips's segment of the broadcast. It is likely that some people who became confused and frightened was Frank Readick's interpretation of an on-the-scene news reporter. Readick was inspired by the eyewitness description of the explosion of the zeppelin Hindenburg, which had occurred on May 6, 1937, at Lakehurst, New Jersey. In this world-famous broadcast, the reporter was describing the uneventful landing of the Hindenburg when it suddenly exploded with spectacular and deadly force. The reporter struggled to remain coherent, and his tearful, second-by-second description was heard by

millions. The day of the War of the Worlds broadcast, Readick spent hours listening to the Hindenburg recording (Houseman 1948). His interpretation of the Martian attack created a sense of deja vu. The emotion, the stammering, and even the tempo of Carl Phillips's narration reminds one of the Hindenburg disaster. Frank Readick's blending of the real and imaginary must have been very disconcerting for those who had heard the Hindenburg broadcast eighteen months earlier.

After Carl Phillips's "death" and until the first station break, the broadcast consisted of a collage of news bulletins, public announcements, and on-the-scene reports. Taken sequentially, these bulletins and reports seemed to describe the Martians' utter destruction of the New Jersey National Guard, a devastating Martian advance across New Jersey, and, by the end of the first half of the show, massive nerve gas attacks on New York City. Events of such magnitude could hardly occur in a period of less than fifteen minutes. About 25 percent of the listeners who had become frightened quickly concluded that they were listening to a radio drama because of this time distortion and other internal inconsistencies of the broadcast (Cantril 1966:106-107).

Most of the frightened listeners did not perceive the impossibility of a fifteen-minute sweep of the East Coast by Martians. Cantril describes these people as experiencing the most severe symptoms of panic: their critical abilities had been so swept away that they continued to believe the impossible. Cantril's data, however, suggest an alternate interpretation of this group's behavior. Quite simply, many of Cantril's interviews suggest that listeners perceived the reported events as occurring simultaneously rather than sequentially. Nothing in the first part of the broadcast definitely stated that the Martians who had landed at Grovers Mill were the same Martians who, moments later, were reported to be marching across New Jersey or attacking New York City. Listeners who failed to perceive a time distortion in the broadcast had not necessarily lost their critical abilities. Rather, they were perceiving the news bulletins and on-the-scene reports as an understandably confusing and disordered collage of information pouring in simultaneously from all across the nation.

The psychogenic, or hysteria, explanation of people's reactions to the War of the Worlds

broadcast severely underplays the unique and unsettling character of the show. Cantril poses the question: "Why did this broadcast frighten some people when other fantastic broadcasts do not?" He provides a partial answer when he considers the realistic way in which the program was put together (Cantril 1966:67-76). Houseman (1948) provides even more insight when he discusses the "technical brilliance" of the show that emerged under Orson Welles's direction. If we take into account the unique character of the War of the Worlds broadcast, we needn't speculate that psychogenic mechanisms caused people to lose their critical ability and then to panic. Rather, Orson Welles and his Mercury Theater staff of excellent writers and actors not so innocently conspired to "scare the hell out of people" for Halloween. They succeeded in scaring the hell out of 20 percent of their listening audience.

In summary, the quantitative mass hysteria studies fail to show that the unusual and unverified experiences are widespread. In some instances, these experiences are reported by a very small portion of an available population, and in no instance are they reported by a majority. The quantitative studies also fail to clearly substantiate the hysterical nature of unusual and unverified experiences. Some studies have relied almost totally on the judgment of law enforcement or medical authorities that the reported experiences are of a hysterical nature. Cantril, on the other hand, fails to take the unique features of the War of the Worlds broadcast into account when he concludes that the fear reactions were hysterical in nature.

Mass hysteria studies generally fail to distinguish mobilization as a distinct element of the episodes that prompted the investigations. Cantril, for example, alleges that panic flight occurred during the War of the Worlds broadcast but does not systematically examine his data to determine the extent or characteristics of this flight. Cantril also notes that telephone switchboards at CBS, local radio stations, police, and hospitals were flooded with calls from hysterical people. Again he made no systematic attempts to ascertain the nature of these calls. Likewise, Johnson (1945) noted that Mattoon residents formed neighborhood patrols during the anesthetist incident, but he did not attempt to find out when these patrols occurred or determine their size, composition, and activities. Such types of mobilization are probably more burdensome to authorities and disruptive of social routines than are the unusual and unverified experiences.

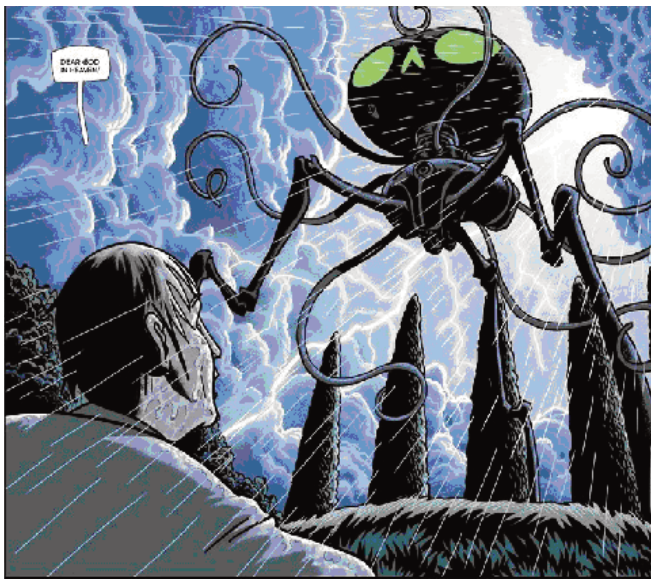
Even though the mass hysteria studies fail to systematically examine mobilization, they do present information that, when carefully considered, provides some insight into this process. Though Cantril's data does not document the claim that the War of the Worlds broadcast produced substantial amounts of panic flight, a few of his interviews suggest that some people started to pack belongings in preparation for movement before they found out the news bulletins were a play. In only one instance, however, does Cantril (1966:54) discuss a person attempting to get away from the Martian attack, without regard for future consequences. Cantril received a letter from a man who spent $3.25 of his meager savings to buy a ticket to "go away." After the man found out it was a play, the letter continued, he realized he no longer had enough money to buy a pair of workshoes. The last part of the letter contained a request for size 9B workshoes. Houseman (1948:82) reports that Mercury Theater received a similar request for size 9B workshoes which they sent in spite of their lawyers' misgivings. The story of the man who decided to forgo workshoes in order to escape the Martians has a decided ring of the apocryphal. ■

The Martian Panic Seventy Five Years Later: What Have We Learned? by Robert E. Bartholomew

The 'War of the Worlds' panic happened seventy five years ago, but its lessons are as relevant today as back then.

