

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 178

### “1919 – Austria-Hungary III”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

The Great War was begun as part of a scheme to revitalize the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It ended with the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy, and its replacement with separate Austrian and Hungarian states, both of them republics, thus ending a 900-year-old dynasty.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 178. 1919 – Austria-Hungary. Part three.

This is the third episode in our 1919 World Tour series, and like the first two, we’re in Austria-Hungary, and you can bet I’m hoping this series won’t require me to do three episodes each on every single nation in the world. But you know Austria-Hungary is a special case. It isn’t every day an empire breaks up on you.

To review, we’ve already covered the formations of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, as well as the transfer of sovereignty over Transylvania from Hungary to Romania. The new nation of Poland and the older nation of Italy each took control of some formerly Habsburg territory, but I’m saving those two countries for future episodes. We’ll be talking about Poland in the next episode. (More about that later.) What remains of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy for today’s episode is Austria and Hungary themselves. Hungary, you’ll recall, declared the Dual Monarchy dissolved and went its own way following the Aster Revolution on October 31, 1918.

I’ll come back to Hungary in a few minutes, but for now, let’s focus on Austria. What is Austria, anyway? This is actually a complicated question. The simplest answer is that Austria is what’s left of the Cisleithanian half of the former Empire after the secession of the Czech and South Slav and Italian-speaking regions. Or to put it even more simply, it’s the German-speaking region of the Austrian half of the former Empire.

That's not especially simple, does it? But that's what the "Provisional National Assembly for German Austria" declared on October 30, 1918, in the wake of the independence declarations of Czechoslovakia on the 28<sup>th</sup> and the South Slavs on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The Provisional National Assembly was made up of the German-speaking members of the old Imperial Reichsrat, that is, the Reichsrat minus those who had already left to take part in the governance of the newly declared Czechoslovakia and the State of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs.

On November 11, 1918, one week after Austria-Hungary agreed to the Armistice of Villa Giusti, and the same day the Armistice on the Western Front took effect, the Austrian Kaiser Karl issued a proclamation which was not quite an abdication, but did say he relinquished his power over the governance of Austria. Two days later, he would issue a comparable declaration with respect to Hungary. In one sense, Karl was merely bowing to the inevitable, but it's significant that he did stop short of a full abdication, unlike his brother Kaiser in Germany. Instead, he left the door open for the either or both of the new governments in Vienna or Budapest to invite him back, perhaps under a new constitutional monarchy. Karl probably calculated the odds of at least one of his former realms taking him up on this implied offer were pretty good. But in fact the level of interest in this possibility in either capital was approximately zero.

This was obvious enough that by March 1919, even Karl had given up and he and his family went into exile in Switzerland. Later, in 1921, after a failed attempt to reclaim the Hungarian throne, the Allies would move Karl into exile on the Portuguese island of Madeira, where he would pass away from pneumonia just months later, on April 1, 1922. Karl's postwar plans to regain one or both of his thrones were no more successful than his wartime plans to hold his empire together had been. Karl was not a particularly adroit politician, but it's doubtful whether the most skilled of leaders could have charted a course through the troubled waters history forced Karl to navigate. He was 34 years old.

Karl's non-abdication abdication did not go entirely unnoticed in Vienna. The following day, November 12, the Provisional National Assembly declared German Austria, as they called it, a republic embracing the German-speaking regions of the old Austrian Empire. So take that, former-Kaiser Karl. They also declared that German Austria was an integral part of the new German republic. Now what do these two declarations mean, especially when you put them side by side? That was anybody's guess.

The largest party in this rump Reichsrat was the Christian Social Party. The second largest was the Austrian Social Democratic party. In spite of their party's second-place status in the National Assembly, the new government would be dominated by Social Democrats, with the chancellor being the 48-year old Karl Renner. This deference to the Social Democrats was strategic. With strikes and workers' protests breaking out all over Vienna and workers' militias forming and soldiers returning from Russia with their heads full of Bolshevism, it was thought prudent to let Social Democratic leaders deal with this delicate situation, and this was a wise choice. The Social Democrats had enough credibility with socialists and worker groups to win at least

grudging support, although the political situation in Vienna remained uneasy. There was an attempted leftist coup in June 1919, but it failed, and Austria avoided the fate of Hungary.

