

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 238

### “Holy Mackerel!”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Radio as entertainment medium initially meant the radio music box, much to the detriment of the phonograph companies. But radio stations and radio networks experimented with other forms of entertainment and eventually hit upon the radio series.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 238. Holy Mackerel!

Jack and David Kapp were brothers, born into a Jewish-American family in Chicago in 1901 and 1904, respectively. Their father had worked as a door-to-door salesman for the Columbia Phonograph Company, and in their youth, the two boys helped their father load his horse-drawn buggy with record players and records every morning before he went out on that day’s sales calls. By the time they were teenagers, their father was selling phonographs and records out of his own store, where his boys helped out after school.

In 1921, when Jack and David were 19 and 16, respectively, and David had just finished high school, the two brothers opened their own store. It was located in a run-down section of Chicago, close to the dividing line between a white neighborhood and an African-American one. There, the Kapp Record Store sold jazz records.

The record industry was changing. The original patents were expiring, meaning record companies were now free to make and sell records for each other’s machines, and the Kapp brothers were among the first to take advantage of this development to open a store that sold records for more than one brand of phonograph. Instead of selling by brand, they could focus on the music itself.

In post-war America, jazz was sweeping the nation, episode 227. But you wouldn’t know it from listening to the radio, where jazz was scarcely acknowledged to exist. What were they playing on the radio? The kind of music hotel orchestras played at tea time. Conservatory music. Classical

music. One radio station's program director called it "potted palm music," because decorating a room with potted palms was considered the height of good taste in the 1920s. It was the music Americans considered "cultured" and "classy."

One reason was that in a heavily immigrant culture, classically trained immigrant musicians were easy to come by, and easy to persuade to play for nothing or next to nothing. Another reason was that jazz came out of the most marginalized community in America, African Americans. Radio announcers went out of their way to denounce jazz music as "immoral" and "abominable," even as they introduced a violin recital or a Schubert lied. Music that we might today call "folk" or "country" music was also disdained, although there were stations in the South and West that might give over a few minutes of air time now and then to a musician offering what the announcer might describe as "old time fiddle music."

Last time, I mentioned AT&T's experiments in using telephone lines so that radio stations could broadcast not only sound from their own studio but from remote locations. In July 1923, as radio was becoming a national obsession, President Harding returned from his trip to Alaska and gave that speech in Seattle, in which he predicted statehood for America's northernmost territory, which I talked about in episode 228. AT&T phone lines carried that speech to stations in San Francisco and a handful of other places as far away as New York City for broadcast.

A few days later, radio brought to America the news of the President's unexpected demise. A few months later, in December, the new President, Calvin Coolidge, delivered his first State of the Union address to Congress, which was broadcast over seven radio stations from Washington to Dallas, over AT&T cables.

Warren Harding had been counted a pretty good public speaker, but his stentorian delivery came across as artificial and false over the radio. By contrast, when Calvin Coolidge, no one's idea of a great public speaker, spoke into the radio microphone, it sounded down-to-earth and intimate, like a guest in the parlor. Even his nasal voice and thick New England accent only contributed to his homespun appeal. It was the first sign that electronic media in the twentieth century were going to set a completely new standard for what qualified as good public speaking.

Woodrow Wilson spoke on the radio on Armistice Eve 1923, and his message was broadcast on four stations. Less than three months later, he was dead, and his funeral service was carried on the same stations.

In the summer of 1924, radio carried live broadcasts of both the Republican and Democratic national conventions. AT&T linked together 18 stations, which paid for the privilege of carrying WEA's coverage. Rival radio company RCA put together its own competing chain of stations, but RCA's stations had to be linked with telegraph wires because RCA and AT&T were at this time still feuding over patent rights and AT&T was refusing to provide telephone service to RCA. The telegraph lines were workable, though they produced an audible hum. The sound quality was not up to what the phone company could deliver.