Shortly after 8 o'clock on Sunday evening, October 30, 1938, many Americans became anxious or panic-stricken after listening to a realistic live one-hour radio play depicting a fictitious Martian landing at the Wilmuth farm in the tiny hamlet of Grovers Mill, New Jersey. Those living in the immediate vicinity of the bogus invasion appeared to have been most frightened, although the broadcast could be heard in all regions of the continental United States and no one particular location was immune. The play included references to real places, buildings, highways, and streets. The broadcast also contained prestigious speakers, convincing sound effects, and realistic special bulletins. The drama was produced by a 23-year-old theatrical prodigy named George Orson Welles (1915-1985), who was accompanied by a small group of actors and musicians in a New York City studio of the Columbia Broadcasting System's Mercury Theater. The actual broadcast script was written by Howard Koch, who loosely based it on the 1898 book The War of the Worlds by acclaimed science fiction writer Herbert George (H.G.) Wells (1866-1946). In the original Wells novel, the Martians had landed in nineteenth century Woking, England. Seventy five years after the 1938 event, it remains arguably the most widely known delusion in United States, and perhaps world history, and many radio stations around the world continue to broadcast the original play each Halloween eve.

During this seventh anniversary year of the Martian panic, it is timely to reflect on the lessons we can glean from the incident, applying the wisdom that seven decades of hindsight can provide.



Human Perception and Memory Reconstruction Are Remarkably Flawed

Today many people seem to forget that the Martian "invasion" illustrates far more than a short-term panic. It is a testament to the remarkable power of expectation on perception. A person's frame of reference has a strong influence on how external stimuli are interpreted and internalized as reality (Buckhout 1974). Perception is highly unreliable and subject to error (Loftus 1979; Wells and Turtle 1986; Ross, Read, and Toglia 1994). This effect has long been known to be pronounced under situations of stress, ambiguity, and uncertainty (Sherif and Harvey 1952; Asch 1956; Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballschey 1962). This message cannot be over-emphasized and continues to go widely unheeded, as visual misperceptions are a common thread in many reports of such diverse phenomena as religious signs and wonders, UFOs, and Bigfoot.

In his famous study of the Martian panic, Princeton University psychologist Hadley Cantril

discusses the extreme variability of eyewitness descriptions of the "invasion." These examples have been usually overlooked in subsequent popular and scholarly discussions of the panic. One person became convinced that they could smell the poison gas and feel the heat rays as described on the radio, while another became emotionally distraught and felt a choking sensation from the imaginary "gas" (Cantril 1947, 94-95). During the broadcast several residents reported observations to police "of Martians on their giant machines poised on the Jersey Palisades" (Markush 1973, 379). After checking various descriptions of the panic, Bulgatz (1992, 129) reported that a Boston woman said she could actually see the fire as described on the radio; other persons told of hearing machine gun fire or the "swish" sound of the Martians. A man even climbed atop a Manhattan building with binoculars and described seeing "the flames of battle."

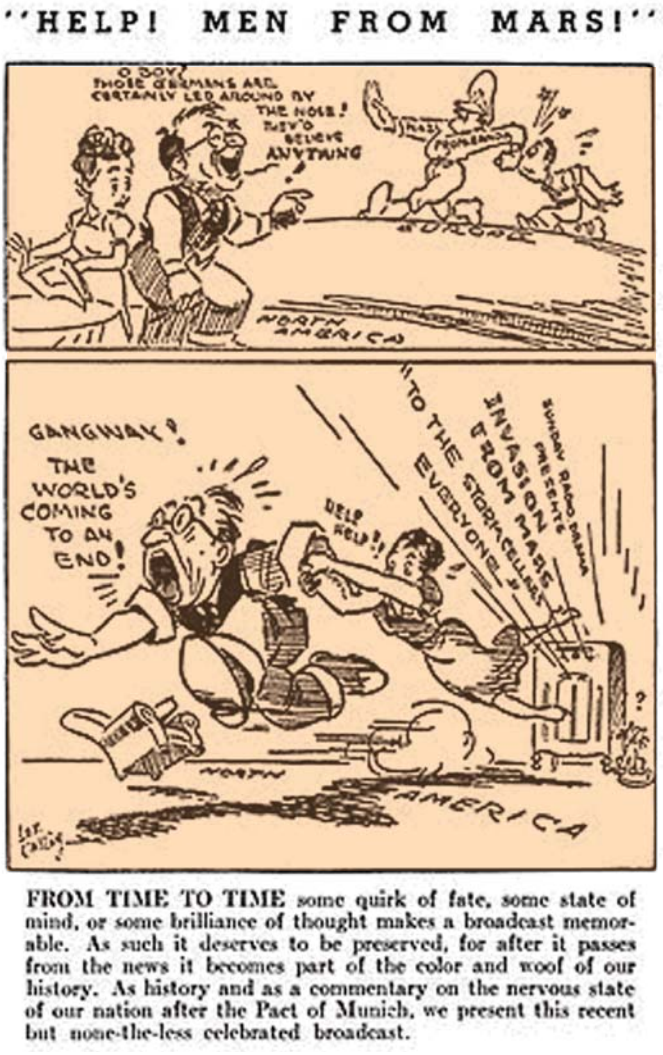
The event also reminds us that the human mind does not function like a video camera capturing each piece of data that comes into its field of vision. People interpret information as it is processed. These memories are not statically locked away in the brain forever, but our memories of events are reconstructed over time (Loftus and Ketcham, 1991). Cantril (1947) cited the case of Miss Jane Dean, a devoutly religious woman, who, when recalling the broadcast, said the most realistic portion was "the sheet of flame that swept over the entire country. That is just the way I pictured the end" (181). In reality, there was no mention of a sheet of flame anywhere in the broadcast.

The Mass Media Are a Powerful Force in Society

Not only does the Martian panic demonstrate the enormous influence of the mass media in contemporary society, but in recent years an ironic twist has developed. There is a growing consensus among sociologists that the extent of the panic, as described by Cantril, was greatly exaggerated (Miller 1985; Bainbridge 1987; Goode 1992). The irony here is that for the better part of the past seveny years many people may have been misled by the media to believe that the panic was far more extensive and intense than it apparently was. However, regardless of the extent of the panic, there is little doubt that many Americans were genuinely frightened and some did try to flee the Martian gas raids and heat rays, especially in New Jersey and New York.