As a defeated member of the Central Powers, Austria would not get a seat at the peace conference. In the meanwhile, Austrians were left to contemplate exactly what Austria, or “German-Austria,” was. There had been an Austria for 700 years, but there had never been an Austrian state before. Austria had merely been a patchwork of territories that had nothing in common except a language, German, a religion, Roman Catholicism, and a ruling dynasty, the Habsburgs.

Austria was a land of 6.5 million people centered on Vienna, which was the largest city in Europe after London and Paris. But by 1919, Vienna had become an imperial capital that no longer ruled an empire. The population of Vienna and its environs approached half the population of all Austria. You could almost regard Austria as a city-state. From Vienna spread a network of road and rail arteries that extended to Prague and Budapest and Trieste, destinations that now lay on the other side of international borders. The new nations on the other sides of those borders were struggling economically themselves and resented Vienna, hence, no more shipments of grain from Hungary, no more coal from Bohemia. It was not at all clear whether this small, land-locked city-state could survive.

One obvious solution was the one the new National Council itself was floating: that German-Austria unite with Germany. People were even using the German word *Anschluß*, “joining” or “unification,” which, if you’ve read ahead in your history of the twentieth century, yeah, you know this is going to become a touchy topic. But it was not a new idea. It’s been out there since Germany formed in 1871. Since Germany defines itself as an ethnic German state, it might seem natural to include German-speaking Austrians. The problem has always been that for Habsburg Austria to bring along its non-German-speaking territories into Germany would undermine the ethnic identity of the German state, but to relinquish control over the non-German-speaking territories has hitherto been unthinkable. But now that the non-German-speaking territories are lost anyway, the unthinkable has become, well, thinkable.

But unification was not to be. Karl Renner and the Social Democrats were open to the idea, but the Catholic-oriented Christian Social Party was not happy with the idea of Catholic Austria getting swallowed up in a much larger, Protestant-dominated Germany. But their unease was as nothing compared to the French unease. Remember that Germany, even in defeat, remained a more populous nation than France, with a larger economy. The French certainly haven’t forgotten, and their top priority is making sure that Germany is never a threat again. Adding 6.5 million new Germans into a nation that was already bigger than France was, shall we say, inconsistent with that priority. The French floated the idea of severing the Catholic south of Germany and uniting that with Austria, thus creating a northern Protestant state and a southern Catholic one that presumably would be friendlier toward Catholic France, but the British and the Americans opposed dividing Germany.

Back in 1914, Austria-Hungary had been at least as responsible as Germany for starting the war. The Allies wanted Austria-Hungary to bear its share of the war guilt and its share of reparations, but the dissolution of the Empire made that difficult. If Austria and Hungary were to be expected to pay reparations, surely they couldn't be expected to bear the full cost alone, without contributions from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and Romania and Poland. Only, who wants to be the first to suggest that our own allies pay us reparations?

Also, Kaiser Karl's attempts to negotiate a peace in 1917 did buy Austria some goodwill with the Allies, as did the obvious truth that by the end of the war, Austria had become almost as much a victim of German domination as Belgium had. Add to that the fact that the new rump Austrian state had no money and that it was teetering on the brink of Bolshevik revolution—you don't want to see Austria end up like Hungary, do you?—and a consensus emerged to go easy on Vienna. No reparations payments would be demanded, but the Treaty of Saint-Germain, which formally ended the war against Austria, did prohibit Austria from uniting with Germany, unless the unification was approved by the League of Nations. Austria was required to give up its concessions in China. And due to a clerical error caused by a careless cut-and-paste operation using the treaty with Germany as a model, the befuddled Austrians found themselves confronted with a provision banning the landlocked nation from building any U-boats.

The Allies resorted to a plebiscite to settle part of Austria's southern border in the region of Carinthia. This plebiscite was held in October 1920. The population of the region in question was Slovene by about a 2-1 ratio, and the question was, should this region remain part of Austria or join the new Yugoslav state? During the plebiscite campaign, German-speaking Austrians pledged to respect Slovene minority rights and warned that the new Yugoslavia would be a warlike state that would draft Slovene sons into its military. The pro-secession side warned Slovenes they would be ruled by Jews and German barons. In the end, the region voted to remain part of Austria, by a margin of 60%-40%, which roughly means about half of the ethnic Slovenes must have voted to remain in Austria. The outcome would be controversial for decades to come.

