

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 53

### “Take Advice From Theodore”

#### Transcript

[music: ragtime fanfare]

When Theodore Roosevelt’s term ended, Progressives wanted his successor to be someone who would preserve and build upon Roosevelt’s reforms, in the face of conservatives, who wanted to turn back the clock to the McKinley era.

Roosevelt thought he’d found just the man in William Howard Taft; someone whose views were similar to his own, and would be a steady and reliable hand on the tiller. Alas, it would not be long before Roosevelt decided his faith in Taft was badly misplaced.

Welcome to the History of the Twentieth Century.

[music: “The Twentieth Century Rag”]

Episode 53. Take Advice From Theodore.

We’re back in the United States today, and in the closing years of the age of ragtime. It’s occurred to me that I only used the ragtime version of the theme music once before today, and ragtime’s almost over, so I want to get the most out of the music. When last we visited the United States, Theodore Roosevelt had just stepped down from the Presidency, so for today, we’ll take a look at what happened next.

On the very night of his election in 1904, Theodore Roosevelt had rashly promised not to run for President again. As we have seen, he would come to regret that decision, and although Roosevelt’s popularity had peaked by 1906 or 1907, he likely could have won re-election in 1908, if he had tried for it. He was at this point only 49 years old, and as hale as ever. But he didn’t. He felt bound by that promise.

During Roosevelt’s presidency, the Republican Party had become increasingly polarized between conservative Eastern pro-business Republicans, who generally had never supported Roosevelt with enthusiasm, and rural and western Progressive Republicans, who were Roosevelt’s base. Roosevelt had worked hard to hold the party together and try to keep both factions happy, but when it came to 1908, Roosevelt was keen to protect his legacy, and in

particular, to avoid seeing some conservative Republican elected who would roll back Roosevelt's Square Deal reforms.

And so Roosevelt settled on William Howard Taft early on as the man to protect his legacy, and, as far as Roosevelt was concerned, if you were his friend, you were a Taft supporter, and if you were not a Taft supporter, you were not his friend.

There were other Republican contenders for the presidency. On the conservative side were Ohio Senator Joseph Foraker, House Speaker Joseph Gannon, and maybe even Vice President Fairbanks. On the progressive side were the firebrand Senator from Wisconsin, Robert La Follette and the Governor of New York, Charles Hughes.

The Democratic Party had held the first ever primary elections in 1904. In 1908, four states held Republican primaries: Ohio and California went for Taft, Wisconsin went for its favorite son, La Follette, and Pennsylvania went for its favorite son, Senator Philander Knox, who, you may recall, had previously been Roosevelt's Attorney General.

On the Democratic side, the nominee was, once again, William Jennings Bryan, who had run unsuccessfully twice against McKinley. But the populist Bryan had run as the progressive alternative to the conservative McKinley, only to watch Theodore Roosevelt and the Republicans enact policies that Bryan had campaigned on, like railroad regulation, trust busting, and a ban on corporate political contributions. In 1908, Bryan could plausibly run as the candidate voters could best trust to uphold the popular Roosevelt legacy. After all, Bryan could honestly say that he had campaigned in favor of all those things long before William Howard Taft ever had.

The Democrats' campaign slogan that year was "Shall the People Rule?" which was a dig at Taft as Roosevelt's hand-picked successor. The informal Republican slogan mocked Bryan's three runs for president by suggesting: "Vote for Taft now...you can vote for Bryan anytime."

But there seemed to be a bipartisan consensus on moving forward with Roosevelt-style Progressivism. There was much still to be done. Laws to set minimum wages and maximum hours. Regulation of child labor. Tariff reform – we'll come back to that one. Further regulation of corporations and more antitrust actions.

The Supreme Court was not being helpful. In 1905, in a case called *Lochner v. New York*, the court declared a New York State law setting a maximum of 10 hours per day on bakery employees unconstitutional. It was a five to four decision. The court held that the United States Constitution implicitly protected a freedom of contract, and that regulation of the terms of an employment contract is unconstitutional.