Based on various opinion polls and estimates, Cantril calculated that of about 1.7 million people who heard the drama, nearly 1.2 million "were excited" to varying degrees (58). Yet there is only scant anecdotal evidence to

suggest that many listeners actually took some action after hearing the broadcast, such as packing belongings, grabbing guns, or fleeing in motor vehicles. In fact, much of Cantril's study was based on interviews with just 135 people. Bainbridge (1987) is critical of Cantril for citing just a few colorful stories from a small number of people who panicked. According to Bainbridge, on any given night, out of a pool of over a million people, at least a thousand would have been driving excessively fast or engaging in rambunctious behavior. From this perspective, the event was primarily a news media creation. Miller (1985, 100) supports this view, noting that while the day after the panic many newspapers carried accounts of suicides and heart attacks by frightened citizens, they proved to have been unfounded but have passed into American folklore. Miller also takes Cantril to task for failing to show substantial evidence of mass flight from the perceived attack (1985, 106), citing just a few examples and not warranting an estimate of over one million panic-stricken Americans. While Cantril cites American Telephone Company figures indicating that local media and law enforcement agencies were inundated with up to 40 percent more telephone calls than normal in parts of New Jersey during the broadcast, he did not determine the specific nature of these calls: *Some callers requested information, such as which units of national guard were being called up or whether casualty lists were available. Some people called to find out where they could go to donate blood. Some callers were simply angry that such a realistic show was allowed on the air, while others called CBS to congratulate Mercury Theater for the exciting Halloween program…we cannot know how many of these telephone calls were between households. It seems…(likely) many callers just wanted to chat with their families and friends about the exciting show they had just listened to on the radio (Miller 1985, 107).*



FROM TIME TO TIME some quirk of fate, some state of mind, or some brilliance of thought makes a broadcast memorable. As such it deserves to be preserved, for after it passes from the news it becomes part of the color and woof of our history. As history and as a commentary on the nervous state of our nation after the Pact of Munich, we present this recent but none-the-less celebrated broadcast.

Goode (1992, 315) agrees with Miller's assessment, but also notes that to have convinced a substantial number of listeners "that a radio drama about an invasion from Mars was an actual news broadcast has to be regarded as a remarkable achievement." Either way you view it, whether tens of thousands of people became panic-stricken, or more than a million, there is no denying that the mass media have significantly influenced public perception of the event. There is also no disputing that similar broadcasts have resulted in full-fledged panics.

It Can't Happen Again?

Only someone with an ignorance of history would assume that similar panics could not recur. More recent mass panics and delusions

have involved the pivotal role of the mass media (especially newspaper and television). For instance, the media were instrumental in triggering a widespread delusion about the existence of imaginary pit marks on windshields in the state of Washington during 1954, erroneously attributed to atomic fallout (Medalia and Larsen, 1958). Mass delusions can also have a humorous side. During March 1993, excitement was created in Texas after The Morning Times of Laredo published a hoax account of a giant 300-pound earthworm undulating across Interstate 35. Many citizens in the vicinity of Laredo believed the story despite claims that the worm was an incredible seventy-nine feet long! What is not humorous is the relative ease at which a spate of media hoaxes were perpetrated across the country in the early 1990s, prompting the Federal Communications Commission to impose fines of up to $250,000 for TV stations knowingly broadcasting false information. But could a repeat of the 1938 Martian panic occur? The answer is, “Yes.”

A widespread panic was triggered following a broadcast of the Wells play by a Santiago, Chile, radio station on November 12, 1944. Upon hearing the broadcast, many fled into the streets or barricaded themselves in their homes. In one province, troops and artillery were briefly mobilized by the governor in a bid to repel the invading Martians. The broadcast was highly realistic. It included references to such organizations as the Red Cross and used an actor to impersonate the interior minister (Bulgatz 1992, 137).

On the night of February 12, 1949, another radio play based on The War of the Worlds resulted in pandemonium in Quito, Ecuador, with tens of thousands of panic-stricken residents running into the streets to escape Martian gas raids. The event made headlines around the world including the front page of the February 14, 1949, edition of The New York Times ("Mars Raiders Caused Quito Panic; Mob Burns Radio Plant, Kills 15”). The drama described strange Martian creatures heading toward the city after landing and destroying the neighboring community of Latacunga, twenty miles south of Quito. Broadcast in Spanish on Radio Quito, the realistic program included impersonations of well-known local politicians, journalists, vivid eyewitness descriptions, and the name of the local town of Cotocallo. In Quito, a riot broke out and an enraged mob poured gasoline onto the building housing the radio station that broadcast the drama, then set it alight, killing fifteen people.

The tragic sequence of events began when a regular music program was suddenly interrupted with a news bulletin followed by reports of the invading Martians wreaking havoc and destruction while closing in on the city. A voice resembling that of a government minister appealed for calm so the city’s defenses could be organized and citizens evacuated in time. Next the “Mayor” arrived and made a dramatic announcement: “People of Quito, let us defend our city. Our women and children must go out into the surrounding heights to leave the men free for action and combat.” Positioned atop the tallest building in the city, the La Previsora tower, an announcer said he could discern a monster engulfed in plumes of fire and smoke advancing on Quito from the north. It was at that point, according to a New York Times re-

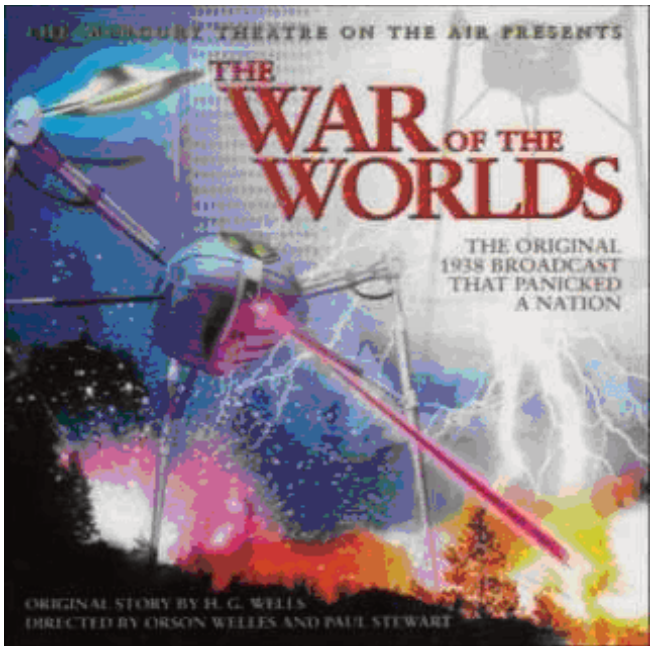
porter, that citizens "began fleeing from their homes and running through the streets. Many were clad only in night clothing."

Other radio adaptations of The War of the Worlds have had less dramatic consequences, but resulted in some frightened listeners in the vicinity of Providence, Rhode Island, on the night of October 31, 1974, and in northern Portugal in 1988 (Bulgatz 1992, 139).

What of the Future?

Since 1938, the world's rapidly expanding population has grown increasing reliant on the mass media, and people generally expect the news to contain immediate, accurate information on nearly every facet of their lives. By most projections, the twenty-first century will bring an even greater dependence on information and mass media. While it may be true that you cannot fool all of the people all of the time, as the "War of the Worlds" panics and other mass scares attest to, you need only fool a relatively small portion of people for a short period to create large-scale disruptions to society. That is the lesson we can glean from the reaction to the 1938 broadcast. It can and will happen again. Only the mediums and forms will change as new technologies are developed and old delusional themes fade away while new ones come into vogue.