Austria was awarded a small strip of land on the Hungarian side of the Austro-Hungarian border, approximately the same territory Czechoslovakia had wanted for its corridor to Yugoslavia. This was partly for the sake of Austrian national security, since Vienna was very close to the new border, partly because the inhabitants of the strip were German-speaking, and partly because the city of Vienna needed the produce of the region's farms. This put Austria in a singular position, being the only one of the Central Powers to gain a bit of territory from the Paris Peace Conference. Admittedly, a very small bit.

[music: Strauss, *Frühlingsstimmen*]

The last time we looked at Hungary, we saw the Aster Revolution unfold in the final days of October 1918. The revolution brought to power a new socialist-dominated Hungarian National Council led by Count Mihály Károlyi, a wealthy Hungarian aristocrat who had become an

outspoken opponent of the war and had endorsed peace with the Allies based on Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points formula. In Vienna, Kaiser Karl had no choice but to become the horse led by the cart, and so he ratified the Aster Revolution by appointing Károly prime minister.

Hungary had always been the more conservative half of Austria-Hungary. On the Austrian side, there were many attempts to work out a *modus vivendi* between German speakers and the Slavic minorities, though no one was ever able to find a compromise that satisfied both sides. In Hungary, things were quite different. There was a strict policy of magyarization and minority languages and cultures were suppressed, even though, or perhaps because, Hungary was a majority minority nation, with ethnic Magyars accounting for less than half the population. Hungary also complicated efforts to find a solution to ethnic strife in Austria by bitterly opposing any proposal to grant to Czechs or South Slavs the same privileges Hungary had within the Dual Monarchy.

The new government laid out an ambitious reform program for Hungary, including the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy and the establishment of a Hungarian republic, land reform, civil liberties and recognition of minority rights. The new Hungary was not going to suppress its minority cultures, it was going to embrace them and become the Switzerland of Eastern Europe.

Yeah, get in line. There's a lot of that kind of talk going around these days, but these new liberal promises were greeted skeptically, both by Hungary's unhappy minority groups and by the Allies. Károly told US representatives in Budapest that his postwar policy was, "Wilson, Wilson, Wilson." Pictures of the US President popped up all over the capital, adorned with the legend, "A Wilson Peace is the Only Peace for Hungary."

The new government tried to put its best foot forward with the Allies by sending the noted Hungarian feminist and pacifist Rosika Schwimmer to Switzerland to open a dialogue with Allied governments. We've met Schwimmer before, in episodes 108 and 132, where I noted this arguably made her the first woman ambassador in history, but it was to no avail. She was rebuffed by the Allies and sent back to Budapest by the Swiss, at least in part because she was a woman.

A show of good intentions would not be enough to save Hungary. This became obvious as soon as Károly traveled to Belgrade to meet with the French commander, Louis Franchet d'Esperey, to sign a new armistice. He was signing a new armistice because, after the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy, the new Hungarian government wasn't sure the armistice that the Austrians had signed still applied to Hungary, so best to nail down another one, just to be on the safe side. That's how I handle my affairs, too.

But this meeting also represented an opportunity to make a good impression on the Allies and convince them that Hungary truly had reformed.

It didn't work. The Hungarians got a chilly reception, with General Franchet d'Esperey telling Károly to his face that Hungary's history of suppression of its ethnic minorities was well known to the Allies, and it was going to stop. Right now. So much for the Switzerland of Eastern Europe. This one, anyway.

The French commander ordered the Hungarians to withdraw their military from Hungary's minority regions: the Banat, Slovakia, Croatia, and Transylvania. Now, the military situation in Eastern Europe is a little...rickety. In theory, there is an armistice in place and Austrian and Hungarian forces are committed to comply with its terms. The Allied Army of the Orient is theoretically responsible for maintaining order wherever the Central Powers are not, which right now is a huge swath of territory from Greece up to Poland. The French and British had nowhere near enough soldiers of their own to occupy all this real estate, so in practice they outsourced the job to their local allies, especially the armies of Serbia, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. And what do these three nations have in common? They all border on Hungary, they all have ethnic cousins living in Hungary, and they all have longstanding grievances against Hungary, which raises the question, once these hostile forces occupy those ethnic minority regions of Hungary, what are the odds they'll leave voluntarily? Like, ever?