The *Lochner* case is one of the most famous cases in the history of the United States Supreme Court, famous entirely because today there is nearly unanimous agreement that it was wrongly

decided. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote a scathing dissenting opinion that stands today as some of his most memorable writing. Holmes pointed out that there have always been laws setting limits on what people can or can't agree to in contracts, and observed that the "Constitution is not intended to embody a particular economic theory," especially one "which a large part of the country does not entertain." Nevertheless, it would take the Supreme Court 30 years to overrule this decision. This 30-year period would come to be referred to by legal scholars as the *Lochner* Era, during which the Supreme Court would make it very, very difficult to enact laws to protect working people.

In early 1908, in a case called *Howard v. Illinois Central Railroad Company*, the Supreme Court found unconstitutional a federal workers compensation bill, a bill that Roosevelt had gotten passed during his whirlwind of legislation in 1906. This is another example of *Lochner*-era jurisprudence, and incensed President Roosevelt, who was moved to send a blistering message to Congress, condemning the decision, called it "a matter of humiliation to the nation." It was outrageous, Roosevelt suggested, that the United States would be the only industrialized nation whose government lacked the power to enact basic legislation to protect industrial workers, legislation that was uncontroversial in many of America's competitor nations. Roosevelt called on Congress to craft new legislation to achieve the same end without running afoul of the constitutional markers the court had laid down in its decision.

Now, Roosevelt was a shrewd political operator, and he was all in on Taft as his successor. Publicly, Roosevelt tried to stay aloof from the race to succeed him; privately, he pulled every string he could get his hands on to put Taft in the White House. The content of his message to Congress on the *Howard* decision was no doubt sincere, but his decision to deliver the message on January 31, the very same day that one of Taft's principal Republican challengers, New York Governor Charles Edward Hughes, was scheduled to give a major campaign speech, was pure politics. Roosevelt's message got the headlines, and Hughes was shunted to the back pages. Needless to say, with support like that, Taft won the nomination, and the vice-presidential nomination went to a conservative New York congressman, James Sherman.

William Howard Taft had never run for elective office before. Speaking before a crowd made him nervous; he dreaded doing it. He even hated writing speeches, and was notorious for his procrastination. He was one of those people who would announce to you that it was time to get started writing that speech a week before it was to be delivered, and then the morning of the big day, you would find him staring at a blank piece of paper. He was, in short, the polar opposite of the workaholic Theodore Roosevelt, a man who was never happier than when he was standing in front of a crowd.

As a political novice, Taft was surely thankful to have as savvy a politician as Roosevelt at his disposal for consultation. Roosevelt, of course, was only too happy to tell Taft how to do

everything. Taft's repeated consultations with Roosevelt became so apparent that the press began to make fun of him, saying that T.A.F.T. stood for "Take Advice from Theodore."

Taft even asked Roosevelt to help him draft his acceptance statement to the Republican National Convention in Chicago, although, keeping with the old-fashioned view that it was unseemly for a presidential candidate to campaign too hard, he did not deliver the address in person. He resigned for his position as Secretary of War on June 30, to devote his full time to the campaign, and Roosevelt appointed Luke Wright, Taft's successor as Governor General of the Philippines, to be Taft's successor at the War Department.

In November, Taft won the election convincingly, and Bryan suffered the worst of his three defeats, although he managed to improve on Alton Parker's results from 1904. Bryan carried the same 13 states that Parker had carried, plus Nevada, Colorado, Bryan's home state of Nebraska, and the brand new state of Oklahoma, voting in its first Presidential election, which went Democratic as many had anticipated. More significantly, Democratic performance improved in a swath of Republican states from Pennsylvania through the Midwest and into the Rocky Mountains, evidence that the party was breaking out of its southern stronghold and building a national presence.

