

The War of the Worlds

A New View on an Old Con



by the Self-Righteous Brothers

It was all a tempest in a teapot.

—Jack Parr

Most of us are already acquainted with Orson Welles' legendary radio adaptation of H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, broadcast on the evening of October 30, 1938 on CBS Radio's *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. The broadcast is infamous for causing widespread panic across America as tuners-in believed they were hearing a real account of an alien – or at least a Nazi – invasion of New Jersey. This event endures to this day as a testament to the power of mass media to mislead us. And that's true, but not in the way you think.

You see, the mainstream – including [PBS](#) and [Radiolab](#) – continues to focus on the “mass hysteria” catalyzed by Welles' broadcast, as if *that* demonstrated the media's power. In this still-accepted reading, the citizens of 1930s America appear to us a gullible gaggle of dimwitted

dupes, and we enlightened denizens of 21st-century America immediately assert our progress and superiority over our sheep-like ancestors. How silly it is that millions of Americans would believe in a Martian invasion simply because they heard it on the radio! *We* would never fall for such tomfoolery, we say.

But the joke is on us, since we continue to believe in a mass hysteria that never happened. [Wikipedia](#) admits this in the very first paragraph of its page on the event:

The episode became famous for causing panic among its listening audience, but the scale of that panic is disputed, as the program had relatively few listeners.

Even that understates it. *Slate's* 2013 [exposé](#) states it bluntly:

The supposed panic was so tiny as to be practically immeasurable on the night of the broadcast.... [A]lmost nobody was fooled by Welles' broadcast.

So much for our superiority over our forebears. It turns out we're much more gullible than they were.

In fact, according to a later remark by CBS president Frank Stanton, most people didn't even hear the show that night. That directly contradicts a 1940 study of the event published by Princeton professor Hadley Cantril, who calculated that 6 million people heard the show and 1.7 million of them believed it was real news. You'd think a study published a few years after the event, and out of an Ivy League school no less, would be somewhat more fact-based and objective than the immediate news reports, but later historians have concluded that Cantril's study had "serious flaws." In fact, it was totally bogus. Cantril failed to distinguish between respondents who thought it was real and those who knew it was fictional, and merely lumped all respondents who said they felt "excited," "disturbed," or "frightened" under the category of "panicked" in his results. "Panicked" is an intentionally misleading word, since it implies they all thought it was real – why else would you panic?

So far, I haven't told you anything that isn't already known. You can read all this on Wikipedia or the *Slate* article or a dozen other places. What you won't read anywhere else is that the entire event was staged – not just the broadcast itself, but also the newspapers' fabrication of a mass panic, the reaction of Welles to the false reports, *and* the media coverage of Welles *in response to those reports*. The whole thing was planned as a test; they wanted to gauge the feasibility of **convincing the public of a large-scale event that didn't happen**. Remember, this was 1938. America was on the cusp of entering World War II, where a great many fake deaths, bombings, and other atrocities were [staged](#).

In that case, didn't the test prove to be a failure? Only if you think the test was the broadcast itself, which admittedly fooled nobody. But the real test was *the reportage of a mass panic*. Nobody went to bed on October 30 thinking New Jersey had been invaded by Martians or Germans, but everybody woke up on October 31 believing the entire country had fallen into the grip of hysteria and chaos. The dates support this interpretation, of course. Intelligence loves to run their projects on Halloween, not the day before. The broadcast was simply the setup for the real project, which began the following day.

After the evening broadcast, we're told Welles and the entire *Mercury Theatre* team pulled an all-nighter to rehearse for their next radio drama, *Danton's Death*. In the wee hours of Halloween

morning, Welles was conveniently still in the studio, where a group of newspaper reporters and photographers arrived to ambush him. Scroll back to the top of this paper for a photo of the “surprised” Welles. Have you ever seen a more staged “candid” photo in your life? Welles looks like a self-obsessed Christ sacrificing himself to the gods of media. You can tell by his expression that he already knows this stunt will propel him to stardom, as in fact it did. Welles was only 23 years old at the time, but he had already been chosen, which is why he looks so smug here (and for the rest of his life). We already know Welles came from privilege, and I’m not just talking about his great-great-grandfather being a U.S. Senator. I’m talking about his being [a member of the ruling Families](#), related to all other famous people going back centuries. That includes, of course, H.G. Wells, whom we can assume was a close relative of Orson and part of the reason *The War of the Worlds* was chosen. (A couple generations back and Orson’s family becomes Wells without the extra ‘e’.) But not every Family member gets to be part of such a prominent project. Many kids from the Families are too dumb, inept, or lazy to be entrusted with any projects, but Welles had some real magnetism, if not actual talent. *Citizen Kane* is in many ways a technical masterpiece, despite the complete failure of its central symbol – the Rosebud sled – to elicit any true feeling. It rings false, as do many of its pivotal scenes. But he knew how to create a sense of drama, and it won him this early assignment.