Each era has a set of taken-for-granted social realities that define it and manifest in unique delusions. During the Middle Ages scores of popular delusions, panics, and scares surrounded the belief that humans could transform into various animals, especially wolves (Eisler 1951; Noll 1992). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most recorded delusions were precipitated by a widespread fear of witches and manifested in episodes of mass demon possession and moral panics involving a hunt for imaginary witches (Calmeil 1845; Garnier 1895; Huxley 1952). These episodes often resulted in



torture, imprisonment, or death for various minority ethnic groups including Jews, as well as heretics, deviants, the aged, women, and the poor (Rosen 1968; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994). Twentieth-century mass delusions overwhelmingly involve two themes. The first is a fear of environmental contaminants mirroring growing concern about global pollution and heightened awareness of public health. This situation has triggered scores of mass psychogenic illness in schools (Bartholomew and Sirois, 1996), factories (Colligan and Murphy 1982) and occasionally communities (Goldsmith, 1989; Radovanovic 1995), and numerous delusions without psychogenic illness (Miller 1985; Goode 1992). A second series of delusions has spread widely in Western countries that have become dependent on child day care facilities. Their prominence since the mid-1980s coincides with a series of moral panics involving exaggerated claims about the existence of organized cultists kidnapping or molesting children. These myths function as cautionary tales about the inability of the weakened nuclear family to protect children (Victor 1989, 1992).

At the dawn of the twenty-first century and a new millennium, we can only ponder what new mass panics await us. It is beyond the realm of science to accurately predict what these will entail. But it will be vital for scientists to respond to the challenge of this new era of ideas and technologies that will engender an as-yet unforeseen set of circumstances that characterize and define each age. For mass panics and scares can tell us much about ourselves and the times in which we live. Part of this challenge entails remembering the lessons of the past.

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Robert E. Bartholomew

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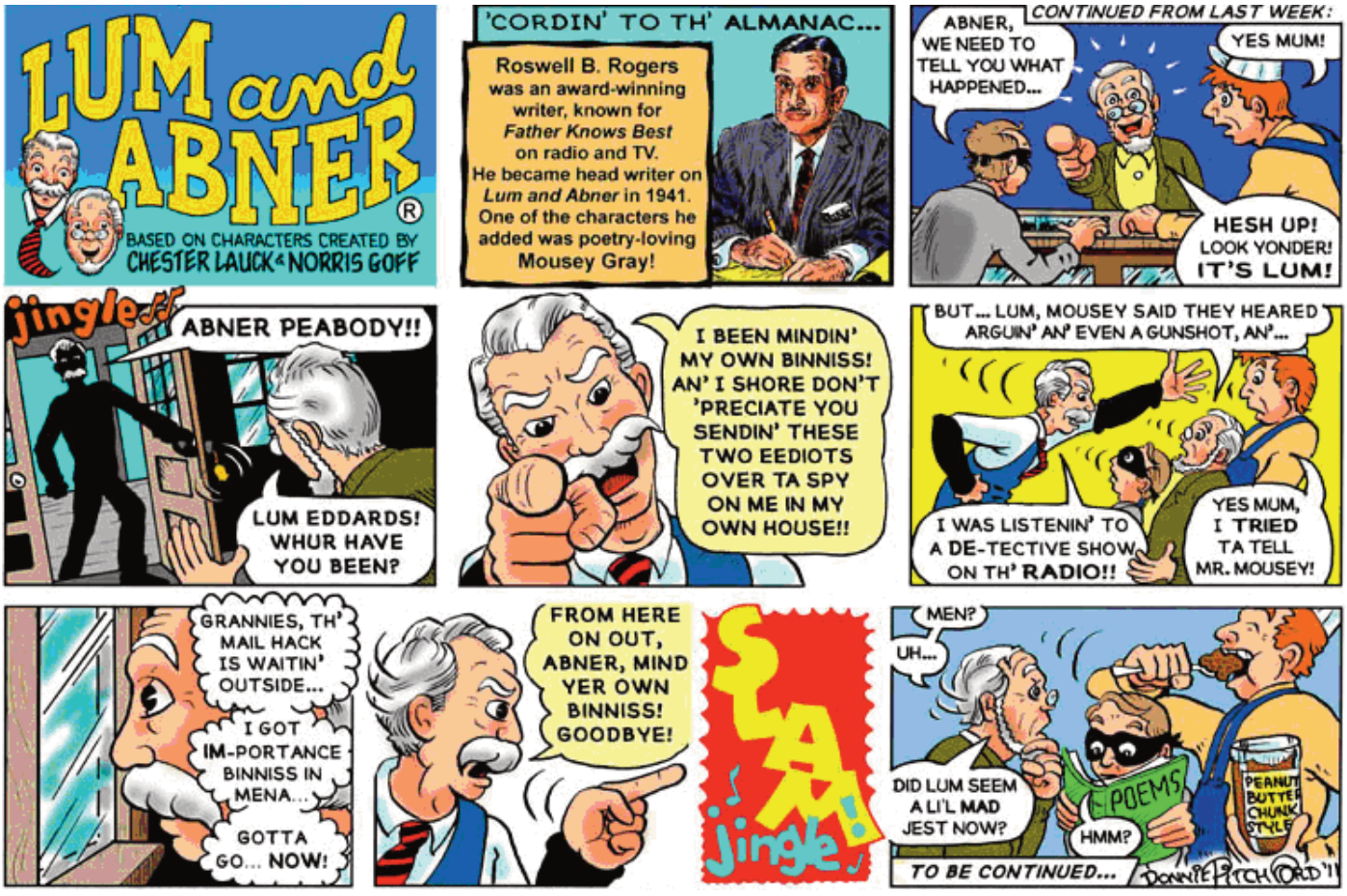


When Mars Attacked: Orson Welles, The War of the Worlds & the Radio Broadcast That Changed America Forever