The close relationship between Roosevelt and Taft began to break down almost immediately after the election. Taft's frequent consultations with Roosevelt on political strategy ended after the election, and Roosevelt saw little of his successor after that. Taft worked on assembling his own cabinet, which felt like something of a snub to Roosevelt, who had kept on McKinley's cabinet after *he* became president, and expected Taft to do the same. But Taft would dismiss seven out of nine Roosevelt cabinet secretaries, including his own successor, Luke Wright, and James Garfield. We've met Garfield before. He was the son of the former president of the same name and at the end of the Roosevelt administration was Secretary of the Interior. In that role, he was seen as the protector of Roosevelt's conservation policies. Garfield, like Taft, was the scion of an influential Ohio political family. The Garfields and the Tafts knew each other well, and James Garfield had campaigned energetically for Taft in Ohio. He had fully expected to keep his Cabinet position. Instead, Taft kept him hanging until just before his March inaugural, and then announced he would appoint Richard Ballinger, a Seattle attorney and former mayor of that city, a move that alarmed conservationists who saw Garfield as a strong ally.

All seven of Taft's new cabinet secretaries were lawyers, in fact, and many were corporate lawyers. American corporate elites felt encouraged; everyone who supported Roosevelt's trust-busting policies wondered what it all meant. Was Roosevelt now being snubbed? He would say later that he felt that way, though he gave no sign of it at the time. He continued to speak warmly of Taft, and less than three weeks after Taft's inauguration, Roosevelt was off to Africa on a big game hunting safari. It was mostly for his own enjoyment, but it was not an accident that

Roosevelt would be out of the country for the next year, giving Taft some breathing space to define his own administration.

He needed it. By his own admission, Taft was no politician, and acknowledged that had it not been for his wife, Nellie, he likely would still be a judge. Nellie Taft, having already been effectively the First Lady of the Philippines, was well-suited to the White House, in contrast to the much more private Edith Roosevelt, who was once quoted as saying that a woman's name should only appear in the newspaper twice: when she gets married and when she dies. She had routinely refused interview requests. Edith Roosevelt remains to this day one of the most obscure First Ladies of the twentieth century—in stark contrast to her husband, the Mt. Rushmore guy.

Nellie Taft took up the cause of improving wages and working conditions for women in public employment, or “working girls” as they were called at that time. The Tafts sent their daughter to Bryn Mawr College, and Nellie publicly endorsed higher education for women. And the right of women to vote.

Inspired by the parks of Manila, and the band concerts there, Nellie spearheaded a project to beautify Washington's Tidal Basin and make it into a public park. She had developed a fondness for Japanese cherry trees during her visits to Asia, and when she heard that the climate of Washington was suitable, there was no stopping her. She purchased 100 Japanese cherry trees for the park, which made the newspapers as far away as Japan, which in turn inspired the mayor of Tokyo to send Washington a gift of two thousand more.

As for the new president, once he was in office, the first major issue he chose to take up was tariff reform. Yes, I can see your eyes glazing over already, even though this is a podcast. But tariffs are an important and neglected aspect of this era. The United States government, like most national governments of this time, got much of its tax revenue from import tariffs. The issue of tariffs is tricky because tariffs have a lot of moving parts. They affect government revenue, the business climate, and relations with other countries all the same time.

We have already seen how the landed nobles of East Prussia pressured the Imperial German government to raise agricultural tariffs, which in turn drove a wedge between Germany and Russia. So, you see? So sit up and pay attention.

In the United States, high tariffs have been a cornerstone of Republican Party policy. Republicans are the party of business, and businesses loves tariffs, because they keep the price of imports high, which allows domestic businesses to keep their prices high as well. Lowering tariffs was part of the platform of Grover Cleveland when he ran for president in 1892. After William McKinley was elected in 1896, tariffs went right back up again.

Tariffs were a hot issue in the Republican Party during the Roosevelt administration. The conservative, Eastern pro-business wing of the party still loves tariffs to pieces. But the more

progressive Western and rural pro-Roosevelt wing of the party is becoming increasingly anti-tariff. For one thing, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when trust busting is a major issue, many people began to ask whether high import tariffs were facilitating the growth of these dangerously large monopolies. There was also an equity issue. Tariffs are essentially sales taxes, and as any economist can tell you, sales taxes are essentially regressive. Poor people pay proportionately more of their income in sales taxes, and rich people pay proportionately less.