In contrast to the smoothly run, uncontested Republican convention, the Democrats took 103 ballots to select their nominee, John W. Davis. The chaos and anger on display at the Democratic convention, along with hints of heavy Ku Klux Klan influence over the delegates, cast the Democrats in a bad light in front of the whole nation, and no this doubt contributed to their defeat.

But radio thrived. Christmas of 1924 was widely billed a “radio Christmas,” as dozens of companies now sold radios, radio kits, and radio accessories. Radios were now a must-have consumer item.

The rise of the radio led to the collapse of the phonograph. Sales of phonographs and records plummeted, with one notable exception. That exception was jazz. The major record companies each had a line of what they called “race records” back then. They meant by that records produced for the African-American market. There is no data I’m aware of by which we can judge how many African Americans bought radios or listened to “potted palm” music during the 1920s, but there is plenty of evidence that records produced for the African-American market, especially jazz, kept the phonograph industry afloat during the dark days of the radio craze. Whenever a new Bessie Smith record came out, record stores in African-American neighborhoods saw lines of customers that ran around the block.

At their record store in Chicago, the Kapp brothers catered to a mixed clientele of white and Black customers at their strategically located store. Record stores in white neighborhoods and business districts might not carry race records in their bins, but passionate white jazz fans taught themselves how to look up the catalog number of the latest release by Bix Beiderbecke and place a special order.

Meanwhile, European art music ruled the airwaves. In smaller communities, where it was harder to find musical talent, radio stations experimented with poetry and dramatic readings and with airing plays on the radio, which led to the birth of radio drama, theatre of the airwaves, shows meant not to be seen, but only to be listened to.

In Washington, Herbert Hoover’s Commerce Department had reorganized the radio spectrum and had assumed the authority to allot specific frequencies and even specified time slots within those frequencies to radio station applicants, even though it lacked specific statutory authority to make these decisions. The Department claimed the authority anyway, on the simple principle that someone had to do something before the radio waves degenerated into chaos. But the Department did not believe it had the authority to refuse a valid application for a radio station license, and by 1925, the radio band had filled up, at which point the Commerce Department refused to issue any more licenses.

With no new licenses available, businesses interested in the commercial possibilities of radio began bidding for existing radio stations. The sales prices skyrocketed, and licenses that had

been purchased from the government for next to nothing were reselling at jaw-dropping markups. As much as a million dollars.

Some of the earliest applicants for radio licenses had been churches. Broadcasting the Word of God over the airwaves seemed a natural extension of the work of the church. In Britain, the BBC broadcast Church of England services from the beginning, and that seemed a responsible, public-spirited thing to do. Who could object to that?

But one of the unforeseen consequences was that churchgoers soon discovered the advantages of attending church via the radio at home, perhaps in their nightgowns and over coffee and toast, rather than bundling up and going out into the cold or the rain to listen to a sermon delivered by a clergyman who was neither as insightful nor as charismatic as the one they could have listened to in the comfort of their own homes.

Once the Commerce Department ran out of licenses and radio stations became a sellers' market, many churches were persuaded to sell their stations to commercial broadcasters, often under an arrangement where the new station owner would agree to continue to broadcast Sunday services at no cost to the church. Other churches retained their stations, notably the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel in Los Angeles, operated by the newest sensation in the world of evangelism, Sister Aimee Semple McPherson, who by 1925 had eclipsed Billy Sunday as the most famous preacher in America. Sister Aimee not only operated her own radio station but also felt at liberty to change frequencies as needed to get out the Word on a clear channel. A frustrated Secretary Hoover ordered a Commerce Department inspector to shut the station down, which in turn provoked an angry telegram from Sister Aimee to Herbert Hoover which read:

PLEASE ORDER YOUR MINIONS OF SATAN TO LEAVE MY STATION ALONE STOP.  
YOU CANNOT EXPECT THE ALMIGHTY TO ABIDE BY YOUR WAVE LENGTH  
NONSENSE STOP. WHEN I OFFER MY PRAYERS TO HIM I MUST FIT INTO HIS WAVE  
RECEPTION STOP. OPEN THIS STATION AT ONCE.