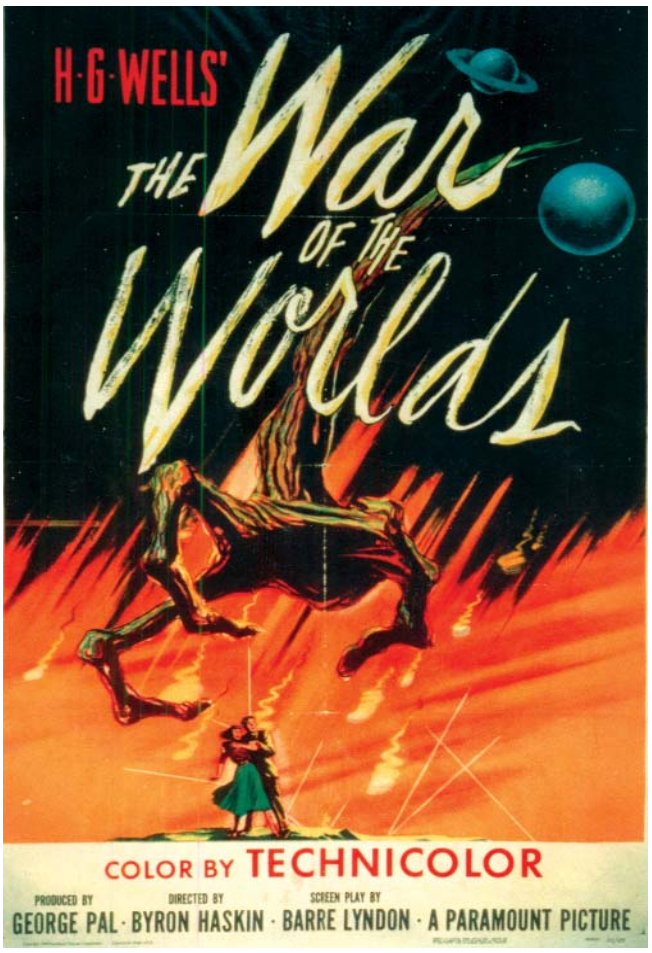
A Review by Doug Hopkinson

With the advent of the 75th anniversary fast approaching, David Acord has written a new book titled *When Mars Attacked: Orson Welles, The War of the Worlds and the Radio Broadcast that Changed America Forever* which is all about the 1938 *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast.

When Mars Attacked is a thoroughly enjoyable and enlightening read. It is full of information about the famous (or infamous) 1938 Mercury Theater broadcast of the H.G. Wells story The War of the Worlds and the back stories of the people involved. It reads more like a novel or a re-enactment rather than a dry presentation of facts. Mr. Acord has successfully blended and woven facts into the story he recounts about Orson Welles. How and perhaps why Orson Welles became the man he was. What radio was and what it was on the verge of becoming. Mr. Acord tells us how politics, dramatic arts, science and the power of the press all interacted with each other one night during a radio broadcast in October, 1938. He tells us how and perhaps why the American listening audience appeared to be so gullible and susceptible to Orson Welles' production, the panic it created and the aftereffects it fostered.

This book will be of significant interest to any old time radio enthusiast or fan of Orson Welles. It presents new insights into that particular day in history as well as the people involved in the broadcast. It is definitely not a reference book but is rather a book to reference.

David Acord gives you all the pertinent who's, what's, where's and even why's but leaves out unverifiable and unnecessary rumors and innuendoes other than the ones he exposes for being false or exaggerated. The book is very informative without being a cumbersome read. *When Mars Attacked* cannot be found on the shelves of your local bookstore or library, presently it can only be found on Amazon dot com as a Kindle book. There are no immediate plans to make this book available in any other format.



OTRR ACQUIRES NEW EPISODES AND UPGRADED SOUND ENCODES FOR Sept/Oct

This is a list of newly acquired series/episodes. They may either be new to mp3 or better encodes. These were acquired by the Group during the months of May and June. They were purchased by donations from members and friends of the Old Time Radio Researchers.
If you have cassettes that you would like to donate, please e-mail beshiresjim@yahoo.com
For reel-to-reels, contact david0@centurytel.net
& for transcription disks tony_senior@yahoo.com

Amos N Andy

1950-01-15 Brown vs Brown.mp3
1950-01-21 Mama & Hubert Smithers.mp3
1950-01-29 Stolen Suits.mp3
1950-02-04 New Parking Lot.mp3
1950-02-18 The Best in Town.mp3
1950-03-04 Sapphire on Television.mp3
1950-03-19 Andy Romances Eloise Walker.mp3
1950-03-26 The Happy Stevenses.mp3
1950-04-02 Andy Goes to Charm School.mp3
1950-04-16 The Census Taker.mp3
1950-04-23 Lodge Convention in Chicago.mp3
1950-04-30 Andy Inherits 25,000 Dollars.mp3
1950-05-07 Battle Over Andy's Inheritance.mp3
1950-05-14 Andy and the IRS.mp3
1950-05-21 Summer at Pine Crest Lodge.mp3
1950-10-01 Kingfish is Drafted.mp3
1950-10-08 Kingfish is in the Service.mp3
1950-12-17 Sapphire Leaves the Kingfish.mp3

Broadway's My Beat

52-07-05 The Stacy Parker Murder Case.mp3
53-07-04 The John Rand Murder Case.mp3

Crime Does Not Pay

49-12-12 Gasoline Cocktail.mp3

Crime On The Waterfront

49-02-24 Audition Show.mp3

Fibber McGee & Molly

55-03-31 The Owl And The Pussycat.wav
55-04-03 Little Boy Lost.wav
55-04-04 McGee Looks For His Raincoat.wav
55-04-05 McGee Discovers A Talent.wav
55-04-06 In The Recording Session.wav
55-04-07 Les' Career Is Over.wav
55-04-11 The Shopping Crush.wav
55-04-12 McGee Thinks Parking Meters Are Coming.wav
55-04-13 Someone Keeps Phoning the McGees.wav
55-04-15 MeGee Gets A Pedometer.wav
55-04-17 McGee Finds An Old Unopened Letter.wav
55-04-18 Molly Insists The Windows Be Washed.wav
55-04-19 Molly Gets Tired of Doc's And McGee's Insults.wav
55-04-20 The McGees Offer To Babysit.wav
55-04-21 The First Day Of Sitting.wav
55-04-24 McGee Judges A Beauty Contest.wav
55-04-25 The Noise Abatement Committee.wav
55-04-26 Doc And McGee Vie In A Golf Match.wav
55-04-27 The Golf Match Continues.wav
55-04-28 The Golf Match Finally Concludes.wav
55-05-01 The Mystery Ladies Society.wav
55-05-02 McGee Finds A Phone Number In An Old Wallet.wav
55-05-03 Molly Gets Her Christmas Cards Ready.wav
55-05-04 Molly Gets A Plumbing Job.wav
55-05-05 Doc Gamble Lays McGee Up.wav
55-05-08 McGee Writes To His Congress-man.wav
55-05-09 Molly Gets Jury Duty.wav
55-05-10 McGee Finds A $1 Error In His Bank Statement.wav
55-05-11 McGee Learns About Business Prob-lems.wav