This case was laid out before the American public by none other than Ida Tarbell herself, in a 1909 magazine article entitled “Where the Shoe Is Pinched.” Animal hides were exempt from import tariffs until the 1897 McKinley-era tariff increases. In the decade since then, the price of shoes went up 25% in spite of new machinery and manufacturing methods that could make shoes more efficiently. High import tariffs allow domestic producers to jack up their prices without fear of losing sales, because everyone needs shoes, even working-class people making less than \$10 a week, who haven’t seen a raise since the Cleveland administration, and were finding that the purchase and repair of shoes was eating up a larger and larger share of their income. Tariffs had made possible a leather trust.

Another problem with tariffs was that they were arcane. Because they’re not just a flat percentage. Wool tariff regulations, for example, were over 4,000 words long. There were different tariffs for different grades of wool, and you have to be an expert in the wool trade to understand the tariff schedule. This invited corruption, because only the experts could see what effect the tariff schedule would have on the wool trade. Even most congressmen who were voting on these tariffs probably didn’t understand the impact they were having on American business. And that was entirely the point.

So the issue of tariffs had the potential to split the Republican Party. Roosevelt had understood this, which is why he never took up the cause, although sometimes he threatened to, during negotiations with conservative Republicans in Congress, as a bargaining chip to get his way on other issues. Tariffs had become a personal issue for Taft when he was Governor of the Philippines, because he had lobbied Congress hard to exempt the Philippines from import tariffs. Taft had thought, reasonably enough, that tariff exemption for Philippine imports would benefit the Philippine economy and would build ties between the Philippines and the United States. But Philippine exports were mostly tobacco and sugar, and the tobacco and sugar lobbies in the United States had fought him tooth and nail, and the tariff preference for the Philippines had gone nowhere.

And so, Taft took up tariff reform. His first message to Congress, just two weeks after his inauguration, was a call for tariff reform. To the amazement of his allies and his opponents alike, that first message to Congress was all of 340 words, about 1/50 the length of the messages Congress was used to getting from Theodore Roosevelt. Taft had written it earlier that morning.

And although he called for tariff reform, he offered Congress no bill, no guidelines. He left all that to them.

Tariff reform became the number one issue of 1909, and both houses of Congress worked on the question. Of course, there was also the question of how to replace government revenues lost to tariff reductions. The Progressive answer was a corporate tax and a graduated income tax. Taft endorsed the former. As for the income tax, the Supreme Court had previously declared a federal income tax unconstitutional. The reason was a provision of the Constitution that requires any Federal property tax to be evenly allocated among the states. There was no Federal property tax in 1909, and there hadn't been one for over a hundred years. But the Court ruled that to the extent that an income tax taxes income from property, such as rents or interest or stock dividends, it was effectively a property tax.

It was a strange ruling, and, please note that the Supreme Court never said that a Federal income tax on wages and salaries posed any kind of constitutional problem, one hundred years worth of legal charlatans notwithstanding. Still, if there was to be an income tax, it would either have to exempt rents and interest and dividends, or else there would have to be a constitutional amendment. Congress went the latter route, and passed the first constitutional amendment since the Reconstruction Era, to empower the federal government to tax any income, from whatever source. The amendment would take effect in February 1913, just days before the end of Taft's term.

As for tariff reform itself, The House passed a bill that reduced many tariffs; the Senate, on the other hand, drew up a bill that lowered a few tariffs and raised many others. That's the Senate for you. Still the bastion of conservative men of business. The two bills went to conference committee, and there was more debate. In the end, the Congress passed a tariff bill that pleased to no one. Taft didn't help either his cause or himself when he signed it and declared it "the best bill that the Republican Party ever passed," even though it was clear that the new bill had made Western Republicans very unhappy.

Okay, enough about tariffs for now. As a palate cleanser, how about some Scott Joplin? In 1909, Joplin published *Euphonic Sounds*, one of his most popular works. This performance was taken from a period piano roll, and not just any piano roll, but a piano roll of Scott Joplin's own performance, made in 1917. It's not often you get to hear Joplin himself play piano, so this recording is historically significant. Sadly, Joplin was in poor health when he made this recording, and it comes through in the performance. Still, what better way to understand ragtime than by listening to the master himself give his interpretation?