Sister Aimee was not the first or the only broadcaster to question the power the Commerce Department claimed for itself. I'll come back to that topic later in the episode.

Radio had gone from nothing to a huge business and a national sensation in a matter of four years. But even as radios appeared in every home, new technologies appeared on the horizon that promised even more.

With the AM broadcast band filling up with commercial broadcasters, amateur radio operators became a greater and greater nuisance to the new industry until at last, like Napoleon to Elba, they found themselves banished to frequencies no one else had any use for, above the band used by the commercial broadcasters, a realm of shorter wavelengths that soon came to be called "short wave radio." But the amateurs got the last laugh. It took no time at all for them to discover

that their broadcasts could be received on other continents. Soon American amateurs were chatting amiably with newfound friends in Europe.

It turned out that shortwave frequencies reflect off the Earth's ionosphere, making it possible for a shortwave broadcast to be heard around the curvature of the planet. Wow. Here was a technology that might allow for an end run around AT&T's control of landlines. Westinghouse's KDKA in Pittsburgh demonstrated the potential by broadcasting its programming on shortwave, which was picked up and rebroadcast on the commercial band by a station in Cape Town, South Africa. Double wow.

GE general manager Owen Young remarked to his engineers one day in 1923, "I'm getting tired of dots and dashes. Why don't you make a system so that you can put in a written letter and, zip, it will come out just as it is written on the other end?" The engineers laughed at first at his naiveté, but by 1924, RCA was demonstrating the ability to transmit images by radio across the Atlantic Ocean. This would be a boon to newspapers, which could now secure and publish actual photographs of breaking news from around the world. And if you think about it for a minute, the ability to transmit photographs over radio waves is basically slow-motion television. By this time, new technologies were emerging thick and fast and people were already wondering how long it would take for the engineers to work out the technology to transmit moving pictures along with sound. It actually took longer than a lot of people figured.

[music: Brahms, *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 5*]

In Dartmouth, Massachusetts, there lived an eccentric millionaire named Edward Green, usually known as "Colonel Green." He had inherited a large fortune from his mother and built himself a mansion on Round Hill in Dartmouth. He owned the second-largest stamp collection in the world (only King George V had a bigger one) and in 1918 he had made philatelic history by paying \$20,000 for a sheet of 100 US air mail stamps accidentally printed with the airplane in the center of the stamp upside down. Those one hundred stamps were the only ones known to have been printed with this error and they became some of the best known and most sought after postage stamps in history. Colonel Green eventually broke up the sheet and sold off most of them. If you want one of them today, expect to pay something in the range of US\$1.5 million.

In 1922, just months after his Round Hill mansion was complete, Colonel Green bought a radio transmitter. He licensed it as station WMAF and installed it on his estate. He used it to play his favorite records over the air. He even installed loudspeakers around the perimeter of his property so that neighbors who didn't have radios could still enjoy the music. Every piece of equipment was the best money could buy, and he was quite proud of his new hobby.

Only, his neighbors did not appreciate his generosity. This was at the time when all commercial stations broadcast on the same frequency, and they complained they could no longer listen to more interesting stations, like WEAJ in New York because WMAF was drowning out the signal.

WEAF, you'll recall, was operated by AT&T according to its "phone booth of the air" model. Colonel Green happened to be friends with Harry Thayer, the president of AT&T, and he approached Thayer with a novel request. What would it cost to hire a dedicated phone line from New York to his estate in Massachusetts so that his station could broadcast WEAF's programming simultaneously? The executives at AT&T put their heads together and came up with a figure of \$5,000 per month. They were certain Green would say no.