The Károly government made the calculation that Hungary's best chance lay in full cooperation with the Allies and in reliance on Allied goodwill, and especially on the high principles of Woodrow Wilson, in the hope that the final settlement will be something less draconian than the current armistice lines. The nationalist right in Hungary, on the other hand, was already unsettled by the abolition of the monarchy, the sight of a government full of socialists, and all this talk of land reform. The voluntary surrender of half the kingdom to Hungary's erstwhile mortal enemies was almost too much to bear.

And it soon would become actually too much to bear. On March 20, 1919, the French command ordered the creation of a neutral zone between the Hungarian and Romanian militaries, supposedly to reduce the risk of any outbreak of violence. Creation of this neutral zone would require Hungarian forces to withdraw farther west, while no comparable demand was being made on the Romanians to withdraw to the east. But what would happen if the Romanians decided to take advantage of the opportunity the Hungarian withdrawal created to march right into this so-called "neutral zone" and take it for themselves? Who would stop them?

Károly told the French military representative that if he agreed to this demand, there would be revolution. The French military representative told him to calm down and stop being so hysterical. The next day, March 21, there was a revolution. The Hungarian Social Democratic Party, the largest party in Károly's coalition, joined forces with Hungarian Bolsheviks—I might as well just call them Hungarian communists—under the leadership of Béla Kun, who that same day proclaimed the world's second socialist state, the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Just like that. And the reputation of Bolshevism as an ideology that magically transforms minds and nations got a little stronger. Is Bolshevism about to consume the whole world? Well, we'll have to see.

Béla Kohn was born in 1886 in a small village in Transylvania, and thus had just turned 33 years old when he took power in Hungary. His father was a non-practicing Jew; his mother was a Jewish convert to Protestantism. When he turned 18, he magyarized his surname to "Kun." He became a writer, a journalist, a husband, and a socialist, not necessarily in that order. Kun was conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian Army during the Great War and served on the Eastern Front until he was taken prisoner by the Russians during the Brusilov Offensive of 1916. He was sent to a POW camp in eastern Russia, where he was exposed to Bolshevik ideology and became a true believer, so much so that after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, he was one of the many Hungarians who opted to remain in Russia to help see through the proletarian revolution. He fought for the Red Army in 1918. After the Aster Revolution, Kun was among a few hundred other Hungarian Bolsheviks that the Moscow government sent home armed with bags full of money and heads full of Bolshevism.

Less than five months later came the newly proclaimed Hungarian Soviet Republic. Béla Kun was in principle merely the commissar for foreign affairs in the new government, but he was calling the shots, and he was doing it while regularly consulting telegraphically with Lenin in Moscow.

News of the new Hungarian government sent shock waves all the way to the Paris Peace Conference. Woodrow Wilson's first reaction was to regret pushing the former Hungarian government to accept that neutral zone. David Lloyd George, on the other hand, conscious of Hungary's history of aristocratic nationalism, welcomed the revolution. At first.

The new government rapidly nationalized land and industry in Hungary. Not the kind of land reform the rural peasants had been hoping for, but collectivization, which was almost as unpopular as organizing red militias to go out into the countryside and confiscate food for the cities, which the new government also did.

It's not clear that this new communist government had much support anywhere in the country beyond the industrial workers in Budapest. After a couple of weeks, the Allies sent Jan Smuts to Budapest, ostensibly to discuss that whole neutral zone issue, but actually to sound out Béla Kun and see what kind of Hungarian government the Allies were now dealing with. On the second day of the talks, Smuts walked out of the meeting and returned to Paris, reporting his view that Kun was not going to be in power for very long.