55-05-12 McGee Loses A Tune.wav
55-05-15 The McGees Take In A Movie.wav
55-05-16 MeGee Finds An Old Recipe For Chili.wav
55-05-17 Doc And McGee Fix The Garage Lock.wav
55-05-18 Chef McGee.wav
55-05-19 Running The Malt Shop.wav
55-05-22 All You Can Eat For A Dollar.wav
55-05-23 The Streamliner Belt.wav
55-05-25 The Bee Swarm Invades.wav
55-05-29 Fun Night At The Elks Club.wav
55-05-31 McGee Brings Molly The Wrong Dress.wav
55-06-01 The Lost Kid.wav
55-06-05 McGee Makes Some Ice Cream.wav
55-06-06 McGee Works out His Activity Guide.wav
55-06-07 McGee's Mentality.wav
55-06-08 Frugal McGee Is Stuck Downtown.wav
55-06-09 Nightclubbing It.wav
55-06-12 The Chipmunk.wav
55-06-13 McGee Forgets A Special Day.wav
55-06-14 McGee Finds A Stock Certificate.wav
55-05-24.wav
55-05-30 McGee Is Caught At The Cleaners.wav
55-05-26 The Bee Man.wav

Editorial Policy of the Old Radio Times

It is the policy of The Old Radio Times not to accept paid advertising in any form. We feel that it would be detrimental to the goal of the Old Time Radio Researchers organization to distribute its products freely to all wishing them. Accepting paid advertising would compromise that goal, as dealers whose ideals are not in line with ours could buy ad space.

That being said, The Old Radio Times will run free ads from individuals, groups, and dealers whose ideals are in line with the group's goals and who support the hobby.

Publishing houses who wish to advertise in this magazine will be considered if they supply the publisher and editor with a review copy of their new publication. Anyone is free to submit a review or a new publication about old time radio or nostalgia.

Dealers whose ads we carry or may carry have agreed to give those placing orders with them a discount if they mention that they saw their ad in 'The Old Radio Times'. This is in line with the group's goal of making otr available to the collecting community.

We will gladly carry free ads for any other old time radio group or any group devoted to nostalgia. Submit your ads to: **bob_burchett@msn.com**

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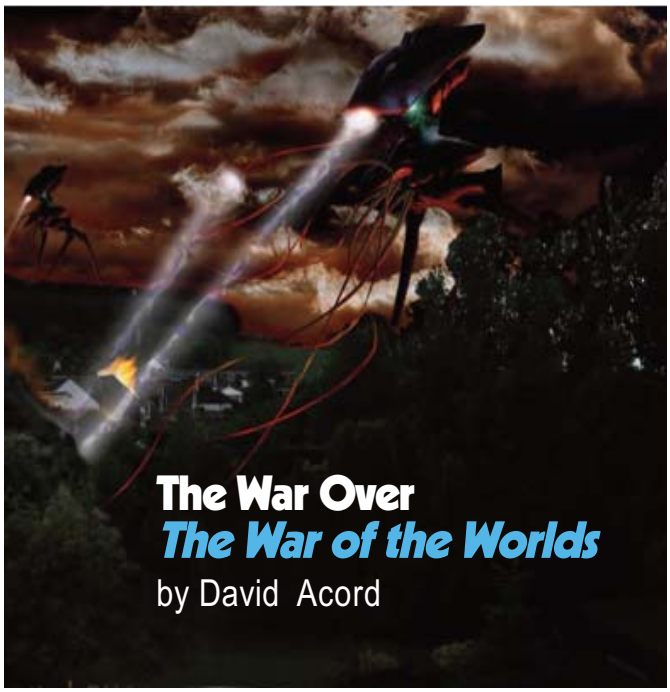


The following article is excerpted and adapted from the full-length book *When Mars Attacked: Orson Welles, The War of the Worlds and the Radio Broadcast That Changed America Forever.*

Orson Welles' broadcast of The War of the Worlds on the evening of October 30, 1938 is an indelible part of American pop culture. Nearly everyone knows the basic outline of the story: how a realistic-sounding radio play set off a nationwide panic and sent thousands of people into hysterics, convinced that Earth was being invaded by powerful Martian forces. Less well known, however, is what happened in the days and weeks following the broadcast, and the extraordinary efforts by a single U.S. Senator to impose draconian censorship measures and curtail free speech in an effort to prevent another Welles-like panic.

Mere hours after the broadcast, Clyde Herring, a freshman U.S. Senator from Iowa (and former governor of that state) and New Deal Democrat, grabbed national headlines when he promised to introduce a bill in the next session of Congress to curb "just such abuses" as Orson Welles had allegedly perpetrated on the American people. He proposed a government scheme in which the networks would not be allowed to air any program unless it had first been approved by a federal board of censors. In essence, he wanted the government to decide what went on the air.

"Radio has no more right to present programs like that than someone has in knocking on our door and screaming," Herring seethed. "Some of the bedtime stories which are supposed to put children to sleep – but involve murders and violence – are an outrage and should be stopped. Programs of that kind are an excellent indication of the inadequacy of our present control over a marvelous facility…There is no freedom of the press or radio involved at all. It is merely a move to tell radio what we want to come into our homes."

Herring's power grab wasn't all that surprising. He had been pushing for the idea of establishing a government radio censorship board within the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for almost a year. In January 1938, he criticized a radio horror play starring Boris Karloff – an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* – and wrote to the show's sponsors demanding a copy of the script. He objected to the "horror and blood and thunder" in the program, saying it was inappropriate for children.

He was also livid over a sexually suggestive comedy skit starring bawdy movie siren Mae West that had aired on NBC's *The Chase and Sanborn Hour* in December 1937. Set in the Biblical Garden of Eden, it featured West as Eve, who engaged in a flirtatious dialogue with the evil serpent, whom she addressed as "my palpitatin' python." Subtlety was not Ms. West's

strong suit. The FCC reprimanded NBC and the network apologized.

After the Karloff and West incidents, Herring argued that networks should "voluntarily" submit potentially disturbing or controversial scripts to a censorship board prior to broadcast. "Herring suggested that in the event a station did not submit its programs for review and they were objectionable, the broadcaster could be summoned before the board to determine whether it was operating in the public interest," one newspaper reported. "Herring said that at least one woman should be included on the board, which would be called on to review such broadcasts as that in which Miss West appeared."

Herring promised to bring a bill to the floor of the Senate in the early winter of 1938, but nothing ever materialized, even though he claimed to have received hundreds of letters of support from around the country. Many in the press ridiculed his proposal, including those in print journalism. "Last night at 11:30 o'clock Boris Karloff acted another horror play over the radio," wrote one wag in March. "It was 'The Dream' and depicted the thoughts of a murderer. I can just visualize Senator Clyde Herring pulling the covers over his head and tearing the sheets." Even though newspaper reporters and editors hated radio because it represented a competitive business threat, they hated government censorship even more, and easily saw through Herring's guise of "voluntary" submissions.