[music: *Euphonic Sounds*]

One of the events of the Taft era that had convinced many Progressives that Taft was not one of them was the Pinchot affair. Gifford Pinchot was the Chief of the US Forest Service under

Roosevelt, and in the early Taft administration. But Pinchot was fired from his position in 1910, following a public dispute with Taft's Interior Secretary, Richard Ballinger. Ballinger, who you will recall was a lawyer, made a decision favorable to a former client regarding a claim on lands in Alaska believed to contain large coal reserves. Ballinger vehemently denied any wrongdoing, but Pinchot persisted in talking publicly about the issue until Taft fired him. Again, it looked like Taft was backtracking on Roosevelt's commitment to conservation. By early 1910, muckraking journalist Ray Baker had published an article entitled "Is the Republican Party Breaking Up?"

Now, as it happens, there was a rumor going around that the big man himself continued to be a staunch supporter of his successor, and was sending him letters of encouragement. One enterprising newspaper reporter, trying to confirm this rumor, asked the President about it, unwittingly forcing Taft into the awkward position of having to admit that he hadn't heard a peep out of Theodore Roosevelt since he'd left the country last March, even though everyone knew that Roosevelt, characteristically, was maintaining an energetic correspondence with his other friends, relatives, and political allies.

So, what was going on here? This is a question that historians have dug into deeply, looking for the sources of the coming rift between Taft and Roosevelt. Taft had written Roosevelt a fond farewell letter and sent him a gift before Roosevelt left on his trip. In the letter-writing etiquette of the time, that meant Roosevelt owed Taft a reply, but he seems never to have sent one, and Taft spent the entire fifteen months that Roosevelt was abroad wondering why his friend and political mentor was now giving him the cold shoulder.

This breakdown in the correspondence between these two men turns out to be merely the first sign that this formerly close friendship and political alliance was about to crash and burn. And not only would it crash and burn, but it would crash and burn and then there would be a terrible earthquake, and it would fall into a deep crevice, and then a volcanic explosion would hurl it back out into a pool of lava, and then a giant meteor would fall...well, you get the idea. It would be bad. The break between Roosevelt and Taft will be the defining feature of the next Presidential election and would split the Republican Party for years to come.

Roosevelt's trip to Africa had ostensibly been to collect specimens for the Smithsonian Institution's brand new Natural History Museum. The party sent home over 11,000 specimens in all. The plan had originally been to return to the United States following the African expedition, but Roosevelt had received so many invitations from European monarchs and statesmen that he added six weeks onto his itinerary to take in a tour of Europe. He was welcomed in royal palaces in every capital, invited to lecture at great universities, and even got to pal around with Kaiser Wilhelm II.

When he returned to the United States, Roosevelt's ship was escorted by yachts and battleships. He debarked to brass bands, waving signs and American flags and throngs of spectators and reporters. He gave speeches, impromptu press conferences, and was paraded five miles up



Broadway, escorted by 150 members of the old First United States Volunteer Cavalry—his old Rough Riders—in front of sidewalks packed with spectators, waving still more signs. Many of which called on Roosevelt to run for President in 1912.

In Africa, Roosevelt had been telling everyone his political career was over. Now...? Maybe not.

The President's wife, Helen Taft, more often known as Nellie, suffered a stroke in May 1909, which disabled her for an extended period. This left Taft deprived of the counsel of the two people whose advice he'd relied upon the most in his political career, Roosevelt and Nellie. The person who filled in and became his closest and most trusted aide was US Army Captain Archibald Butt. Born in 1865, Archie Butt was a veteran of the Spanish-American War and the Philippine War and had served in various government posts. In 1908, Theodore Roosevelt had brought him to the White House and appointed him military aide to the President, and Taft kept him on in that role.