Kun's and his government's appeal, such as it was, had at least as much to do with their loudly asserted commitment to maintain the pre-war borders of Hungary as with their socialist principles. Kun tried to keep that pledge in May by sending his red militia, which consisted mostly of armed workers from Budapest, against Czechoslovakian forces in Slovakia and Romanians in Transylvania. In Slovakia, the Hungarians caught the Czechoslovaks by surprise and were able to take control of Slovakia briefly, long enough to declare a *very* short-lived "Slovak Socialist Republic," which, hey, a lot of people thought the point of this was to maintain

the pre-war borders. Anyway, the battle-hardened Czechoslovaks were soon able to regroup and push back against the Hungarians.

Kun's government also tried to retake Transylvania from the Romanians, again unsuccessfully. We can speculate about what kind of promises Lenin and his government in Moscow might have made to Kun, but the prospects of Russia aiding the communist government in Budapest were nil, since post-war Russia does not share a border with post-war Hungary, but Russia did border on Romania and did have a territorial claim on Bessarabia, which the Romanians had annexed after the Armistice. A Russian advance into Bessarabia in 1919 might have been enough to give Hungary the upper hand in Transylvania, but that was not to be. The Red Army had its hands full with the Russian Civil War and with the Polish Army, which was now advancing east. More about that later.

Did Lenin promise to help Hungary? Maybe, or perhaps Kun was just a little overoptimistic. Either way, picking a fight with the Romanians was a huge mistake. Russian help did not come and the Romanian Army easily withstood the Hungarian attack and began advancing even deeper into Hungarian territory.

By late June, the Social Democratic Party broke with Béla Kun and the communists and attempted to take control of the government. They failed and the communists swiftly organized revolutionary tribunals that put to death hundreds of their political opponents, in a period known as the Hungarian Red Terror.

On August 1, as Romanian troops closed in on Budapest, Béla Kun fled the country. A few days later, the Romanians occupied the capital. Anti-communist nationalists organized what was called the "National Army" around the occupied city of Szeged, in the south of Hungary. They were commanded by Admiral Miklós Horthy, who had been the last commander-in-chief of the Austro-Hungarian Navy. Horthy and his army would eventually take control of Hungary and begin a violent anti-communist campaign known as the Hungarian White Terror, which would be far more bloody than the Red Terror. It would last two years and would target not only communists but liberals, socialists, union leaders, and Jewish Hungarians.

For Béla Kun had been Jewish. And hey, so was Trotsky. And from here begins the idea that Bolshevism is somehow a Jewish plot, an idea that would quickly be embraced by anti-Semites across the continent, even though up till now, anti-Semites were usually casting Jews in the roles of the arch-capitalist exploiters, and...well, strangely enough, although these two ethnic slanders would seem to be mutually exclusive, they are going to thrive side by side in the minds of anti-Semites for a long time to come. Who says haters have to be logical?

As for Béla Kun himself, he fled to Vienna, and later back to Russia, where he lived the rest of his life, until he was executed in 1938 at the age of 52, during the purges that were all the rage at the time. We'll get to that later, too.



The Romanian Army would occupy most of Hungary, including the capital, in defiance of Allied demands that they withdraw until early 1920. When they finally did return home, they took along with them food, cattle, horses, vehicles, telephone equipment, railroad cars and pretty much anything else that wasn't nailed down. The Hungarians called it looting, to the Romanians, it was more of a do-it-yourself reparations plan. Anyway, they argued, they had saved Hungary from Bolshevism. The Hungarians ought to be grateful.

The Allies and what was once again being called the Kingdom of Hungary finally signed the Treaty of Trianon on June 4, 1920. The treaty cost Hungary two-thirds of its pre-war land area and population. The new, smaller, landlocked Hungary would find its industry cut off from sources of coal and raw materials and unable to ship its products to foreign markets, and over three million ethnic Magyars out of a total population of ten million would find themselves outside the borders of the new Hungary.

Admiral Horthy would lead the restored Kingdom of Hungary as its regent, maintaining the fiction that Hungary was still a kingdom, albeit one that lacked a king. Kind of like Denethor, the Steward of Gondor in *The Lord of the Rings*, which won't be completed for another 34 years, but still. This arrangement gave Horthy most of the powers of a king without the title.