Herring also made a strategic error: he overreached. Rather than focus solely on radio, he publicly stated that censorship of motion pictures and the press was also necessary, either through a "national council" or "government regulation based on sound public policy." An editorial writer at *The Oxford Mirror,* in his home state of Iowa, was having none of it. "Mr. Herring de-

plores the lack of culturally valuable material that comes to him in the course of an average radio day," the editorial began. "We deplore with the senator. We also believe that a lot of stuff that is flashed on the moving picture screen and a lot of stuff that is printed is neither fit to be seen or to be read. So we don't read it. We suggest that recipe to Senator Herring. It will make him a lot more popular, we are sure, than any efforts toward curbing the press, the radio and the movies because some parts offend the higher tastes and greater refinements that we, the people of Iowa, should be so happy to see in the bosom of one of our senators."

Ultimately, Herring's proposals went nowhere, and after a few weeks, the otherwise undistinguished junior senator from Iowa and his grand censorship plans faded into the background… until October, when Orson Welles gave him the opening he needed, a second chance to grab the brass ring.

Speaking to journalists immediately after the broadcast, Herring recycled the idea of establishing a federal censorship board, only now there was no talk of it being a voluntary scheme – he seemed to suggest that prior federal approval for radio programs would be mandatory. This time

around, newspaper editors – sensing an opportunity to mortally wound their electronic enemy – ignored their principles and played ball, uncritically reporting on Herring's plan and conveniently failing to mention its previous failure.

As an elected official, Herring could say whatever he wanted and was free to stir up the public's passions. Officials at the FCC were in a more delicate position. As regulators, they had to choose their words carefully and avoid any appearance of bias. Still, it was clear the Commission was hesitant to leap into action. Earlier in the year, after Herring had first proposed his censorship bill, Chairman Frank McNinch and Commissioner T.A.M. Craven both spoke at the National Association of Broadcasters' annual convention and danced around the issue. McNinch said that while he had no problem with most radio programs, "I would be less than candid did I say that in my opinion some of the program features fall below the standard which I believe the public expects and has a right to expect." But he hastily added, "This comment and such further comments as I may make on programs is made in a friendly cooperative and advisory spirit. I am neither a purist nor a prude, but one does not have to be either to believe that those who visit our family circles by means of the radio should be careful not to abuse this privilege." Craven walked the same fine line, professing to be personally opposed to censorship, but also suggesting that the networks "might consider most carefully existing public reactions, and seek to develop a constructive program" of improvements to the overall quality of broadcasts.

Landing site Statue at Grovers Mill

Months later, on Halloween, the day after Welles' broadcast, McNinch again tried to play both sides of the court. First, he requested that CBS send him both a copy of The War of the Worlds script and a recording of the program. It was a typical Washington, D.C. maneuver. The request made it look like he was taking decisive action, when in fact he was just buying time. Commissioner Craven was also lukewarm about the possibility of the FCC taking serious action against CBS. "I feel that in any action which may be taken by the Commission, utmost caution should be utilized to avoid the danger of the Commission censoring what shall or what shall not be said over the radio. Furthermore, it is my opinion that the Commission should proceed carefully in order that it will not discourage the presentation by radio of the dramatic arts. It is essential that we encourage radio to make use of the dramatic arts and the artists of this country. The public does not want a 'spineless' radio."

A third commissioner, George Henry Payne, was the only FCC member to take a strong pub-

lic stance on the matter. “People who have material broadcast into their homes without warnings have a right to protection,” he argued. “Too many broadcasters have insisted that they could broadcast anything they liked, contending that they were protected by the prohibition of censorship. Certainly when people are injured morally, physically, spiritually and psychically, they have just as much right to complain as if the laws against obscenity and indecency were violated.”

Despite Payne’s fiery comments, it quickly became clear that there wasn’t all that much the FCC could do. The Communications Act of 1934 clearly stated: “Nothing in this Act shall be understood or construed to give the Commission the power of censorship over the radio communications or signals transmitted by any radio station, and no regulation or condition shall be promulgated or fixed by the Commission which shall interfere with the right of free speech by means of radio communication.” The only real weapon the FCC had was its authority to renew broadcast licenses for individual radio stations.

Technically, the Commission could refuse to renew a station’s license if its activities were not deemed to be in the “public interest.” Even this was a stretch, however. The program had originated in New York, from the headquarters of a national network, and the individual stations that broadcast it had no idea what they were in for. To punish local stations by withdrawing their licenses made little sense.

Still, something had to be done – or, to put it more accurately, the American public had to believe that something was being done. On November 5, 1938, almost a week after The War of the Worlds aired, Chairman McNinch sent telegrams to the heads of the three major radio networks – CBS, NBC and Mutual – requesting that they travel to Washington for a meeting:

You are invited to informal joint conference with me[…] November tenth two thirty to discuss use of terms ‘flash’ and ‘bulletin’ in broadcasting news and in dramatics and advertising programs. Indiscriminate use of these terms which have well understood significance in the public mind often results in misleading the public. Hope clearly defined practice may be worked out voluntarily. After joint conference want to talk with each [network president] in separate conferences that afternoon or evening relative to voluntary program improvements in the interest of the listening public and broadcasters. Am acting on my own initiative without having asked approval by the commission as do not contemplate other than an informal exchange of opinion and voluntary action.

The decision to focus on specific words was clever. “Flash” had never actually been used in The War of the Worlds program, but “bulletin” had been said thirteen times. CBS had already promised to stop using simulated news broadcasts in dramatic programs, and after the nationwide panic, it was a safe bet that none of the other networks would try anything similar, either. By agreeing to a ban on the use of “flash” and “bulletin,” both the networks and the FCC could

truthfully claim that something concrete had been done to prevent another Orson Welles from scaring the pants off America.

By early December, the scandal had all but disappeared from newspaper pages. The heads of the three radio networks had met informally with Chairman McNinch and, as expected, promised not to use "flash" or "bulletin" in dramatic programs in the future, so as not to confuse the public. On December 5, the FCC released a statement announcing that it had officially closed its investigation. It read in part:

The Federal Communications Commission announced today that in its judgment steps taken by the Columbia Broadcasting System since the Orson Welles "Mercury Theater on the Air" program on October 30 are sufficient to protect the public interest. Accordingly complaints received regarding this program will not be taken into account in considering the renewals of licenses of stations which carried the broadcast.

The Commission stated that, while it is regrettable that the broadcast alarmed a substantial number of people, there appeared to be no likelihood of a repetition of the incident and no occasion for action by the Commission.

Meanwhile, Herring's second attempt at censorship had withered on the vine; no legislation to establish a federal censorship board was introduced. Everyone, it seemed, was eager to put the matter behind them and move on.