But he said yes. Colonel Green paid the line charge every month, and he paid an additional fee for every unsponsored radio program delivered to him, although he would be paid a fee in return to carry AT&T's sponsored programming. It was a good deal for AT&T because now they could offer air time not only in New York but in Massachusetts, and soon over a chain of 38 stations across the United States, a radio network.

By 1925, with the aid of the network concept, AT&T was finally turning a profit on its radio operation. But the company was still in that nasty fight with its nominal business partners, RCA, GE, and Westinghouse, who had signed a deal with AT&T that it would stay out of broadcasting and make its money providing support services to RCA. Instead, the opposite had happened. AT&T was competing with RCA in the realm of broadcasting while refusing to open its telephone lines to its supposed "partners." At the same time, AT&T was in litigation with a number of radio stations, claiming the right to licensing fees from anyone who used a radio transmitter not purchased from AT&T, including transmitters purchased from its "partner," RCA.

That year, the squabbling companies decided that enough was enough and they would submit to a secret and binding arbitration process to determine once and for all what they had all agreed to. In 1925, the arbitrator rendered his verdict. He found for RCA and its owners and against AT&T on virtually every point. Even then, AT&T resisted the decision and threatened to take the matter to court, despite having agreed to a binding arbitration that specifically forbade an appeal.

Meanwhile, the US Federal Trade Commission was announcing its intention to pursue claims of restraint of trade against all the partners: AT&T, GE, Westinghouse, and RCA, whom it accused of operating collectively to keep other companies out of the radio business, which was certainly true.

There was also an internal debate going on within AT&T over the future of the company. Some felt that by diving so deeply into the fledgling radio business, AT&T was neglecting its core business, telephone communication. Company founder Alexander Graham Bell had passed away just a few years ago, in 1922, at the age of 75, his death perhaps inspiring some in the company to reflect on his legacy. And then there was the fact that AT&T filing lawsuits against literally everyone else in the radio business was not a good look for a company already under investigation for restraint of trade.

So a deal was struck. AT&T would quit the broadcasting business. So would RCA, which from now on would focus on manufacturing and selling radio receivers, tubes, and equipment. A new corporation would be created specifically for radio broadcasting. It would be owned 50% by RCA, 30% by GE, and 20% by Westinghouse. It would be called the National Broadcasting Company, and it is still very much with us today, known universally then and now by its initials: NBC.

[sound effect: second inversion c-major triad]

NBC began using a C-major triad in second inversion as its signature sound in 1931, and still uses it today. It became the first registered audio trademark.

What AT&T got out of the deal was that NBC would use its land lines to connect the new NBC network. That way, AT&T still got a piece of the radio pie, while remaining focused on its core business. The new NBC would also purchase AT&T's flagship WEA station in New York City. The station's physical assets were estimated to be worth \$200,000. NBC paid the princely sum of one million dollars, the rest of the money representing the value of the business model AT&T had developed, of selling radio time to sponsors, which would of course become the principal model on which broadcasting in the United States would operate ever since.

The deal with AT&T left NBC with two major radio stations in New York City, its own WJZ and the newly acquired WEA. With support services from its partner, AT&T, NBC would transmit WEA programs to stations around the country on what it would call the NBC Red network, and WJZ programs to stations around the country on what it would call the NBC Blue network. The colors apparently came from pencil lines NBC engineers drew on a map when they first sketched out the possibilities.

The NBC deal resolved the outstanding patent disputes between the major corporations in the radio business, but there was still the licensing issue. Aimee Semple McPherson was not the only radio station owner who questioned the power of Herbert Hoover's Commerce Department to dictate the frequencies and times at which a radio station could broadcast. Some station owners challenged the Department's authority in court, like the Zenith Radio Corporation, which in 1926 won a ruling that the Department was claiming authority that went far beyond the language of the 1912 Radio Act. And after the frequency slots filled up and the Commerce Department refused to grant any more licenses, the sight of station owners who had procured licenses from the government virtually free of charge reselling them a couple of years later at exorbitant markups rankled. It brought back unpleasant memories.