Hungary does technically still have a king, the former Kaiser Karl, who is also King Carol IV of Hungary, remember. As I mentioned earlier, in 1921 Karl got the idea that this Kingdom of Hungary was something to take seriously. He sneaked back into the country and attempted to seize power. The attempt was a failure, with Hungary internally divided on the question of a restoration, and with neighboring Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia mobilizing their armies and threatening war if Karl returned to the throne. And so he was sent off to exile and ultimately, to his death.

Instead, Miklós Horthy would rule Hungary as king in all but name for about 25 years, until October 1944. Hungary would effectively be a dictatorship, governed by right-wing nationalists who went to bed every night cursing the Treaty of Trianon. In the years to come, they would align with other emerging right-wing dictatorships in Europe and, well, I'd better stop right there, because that is definitely a story for another episode.

[music: Bartók, *String Quartet No. 2*]

Before I wrap up today's episode, I want to direct your attention to two young Hungarians who came of age during the tumultuous years of the Great War and its aftermath. The first is named Béla Blaskó, who was born in 1882 in the village of Lugos in Transylvania, the son of a Magyar father and a Serb mother. The second was born four years later, in 1886, to a Jewish family in Budapest and named Manó Kaminer.

Both of these young men took an interest in the theatre from an early age. By 1894, little eight-year-old Manó and his friends were putting on plays in the basement of the Kaminer home. That

same year, the twelve-year old Béla Blaskó dropped out of school to devote himself to a career on the stage. Acting was at this time still considered disreputable in some social circles, so perhaps when Béla chose not to use his family name of Blaskó professionally, it was to protect his family's reputation. He chose instead a surname derived from the name of his home town, Lugos, and became Béla Lugosi. He played in provincial theatres at first. By 1913, at the age of 30, he was part of the National Theatre of Hungary in Budapest, appearing in supporting roles.

Manó Kaminer graduated from the Royal Academy of Theatre and Art in Budapest in 1906 and began his own stage career as an actor in a traveling theatre company. Like Béla Kun, Manó Kaminer chose to magyarize his name and became Mihály Kertész. He also joined the National Theatre of Hungary at about the same time as Lugosi did. But Kertész soon moved into the new medium of motion pictures. He directed the first-ever Hungarian feature film, entitled *Today and Tomorrow* in English, while also acting in the film in a supporting role.

Then came the Great War. Both the 31-year old Lugosi and the 27-year old Kertész were drafted. Both of them served in the Austro-Hungarian Army on the Russian front. Both of them were wounded—Kertész in 1915, Lugosi in 1916—and subsequently discharged. Both returned to Budapest and motion pictures for Hungary's Phoenix Films. In 1917, Lugosi appeared in a film titled *The Colonel* in English, which was directed by Kertész. When Béla Kun took power and nationalized Phoenix Films, Kertész left the country for Vienna. There he found more work directing motion pictures, this time for the Austrian studio, Sascha-Film.

Lugosi, meanwhile, had become involved in leading an actors' union, and he welcomed the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, but after it fell, he fled to Germany to avoid the White Terror. He appeared in a few German films in 1919 and 1920, then chose to emigrate to the United States. The six-foot-one-inch Lugosi was a big, strong man, so he was able to get a job as a merchant seaman. He would then jump ship in New Orleans in 1920. Yes, Bela Lugosi was an illegal immigrant.

He made his way to New York City, still working as a manual laborer and struggling to get back into acting. By the mid 1920s, Lugosi was landing a few roles on Broadway and in silent films. He was usually cast as a villain or an exotic foreigner, owing to his size and his Hungarian accent, which sounded plenty exotic to American theatre audiences.

Mihály Kertész continued to make films in Austria. In 1926, with 64 motion pictures under his belt, his work came to the attention of Jack and Harry Warner, who were sufficiently impressed to offer him a contract to come to the United States and direct for Warner Brothers Pictures. The now 39-year-old Mihály Kertész moved to Hollywood, anglicized his magyarized name and became Michael Curtiz.

Curtiz's first assignment for Warner Brothers was a middling gangster romance film set in Chicago and called *The Third Degree*. Curtiz knew nothing about America or American gangsters or prisons or Chicago, for that matter, and he didn't speak English. To prepare for the

project, Curtiz persuaded the Los Angeles County Sheriff's office to allow him to spend a week in the county jail. Curtiz would become noted for his prep work; he would immerse himself in the topic of a film long before shooting started. He believed that a film's director should always be the biggest expert on whatever the film was about of anyone on the set.