Back to the night of the broadcast, where we notice several things. First, the clearly staged photo of Welles. Second, these other photos of Welles during the night of the broadcast:





Do you notice anything? In the first photo, Welles (in the top right, standing and pointing) is wearing a light grey suit with the pants and blazer matching. In the “ambush” photo, he’s wearing a very dark pinstripe blazer that doesn’t match his very light-colored pants. Now look at the third photo and notice his very dark, solid-colored tie. In the other two photos he’s wearing a striped tie. In other words, none of the photos match. Strange, isn’t it?

Then there is the fact that a gang of newspapermen were at the ready well past midnight to cover this event. This seems unlikely. Third, voice actor Ray Collins reported the studio being raided by policemen shortly after the first scheduled break.

Soon, the room was full of policemen and a massive struggle was going on between the police, page boys, and CBS executives, who were trying to prevent the cops from busting in and stopping the show.

Of course, there wouldn’t have been a struggle. Either the police had a warrant to enter the studio or they didn’t, and if they did, the page boys certainly wouldn’t risk arrest to fend them off. But beyond that, there wouldn’t have been a struggle because the police wouldn’t have been there in the first place. Since we know the mass panic didn’t happen and the police lines were never swamped with hysteric calls, there would be no reason for the police to try and stop the broadcast.

Then we’re told Paul White, head of CBS News, was summoned to the studio, where, in his own words:

The telephone switchboard, a vast sea of light, could handle only a fraction of incoming calls. The haggard Welles sat alone and despondent. “I’m through,” he lamented, “washed up.” I didn’t bother to reply to this highly inaccurate self-appraisal. I was too busy writing explanations to put on the air, reassuring the audience that it was safe.

Again, since we know there was no mass panic, the telephone switchboard would not have been “a vast sea of light.” Nor would a 23-year-old Welles be hanging his head in despair, claiming he was “washed up.” Without a mass panic, the entire narrative we’re given of that

night becomes a fiction. But whereas the mass panic was fabricated by the newspapers, the accounts from the studio are given by the actors and writers, meaning they were as “in” on the media hoax as the media was. We can only conclude that the fabrication was coordinated; that not only the broadcast, but the story of the aftermath in the studio, the reports given in the morning papers, and the subsequent press conference with Welles the next day, were all part of the same script. They had to have been, since everyone involved corroborated the same false narrative of a mass panic.

Notice that I’ve blown past the fact that **all the major newspapers across America ran as their front-page story an event that never happened**. They reported mass traffic jams, riots, and suicides across cities and towns all over the country, none of which ever occurred. We accept that the press has lied to us repeatedly and on a massive scale through the entirety of our nation’s history up until, apparently, the present moment. But the press doesn’t lie to us *now*?

Yes, they lied to us about the *War of the Worlds* panic of ‘38, and about German factories making soap out of corpses during World War I (a news article later found to have been written by British Intelligence). They told us lies and half-truths about WWII, Vietnam, the Bay of Pigs, Watergate, 911, and North Korea, but that is all (mostly) in the past. Starting *now*, there will be no more disinformation. Or if there is, we will see through it. Because we are modern and enlightened and in-control. To that, I can only respond with the opening lines of Welles’ broadcast:

We know now that in the early years of the 20th century, this world was being watched closely by intelligences greater than man’s and yet as mortal as his own. We know now that as human beings busied themselves about their various concerns, they were scrutinized and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinize the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water.

Jack Parr called the *War of the Worlds* debacle a “tempest in a teapot,” but a more apt metaphor is a Petri dish. It was a controlled experiment, and the “intelligences” studying us were not of Martian, but of Langleyan, origin. The entire century has been a controlled experiment perpetrated by Intelligence to see just how much fakery and propaganda the public can swallow.

[Miles: Turns out it is far more than even they ever imagined. Turns out we are like those large-mouth deepwater fish that gulp down thousands of gallons at a time, or like the goats who will eat anything, including tin cans and soda bottles. See the French term for this—*gobemouche*—which I have mentioned before. It is beautifully descriptive, and creates a picture like no English word for this does. Think of a passenger in a car sticking his head out the window like a dog, closing his eyes, and opening his mouth as wide as possible, with flies and everything else going directly down his throat indiscriminately. Now think of that person with a smile on his face, gagging on nothing, happy to swallow any amount of mud, bird droppings, garbage thrown up from passing semis, or effluent falling from airplanes flying overhead, and you have a framable picture of the modern citizen of the world. In fact, you could print and frame it, and the modern citizen of the world would buy it and hang it proudly above his bed.]