What it brought back unpleasant memories of was the Teapot Dome scandal, episode 229. Recall that was a case of private oil companies buying drilling rights on government land for a song and then making huge profits. Private radio companies securing broadcast rights over public airwaves for practically nothing and then reaping a huge windfall sounded like another verse of the same old song.

In the wake of the Zenith ruling, Congress was forced to act, and the result was the Radio Act of 1927, which created the Federal Radio Commission. The Act empowered the Commission to grant limited licenses for specific times or frequencies for specific periods, but without granting ownership. All existing radio licenses would be voided, and their owners would have to apply for new, limited term licenses. The standard for licensing was “public interest, convenience, or necessity.” The FRC was specifically forbidden to grant licenses to any person or corporation found guilty of monopolization or unfair trade practices. The Act specifically denied the FRC the power of censorship, although it did allow for a ban on “obscene, indecent, or profane language.”

The creation of NBC and the passage of the Radio Act laid the groundwork for the radio and later television broadcasting industries as they would be known in the United States for the rest of the twentieth century.

In May 1927, just months after NBC’s two networks were up and running, American aviator Charles Lindbergh became the first person to fly a solo transatlantic flight. Never mind that it was eight years after the first transatlantic flight. Lindbergh became a huge celebrity and radio carried live broadcasts of his triumphant return to the United States. He became the first ever Man of the Year for the fledgling *Time* magazine, not to mention one of the most famous people on the planet. A special Act of Congress awarded him a Medal of Honor; those are usually reserved for military heroes. In hindsight, it’s a little hard to understand why Lindbergh was so celebrated. One historian remarked that people behaved as if Lindbergh had walked on water, rather than flown over it. Perhaps the immediacy of radio offers an explanation.

[music: Rossini, *The Barber of Seville*]

We’ve seen the development of the technical and regulatory framework that developed around the radio industry; now let’s take a look at its effect on programming.

First, the rise of networks killed long-distance listening, and with it the so-called Silent Nights when radio stations would voluntarily go off the air for a few hours so people could listen to stations in distant cities. Network programming was the same everywhere, so what was the point? Radio networks helped bind the nation together, but they also homogenized the programming. Entertainers in New York City found they could now earn hundreds of dollars for a single performance at one of the NBC network studios; entertainers in the rest of the country struggled to get any radio work at all. The mere fact that NBC’s two networks controlled their own programming gave them tremendous clout over American music and arts, over American tastes and fashion, over American culture itself.

NBC adopted AT&T’s basic model of selling blocks of time to individual advertisers, now known as “sponsors,” for sponsored programming. At first, each program had one and only one sponsor. Radio and TV programs would not get multiple sponsors until the late 1950s.



Time blocks that could not be sold still needed to be filled with programming in order to maintain an audience. These were called “sustaining programs.” Sometimes NBC would create a sustaining program in the hope that a sponsor would eventually be found to take it on.

In the early days of radio, by which I mean four years ago, sponsors were satisfied merely to get their names mentioned on the radio in connection with the entertainment. The Wanamaker organ concerts represent an early example. Soon the sponsor’s name would attach to the act itself, as in the “Lucky Strike Orchestra,” sponsored by Lucky Strike cigarettes, or the “A&P Gypsies,” sponsored by the A&P grocery store chain, or the “Gold Dust Twins,” sponsored by Gold Dust washing powder. (More about *them* in a few minutes.)

As early as December 1923, this sponsorship system began evolving into a system of naming the program itself after the sponsor, beginning with the *Eveready Hour*—that’s Eveready as in Eveready batteries—which was an instant success. There was no formula for the program. It might be classical music one week, a one-hour radio drama the next week, a dance band the week after that. Singer Wendell Hall got married on the *Eveready Hour* in June 1924, and cowboy comedian and satirist Will Rogers was paid a then-record sum of \$1000 for an appearance on the show.