The following year, 1927, the struggling Bela Lugosi got the biggest break of his career when he was cast in the title role of *Dracula*, a Broadway stage adaptation of the 1897 novel by Bram Stoker. Lugosi was a large man with a powerful stage presence and an exotic accent. He was even born in Transylvania! Really, what more could you ask for?

*Dracula* had a successful run on Broadway and then toured the country for two years. In 1929, following the West Coast run, Lugosi opted to remain in Los Angeles and try to break into American motion pictures. He played a few small parts for Fox Films, but the role he really wanted was the film version of *Dracula*, which was in development at Universal Pictures. The studio was reluctant to hire Lugosi, at first considering a more prominent actor, but he eventually landed the role, reportedly because he was willing to do it for less money than the other actors under consideration.

*Dracula*, an early talking picture, was released in 1931 and became a critical and commercial success. The play and the film introduced the concept of vampires into American popular culture, and both the film and Lugosi's performance are iconic, even today. Lugosi's name and image and costume and performance and even his Hungarian accent have become inextricably bound up with horror in general and vampire stories in particular in the American popular consciousness. Universal would corner the market in horror films for a time, following up on *Dracula* with *Frankenstein*, starring Boris Karloff, also in 1931, *The Mummy*, also starring Karloff, in 1932, and *The Invisible Man*, based on the 1897 novel by H.G. Wells, also in 1932.

Lugosi himself went on to star in 1932's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, which was less well received than *Dracula*, and unfortunately for him, a combination of typecasting and his accent, which made it difficult for him to play anything other than villains in 1930s Hollywood, conspired to limit the roles available to him. He performed in eight horror films in the 1930s and 1940s alongside Boris Karloff—who, despite his Slavic-sounding stage name, was actually an Englishman born in Surrey named William Henry Pratt. In these pairings, Lugosi always had to settle for second billing. Their final film together was Universal's 1948 *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*—I think the title says it all—which would also be Lugosi's second and final performance as *Dracula* on screen and his last major studio motion picture.

Meanwhile, as *Dracula* was making Bela Lugosi a household name, over at Warner Brothers, Michael Curtiz was chugging along, making a series of solid, and occasionally very successful, films. In the aftermath of *Dracula*'s success, Warner Brothers began its own line of horror films, *Doctor X* in 1932 and *Mystery of the Wax Museum* in 1933, both directed by Curtiz, and attempting to one-up Universal Pictures by filming both of them in color.

But the fad for horror faded, to be replaced by a demand for epic period costume dramas, and here is where Curtiz begins to make a name for himself with 1935's *Captain Blood*, a pirate film starring the then-unknowns Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland, which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Picture that year, though Curtiz did not receive a nomination for Best Director. Flynn and de Havilland would team up with Curtiz again in 1936 for *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and most notably in 1938 for *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, another iconic American film of the period.

Curtiz would go on to direct some of the biggest American films of the era, including many of the most famous screen stars in their most notable roles. Curtiz seemed equally at home in adventure, drama, comedy, musicals, Westerns, or war films. You name it. I'm sure you will recognize many of the titles: *Angels with Dirty Faces*, starring James Cagney in 1938, *Dodge City* in 1939 with Flynn and de Havilland, *The Sea Hawk* in 1940, Errol Flynn again. *Dive Bomber* in 1941, with Flynn and Fred MacMurray. In 1942, Curtiz directed *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, a musical biography of George M. Cohan starring Cagney again, cast against type, and also in 1942, *Casablanca*, with Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, and Claude Rains. *Casablanca* is a film that belongs on anyone's short list of the greatest American films of the twentieth century and it earned Curtiz his second of two Academy Awards for Best Director.

From there, he would go on to direct *This Is the Army*, a 1943 musical, *Mildred Pierce*, a 1945 film noir starring Joan Crawford, and in 1947, *Life with Father*, a comedy starring William Powell and Irene Dunne.