Archie had become personal friends with Roosevelt and his family, and similarly won over the Tafts. The coming rift between the two would be painful to Archie, who strove to remain friendly to both Presidents and hope for a reconciliation. Archie would play a big role in the Taft White House in organizing the staff, consulting with the President, and negotiating with Congress.

The 44-year old Archie Butt never married, but he shared a large house in Washington with the artist Francis Millet, who was 18 years his senior. Together they were regulars on the Washington social circuit, including hosting parties in their own home, parties that were attended by Representatives, Senators, Supreme Court justices, and even President Taft himself.

Archie would introduce Frank simply as "my artist friend who lives with me," and Washington society of the time appears to have taken little notice of the relationship, although from the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it's hard not to think they were a gay couple. There is no known documentary evidence to support this, although you need to keep in mind that Archie was well known for his political and organizational skills, which is what made him so useful to Taft, so he's not likely to be the kind of guy so careless or indiscreet as to leave love letters lying around, or whatever. It's also worth noting that Frank Millet is known to have been involved in a love affair with another man earlier in his life, so there you are.

As we've seen, Roosevelt's staunchest partisans quickly became disappointed with Taft, and soon concluded he had sold them out. That's too harsh a judgment on Taft. Taft mostly believed in the same policy goals as Roosevelt; it's just that Taft was a different kind of leader. He lacked Roosevelt's energy, his charisma, his bombast. Taft was a go along and get along kind of guy. And he was a lawyer and a judge, not just as a matter of personal history, but of temperament. Taft's style was to listen to both sides, weigh the issue quietly and carefully, then issue a decision backed by a reasoned and dignified argument. Just like what a judge does.

Taft had a more conservative view of presidential power than Roosevelt had had. Taft was perhaps too deferential to Congress, and too chummy with his lawyer friends like Ballinger. He was a steady, moderate kind of guy, and it didn't take long before Roosevelt's most ardent Progressive supporters were pining for the good old days when Theodore Roosevelt was large and in charge.

You'd have to wonder how many times Roosevelt would need to be told that Taft was a sellout, and it was his duty to reclaim the leadership of the Progressive movement in America before Roosevelt would start to believe it. He was being told exactly that, over and over again. Even the most humble of public servants could only receive that message so many times before he decided he would have to act on it, and Theodore Roosevelt was *not* one of the most humble of public servants. At the age of 51, actually a year younger than Taft, he was still fit and energetic. Why not?

Although it appears that Roosevelt was done with Taft by the time he returned to the United States, he did not begin criticizing Taft publicly. At least, not at once. The 1910 midterm elections were coming up, and neither man wanted to hurt Republican chances by starting an ugly fight.

Roosevelt traveled the country, giving speeches, in which he began advocating policy ideas far more progressive and radical than anything he had ever spoken of while he was President. While he still endorsed the Square Deal, he said, it was now clear that under the current system, fair play was not possible. There would have to be systemic changes in the US political and economic systems.

He endorsed tariff reductions, a graduated income tax and corporate taxes, as well as an inheritance tax on large estates. He advocated for party nominations to be made in primary elections, rather than in state conventions. He called for new laws banning corporations from expending money to influence political questions. He endorsed new laws regulating child labor and funding job training. He blasted *Lochner*-Era jurisprudence, and called for limits on the Supreme Court.

Progressives, especially in the West, loved it. The Eastern Republican business interests called it radical, and socialism. Taft himself felt first frustrated, then embittered. Roosevelt had never talked like this when he was in the White House. And now, Taft was being painted as having somehow sold out the Roosevelt program, when it was not Taft but Roosevelt who was changing his positions.

As the two men jockeyed for the role of leader of the Republican Party, they both campaigned in state and congressional races. Roosevelt focused on his native New York, Taft on Ohio. Now, it's usual in mid-term elections for the President's party to lose seats in Congress. You may

recall that even during Roosevelt's presidency, Republicans lost seats in both mid-term elections, although the losses were small, and Republican control of Congress was never threatened.