They didn’t have ratings back then, so radio stations and sponsors measured the success of a show by how much mail it generated. The *Eveready Hour* drew mail by the bagsful. This in turn led to pleas to listeners to write in and let the sponsor know how much they appreciated the program. Sometimes autographed pictures of the performers were offered as an inducement to write in. One such plea, for the Gold Dust Twins, went like this:

“Perhaps you open your hearts and homes to them each week—Goldy and Dusty, the Gold Dust Twins, who come to brighten the corner where you are, and perhaps you have written them of your pleasure, or perhaps you have delayed. Won’t you then do it tonight? Notes of encouragement from the audiences of WEAJ New York, WGR Buffalo, WFI Philadelphia, and WEAR Cleveland, serve to brighten these dusky entertainers. [Oh, my God.] Address the Gold Dust Twins, care of station WEAJ, 195 Broadway, New York City, or the station through which this program has reached you.”

It was considered *de rigeur* in those days to name every single station on the network, until the networks became so big that this became impractical. Also, I should explain that Gold Dust washing powder was a big-name brand in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early twentieth centuries. Its trademark image was two African-American children happily bathing together in a washtub. Hence, the Gold Dust Twins, except that the singing duo who bore that name were two grown men, two grown white men, despite being described by the announcer as “dusky.” When you wrote in, you got an autographed picture of the two singers. In blackface.

Advertising remained polite and circumspect into the early NBC years. Products were named, but not described, and no reference was made to their prices, while the entertainment became

increasingly professional. No longer were radio stations literally welcoming performers off the street with little or no idea of their act. Everything had to be scripted and auditioned ahead of time. Not one word was ad libbed.

Early radio was mostly music, but as the end of the Twenties approached, drama became increasingly prominent. There were highbrow dramas, often period pieces, like *Biblical Dramas*, and there were more lowbrow programs that looked into the more rustic corners of America, shows like *Real Folks* and *Main Street*. These were what we now call anthology shows, with a new cast and a self-contained story every week.

But the first real smash hit radio series would look nothing like anything that had come before. It was new. It was groundbreaking. It would attract an enormous audience, estimated at its peak at forty million people, and would exert enormous influence over American culture. It was the first classic radio program.

It was *Amos 'n' Andy*.

It began in 1928, at station WMAQ in Chicago. Twenty-nine-year-old Freeman Gosden of Richmond, Virginia, and 38-year old Charles Correll of Peoria, Illinois, two entertainers who did blackface vaudeville routines, then later brought those routines onto the radio in exchange for free meals, created an original program and an original distribution mechanism.

This was not a network program. Not at first, although later it moved to NBC's Blue Network, sponsored by Pepsodent. Gosden and Correll developed a different kind of distribution system. They recorded their program on 78 RPM records, which were sold to radio stations, which could then air them whenever they pleased, the first example of what would later be called a syndicated program.

The premise of this program was that two African-American men who worked on a farm outside Atlanta, Georgia, move to Chicago in the hope of making better lives for themselves. With very little money, they manage to acquire a broken-down old automobile with no windshield and market it and themselves as the Fresh Air Taxicab Company of America.

The title characters were depicted as ignorant, unreliable, sometimes shady, although generally likeable. Gosden and Correll wrote the scripts and performed the title characters and over a hundred other characters by themselves, using a heavy African-American vernacular, including remarks like, "Splain dat to me" and "Holy mackerel!" which became catchphrases for the show, and frequent malapropisms, like "Whut is you doin'?" "Is you mulsiflyin' or revidin'?"

Like the motion picture, *Birth of a Nation*, episode 104, which was groundbreaking for its cinematography, its length, and its multiple intertwined plots, *Amos 'n' Andy* was groundbreaking for its use of syndication, for plot lines that carried through multiple episodes, and for its blending of comedy and drama. The actors were said to have been moved to tears by

some of the more emotional moments in the show. The program ran fifteen minutes a day, five days a week, and every episode ended on a cliffhanger. The show demonstrated that radio audiences could and would follow a regular cast across multiple episodes. It was a new form of entertainment: the first radio series, and the precursor to soap operas. In its amused and yet affectionate depiction of ordinary working Americans, it was a clear forerunner to later TV shows like *The Honeymooners*, *All in the Family*, and *The Simpsons*.