But why did Herring's efforts fail? The circumstances were extremely favorable to his cause. The public was outraged over Welles' Halloween "trick," and thousands of listeners had been frightened, some going so far as attempting to flee their homes. The timing was perfect – strike while the iron is hot, while emotions were still at a fever pitch. Herring was following the same strategy articulated seventy years later by Rahm Emanuel, Chief of Staff to President Obama. "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste," he said in 2009. "And what I mean by that is an opportunity to do

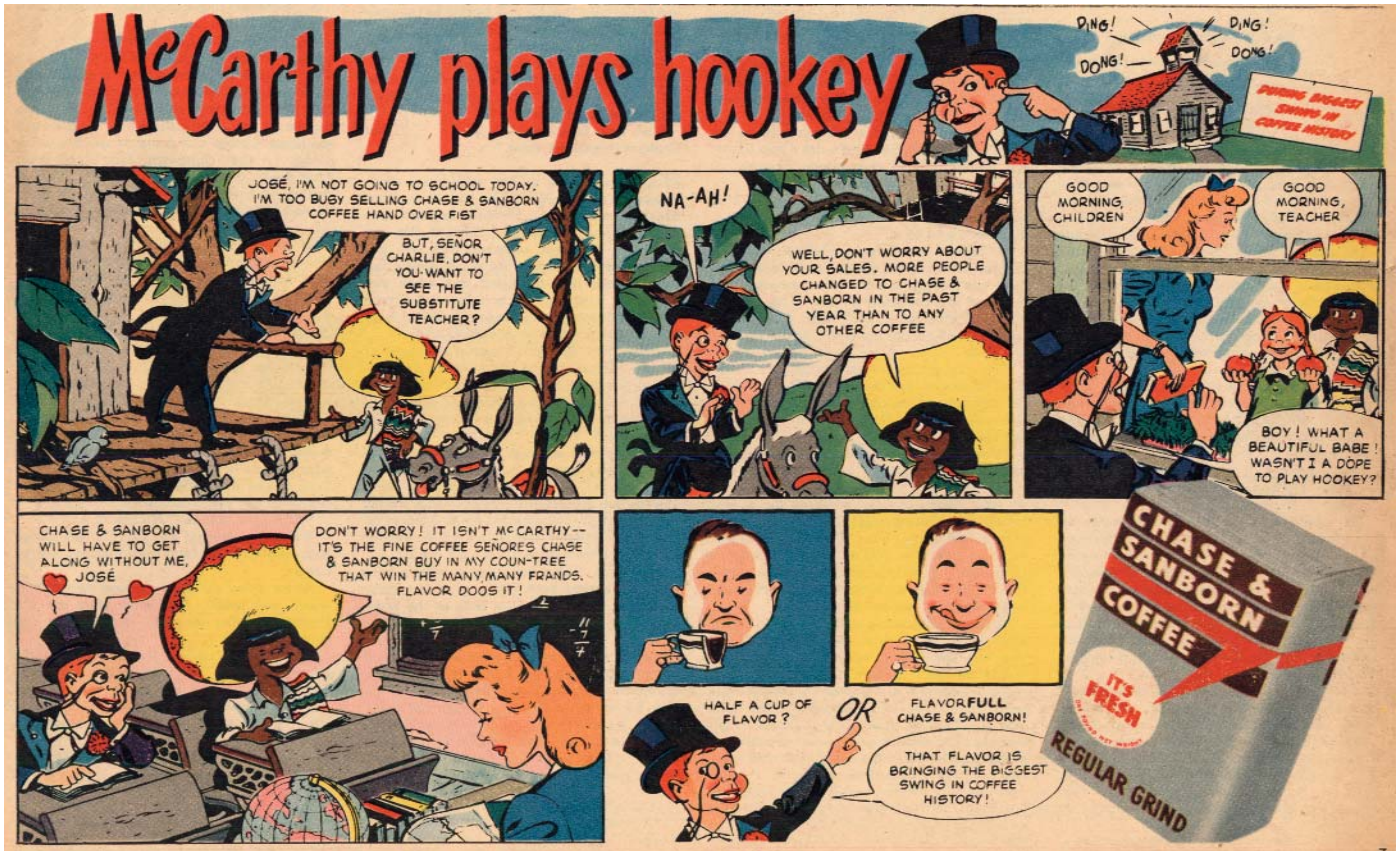
things you think you could not do before."

In the end, Herring failed because even in the midst of their panic and rage, most Americans could not bring themselves to voluntarily restrict bedrock Constitutional protections that had been in place for more than a hundred and fifty years; it was a bridge too far. If the reaction to Welles' broadcast had been more extreme – if, for instance, there had been numerous serious injuries or loss of life – then perhaps the outcome would have been different; luckily, almost everyone came through unscathed. It also helped that The War of the Worlds aired opposite an extremely popular variety show, The Chase and Sanborn Hour, starring ventriloquist Edgar Bergen and his wooden sidekick Charlie McCarthy. Although some listeners switched from Chase and Sanborn to Welles' show after a few minutes, the vast majority of the radio audience did not; thus, the scope of the panic was much smaller than it could have been. For that, we can thank Charlie McCarthy – a tiny wise-cracking dummy who inadvertently helped preserve the right to free speech in America. ■

About the Author

David Acord is an author and veteran Washington, D.C. journalist. He spent more than a decade covering complex federal regulations in the nation's capitol for various business publications. He also served as managing editor and editor-in-chief, respectively, for two international business publishing firms. He is currently the director of communications and executive editor for a national trade association in the D.C. area.

In addition to When Mars Attacked, David is also the author of What Would Lincoln Do? Lincoln's Most Inspired Solutions to Challenging Problems and Difficult Situations (Sourcebooks, 2008) and Success Secrets of Sherlock Holmes: Life Lessons from the Master Detective (Penguin Perigee, 2011). He lives in Arlington, Virginia.



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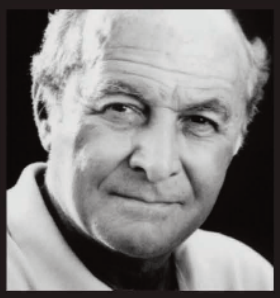

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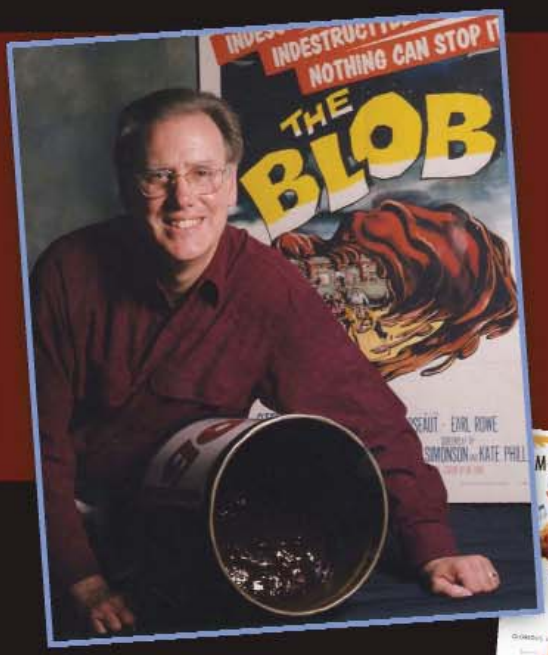

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