1910 was quite different. The Republicans took a drubbing across the country. The Democratic Party gained in the Senate, and picked up 57 seats to take control of the House of Representatives for the first time in 16 years. Despite Roosevelt's support, the entire Republican slate went down to defeat in New York, and in Ohio, Taft political ally Warren Harding lost his bid to become governor. And in New Jersey, the president of Princeton University, a political science professor and Democrat named Woodrow Wilson, a first-time political candidate, got himself elected governor of the state in a convincing win in a state that Taft had carried easily just two years ago.

The Democratic Party was increasingly embracing popular Progressivism, even in the South to some extent, while the Republican Party was tearing itself apart over the same issues. And Republicans could not even agree on the cause of the rift. If you were a Progressive Republican, then Taft was a sellout. If you were a conservative Republican, then Roosevelt, whom you never regarded as particularly sane in the first place, had finally gone barking mad, and seemed intent on taking your beloved party along with him.

With the midterms out of the way, attention began to focus on the 1912 Presidential contest, and it was already clear that Theodore Roosevelt had no intention of sitting back and allowing William Howard Taft to claim a second term without a fight.

We'll have to stop there for today. I've had several listeners ask questions along the lines of, how long is this podcast going to take? How fast are we moving? When will we get to the end? The short answer to these questions is, "I don't know." The longer answer is that when I first began this podcast, I figured it would take 200 to 250 episodes to complete. I'm now thinking something longer than that, maybe 300 episodes or so. We'll see. The podcast is organized by topic, and not chronologically, but I think it's fair to say that we're solidly in the year 1909 by now.

You might look at that year and the episode number, and think, "Doesn't that imply more than 500 episodes altogether?" I don't think so. Many of our earlier episodes were retrospective, and covered material mostly, or entirely, in earlier centuries. I included them because they provided important backstory I felt you needed to have before I could tell the stories of the early twentieth century. That process of laying down the backstory, though, is pretty much over now.

Also, life in the early twentieth century was different from life today in many ways, socially, politically, and culturally, and I feel it's important to emphasize those differences. As we progress through the century, and the society more closely comes to resemble our own, there will be less need for me to explain the local customs as we pass through. All this means, I think, that the narrative will move faster as we proceed through the century. We'll see. I haven't planned it

out much farther than the Great War, which is coming. I don't often mention the Great War because it came as a surprise to many at the time, and I'm trying to recreate that feeling by springing it on you in the narrative. But just so you know, expect Great Power tensions in Europe to become a major topic by January, with the actual shooting war breaking out probably in May. After that, well, we'll all have to wait and see.

But I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we take a look at astronomy in the early twentieth century. There were a few important astronomical events during this period: a huge meteor strike, two significant comets, and a controversy around the planet Mars. A prominent American astronomer of the day, a wealthy eccentric who built his own observatory all the way out in the Arizona Territory, was claiming he had observational evidence that Mars was the home not only to life, but to an advanced civilization. Most other astronomers disagree, but...maybe he's on to something? That's next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing? One of the curiosities of William Howard Taft's presidency which, spoiler alert, is only going to last one term, is that in four years he managed to appoint no fewer than six Supreme Court justices. That's something of a record. The only Presidents who have had more influence in shaping the Supreme Court were Franklin Roosevelt, the man who held the presidency longer than anyone else and got eight appointments, and George Washington, who got to make ten. In Washington's case, the fact that he started with a blank slate and got to appoint all six of the first set of Supreme Court justices had something to do with it. Also, Washington got two terms and Taft only got one.

Taft's first appointment to the Court was an old colleague, Horace Lurton. And I mean old literally, as Lurton was 65 when Taft appointed him, making him to this day the oldest person ever to be appointed an associate Justice. Taft got to appoint a new Chief Justice, to replace Melville Fuller, who finally died in 1910. You'll recall Taft was recently eyeing that position for himself.

Taft also appointed the Governor of New York, his former rival for the Republican presidential nomination, Charles Edward Hughes, to another vacancy. And the last of Taft's six appointments was Mahlon Pitney, who is notable as the last person to receive an appointment to the Supreme Court without ever having attended law school. .

[music: closing theme]