The show was a smash. It sold a ton of radios. Factories adjusted their work hours so employees could get home in time to listen to *Amos 'n' Andy*. Demand for radio receivers reached new heights. In 1929, an *Amos 'n' Andy* comic strip appeared, as did a bestselling book entitled, *All About Amos 'n' Andy and Their Creators*. In 1930, the toymaker Marx and Company produced a windup tin version of the Fresh Air taxi. Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover was elected President during the rise of the show, and he welcomed Godsen and Correll to the White House, where they presented him with an autographed model of the toy car. That same year, the duo went to Hollywood, where they starred in an *Amos 'n' Andy* film. In blackface.

But...

*Amos 'n' Andy* was also like *Birth of a Nation* in the damage it did to race relations in America. In 1930, with the show at its peak of popularity, millions of white Americans would be utterly astonished to learn that African Americans were offended by the program. How could this be? Everybody knew that African Americans loved *Amos 'n' Andy*, just like everyone else. How could they not appreciate being central to the most popular radio show in America?

Some did. A lot did not. Leaders of African-American churches and African-American newspapers denounced the program for its crude depiction of its characters. In 1931, 700,000 African Americans petitioned the Federal Radio Commission over the racism of the show, to no effect. The show would run on radio, and later on television, until 1966.

Since then, it has scarcely been seen or heard anywhere.

The African-American writer and journalist William Branch would later recall his boyhood, when his family would sit around the radio during *Amos 'n' Andy* and chuckle at the jokes. Except for his father, who never laughed. Only later, Branch said, did he understand why. Because those people were supposed to be us.

[Long pause]

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Spence and Frank and Sarah-Jane for their kind donations, and thank you to Erin for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Spence and Frank and Sarah-Jane and Erin help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to

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And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we return to the topic of the global economy. Back in the days of the Belle Époque, times were good and everyone was on the gold standard. In the Jazz Age, everyone wanted to bring back the good times, which meant bringing back the gold standard. Did it, or was the gold standard a barbarous relic? We'll look into it next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I'm struck by the fact that I'm old enough to remember when the bare, unadorned word *network* was understood as referring to broadcasting networks, like NBC. In our time, the word is more often used to describe the interconnection of computers. But like the introduction of computer networks, broadcast networks changed the world. They connected people in new ways and disseminated ideas and entertainment much faster and farther than had ever been possible before. For good and for ill.

NBC's two networks would soon have competition. In 1927, a group of disgruntled radio stations, left out in the cold by the formation of NBC, created a rival network, at first called United Independent Broadcasters. With AT&T charging huge fees for its lines, the new network needed money. It turned to the Columbia Phonograph Company for capital. Columbia was interested. They had the capital, but radio was eating into their business. With the news that their rival, the Victor Talking Machine Company, was merging with RCA, they decided they needed to move into radio too, and agreed to the deal. The Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System began operations from station WOR in New York City.

Unfortunately, the new network was a money loser. Columbia pulled out, and the network was sold to the owners of one of its affiliates, WCAU in Philadelphia. The owners were two brothers, Leon and Isaac Levy, a dentist and a lawyer, respectively. Leon brought in his brother-in-law, 26-year-old William Paley, a graduate of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and an executive in his family's cigar company, to manage the network operation. With a keen ear for talent and an infusion of cash from Paramount Pictures, Paley was able to turn the struggling network around and make it into a serious competitor to NBC. It dropped the word "phonograph" from its name and became the Columbia Broadcasting System, or CBS, and by 1932, CBS would have more affiliates than either NBC Red or NBC Blue.

[music: Closing Theme]

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