In 1951, the now-65-year-old Curtiz directed *Jim Thorpe—All-American*, starring Burt Lancaster. Longtime listeners may recall that I mentioned this film once before, back in episode 67 when I talked about Jim Thorpe and the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm. I should note that Michael Curtiz also competed at the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm as part of the Hungarian fencing team.

The year 1954 saw Curtiz direct another big hit, *White Christmas*, a musical starring Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye, Rosemary Clooney, and Vera-Ellen. In 1958, he directed Elvis Presley in *King Creole*. Curtiz continued to direct until his death in 1962, at the age of 75. His final film was *The Comancheros*, starring John Wayne. Michael Curtiz stands as one of the greatest and most prolific American film directors of the twentieth century. Sadly, I would also have to say perhaps the most underrated. Consider today's episode my small effort to help raise his profile.

Sadly, Bela Lugosi's film career dwindled down to minor roles in low-budget pictures. He was prescribed pain-killers, ostensibly for sciatica, and became addicted to them. Still, the name Bela Lugosi was worth some money on the stage and in personal appearances. After television came along, Lugosi landed the occasional guest appearance on variety shows.

In the early 1950s, Lugosi's plight came to the attention of Ed Wood, a horror filmmaker noted for his ambitious works filmed with tiny budgets and a notable lack of craft. Wood was an

admirer of Lugosi and cast him in a number of his films. Bela Lugosi died in 1956 at the age of 73, and was buried in one of his Dracula costumes.

His death did not prevent Ed Wood from casting Lugosi posthumously in his 1959 film *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, using test footage of Lugosi that was repurposed for the film. *Plan 9 from Outer Space* has been called the worst film in cinema history, and is sometimes acclaimed for its awfulness. The website Rotten Tomatoes calls it “justly celebrated for its staggering ineptitude.”

Long after his death, Bela Lugosi’s name and image remain ensconced in American popular culture. In 1979, his heirs sued Universal Pictures in a landmark case attempting to establish the right of a celebrity’s estate to ownership of the person’s name and image. The California Supreme Court ruled that no such right existed in common law, but nine years later, in 1988, the state passed landmark legislation creating such a right, and many other jurisdictions followed suit. In our time, the Lugosi estate still earns royalties from the use of his name and image.

In 1994, director Tim Burton released *Ed Wood*, a film based on the life of the eccentric filmmaker, with Johnny Depp in the title role. Martin Landau played the part of Bela Lugosi in this film, which performance earned him an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor, an honor Lugosi himself never won in his own lifetime.

We’ll have to stop there for today. I thank you all for listening, and I’d especially like to thank Hugo and Jack for their donation, and thank you to Chris for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons help keep this operation going, and with the end-of-year holiday season upon us, allow me to remind you that donations and patronages make the perfect present, for me. It’s a gift that always fits, never goes out of style, and you can be absolutely certain I won’t return it. If that doesn’t fit your holiday budget, might I suggest a rating and review, especially at the iTunes store? That’s a gift that anyone can afford.

For about two years now, I’ve been complaining that I was behind on the podcast. I’m happy to announce that I have reached that state of bliss I like to call “caught up.” For a while now I’ve been releasing episodes on a three-weeks-on-one-week-off schedule. Now that I’m “caught up,” let’s see if I can manage four weeks on and one week off. No promises, but I’ll give it a try and see what happens.

And since Christmas is coming up, I thought I’d give you all a little Christmas present, in the form of a bonus episode, which will be released on Christmas Day. This is in addition to next week’s episode, which will still go out as usual next Sunday. The topic will be the birth of Poland, which is next up on our tour of the world of 1919. It also meshes neatly with the topic we just finished, since the Austrian province of Galicia, the last little bit of Austria-Hungary we haven’t talked about yet, will be incorporated into the new Polish Republic.

So to recap, part one of the two-parter on Poland will come out Christmas Day, and part two the following Sunday, December 29. After that, I'll be taking a week off, so the next episode, on Finland, will reach you on January 12 of next year.

So I hope you'll join me next time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century* as we begin our two-part series on Poland. That's Christmas Day, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Back in episode 1, I enumerated what I called the ten Great Powers of the world of 1901. Now it's 1919, and Austria-Hungary is no more, so we'll have to strike it off the list. We're left with nine Great Powers, for now.

[music: Closing Theme]