"Croak" Carter: Radio's Voice of Doom

When Westbrook Pegler, who hated almost everybody, died, an associate might have said in all candor: "He was the closest thing newspaper journalism ever had to a Boake Carter." Carter was an extraordinarily powerful and effective critic of the New Deal before Pearl Harbor, especially between 1935 and 1938, when there were few commercially-sponsored news commentators on the air. Administration leaders frequently mentioned their extreme dislike of him. Carter's greatest national prominence, or notoriety, occurred during 1937 and the early part of the following year. After August, 1938, he was banned from the major networks. At the time, some of his millions of nightly listeners were certain that Franklin D. Roosevelt had been responsible. Although the news analyst spoke over the Mutual Broadcasting System from September, 1939, on, he never regained his popularity and died in 1944, already largely forgotten. Today, another look is in order. Historians realize the importance of radio in understanding American society before 1941. For that reason, the career of such a notorious radio personality has particular interest.

Carter relished controversy. "Meat is in argument," he once said. "If I can provide an argument, so much the better." ¹ The commen-

¹ Newsweek, July 18, 1936, 26.
tator seemed to feel that his success was directly proportional to the number of enemies he made. And there were many. The Secretary of the Interior dubbed him "Croak" Carter. Ickes claimed that the newscaster could "enter any intellectual goldfish-swallowing contest and the result would be as impressive as his journalistic career." A distinguished journalist, making no attempt to disguise his loathing, termed the broadcaster a "mercenary poseur."

Early in his career, Carter claimed to have studied the techniques of Detroit's demagogic radio priest, Father Coughlin. If so, he was an apt pupil. Listeners believed that anyone who daily accused administration leaders of shocking laxness and irresponsibility must have good reason. They loved his tough "psychological realism." And the commentator was clever. If a public official proved that the news analyst had distorted the truth, or manufactured a story out of whole cloth, Carter invoked freedom of speech, or excused himself by saying that every reporter makes an occasional slip. He concentrated on sensitive areas where the administration could not afford to make its dealings public knowledge, knowing that government leaders would have difficulty refuting his accusations.

Carter's dire forebodings did not appeal to everyone. In 1937, the New Yorker's E. B. White expressed his indifference in a bit of patronizing verse:

I like to hear him summon us
With all things ominous:
Munitions makers, plotting gain,
Asylums bulging with insane,
Cancers that give no hint of pain,
Insurgency in northern Spain,
And rivers swollen with the rain.
For Boake,
Has spoke,
And it's no joke.

Roosevelt himself tried to affect a similar pose. In December, 1937, he told his son that "if the President (or anyone else) were to under-

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3 Paul Y. Anderson, quoted in Time, Oct. 28, 1940, 47.
5 Quoted in Boake Carter, "Johnny Q. Public" Speaks (New York, 1936), 158.
6 Quoted in Time, Oct. 28, 1940, 47.
take to answer Boake Carter, he would have no time to act as the Executive head of the Government!"  

Harold Thomas Henry Carter was born on September 15/28, 1903, in Baku, a city on the Caspian Sea in what is now the Soviet Union. Until 1924, it is difficult to establish an exact chronology, particularly because the broadcaster afterwards manufactured a past to suit his own purposes. He gave his date of birth as 1898, or 1901. He declared that his Irish father had been Britain’s consul in Baku. Carter’s official birth certificate, on file in London, shows that Thomas Carter was “Company Secretary” for an English oil firm. In 1938, the Treasury Department made an official inquiry into the commentator’s origins. An investigation of British diplomatic records revealed that no Carter had served in the foreign service in any capacity anywhere in the world since 1850. It is typical of the son that he would make himself older than he really was and give his father a fictitious diplomatic career.

Sometime after 1903, the Carter family returned to Britain. At fifteen, the son enlisted in the Royal Air Force. He served as a member of the coast patrol for eighteen months. From 1918 to 1921, he attended Tonbridge, a prestigious public (i.e. private) boys school in Kent, England. The third year he was active in rowing. Later, his knowledge of the sport was to hold him in good stead when he began his career as a radio broadcaster.

Carter claimed to have attended Christ College, Cambridge, but there is no record of his ever having been a student there. He also said that he had served as a reporter for the London Daily Mail. If so, it was probably during the summer of 1921. On September 25

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8 Telegram, Cordell Hull to American embassy, London, Jan. 26, 1938, 811.108 Carter, Boake/1; telegram, Herschel V. Johnson, London, to Secretary of State, Jan. 29, 1938, 811.108 Carter, Boake/2, both in Record Group 59, Department of State Files, National Archives (hereinafter RG 59). Before 1917, Russia used a different calendar than Western Europe, hence the two September dates.

9 Maxine Block, ed., Current Biography 1942 (New York, 1942), 138; Who’s Who in America 1936–37, copy in OF 2103, FDRL.


of that year, he entered the United States for the first time, "charged to the quota for Russia." 12

In the meantime, the father had gone to Mexico in search of oil. His mother, Edith Harwood-Yarred, and his sister Eileen remained in England. After a brief stay in New York, the younger Carter joined his father. He worked as a journalist in the various parts of Central America where Thomas Carter was located. In 1923 the young man visited Cuba. For a time, both were in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Then the father became a director of an oil refinery in Philadelphia. Shortly after, his son joined him. Hoping to make a fashionable impression, the young Carter reputedly arrived attired in "spats, monocle and cane."

The diminutive Englishman began as rewrite man on the city desk of the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin. In April, 1924, after a brief courtship, he married the assistant society editor for the same paper, Beatrice Olive Richter. The Carters gave their children exotic names: Gwladys Sheleagh Boake and Michale Boake. Within a couple of years the family moved to an old farmhouse in Torresdale, outside the city. Carter added many rooms over the years. A photograph taken in the 1930's shows him attired as a British country gentleman—high boots and riding pants—though having trouble removing a book from the third shelf of a book case.

Carter painted more than 100 portraits, termed by one reporter "high in color but not noteworthy for technique." He exhibited some of these at Philadelphia exhibitions over the years. At one time he claimed to own a sixty-foot ketch and to belong to the Delaware Yacht Club. He apparently enjoyed preparing fancy meals as well. Having married a more socially prominent person (Beatrice Richter's father was editor and publisher of Sporting Life), Carter seemed especially pleased at being asked to present a lecture at the Philadelphia Junior League's annual party in January, 1936. His audience included more than 1,500 guests. 13


13 This information has been pieced together from a variety of sources including Liebling, "Boake Carter," 9; Block, Current Biography 1942, 139; Newsweek, July 21, 1934, 20-21; Literary Digest, Apr. 17, 1937, 29-30; dust jacket, Carter, This is Life (New York, 1937);
Carter's first radio experience came in the spring of 1930. A local Philadelphia station needed someone to broadcast a description of a rugby match. Nobody else knew anything about the game. Carter's next radio appearance demonstrated his ingenuity:

The broadcast of the rugby game inspired WCAU to simulate a from-the-spot description of the Oxford-Cambridge boat race. Carter, in the studio, pretended he was a spectator on the bank of the Thames. He got the facts for his description from early editions of the afternoon newspapers, and was 'supported' by a number of wax recordings of English crowd sounds.14

The following year, Boake (the program director at Philadelphia's WCAU suggested that he stop calling himself Harold Carter) became the Hearst "Globe-Trotter" in the City of Brotherly Love. He made two five-minute news broadcasts daily, publicizing the Hearst-Metrotone newsreel and the theaters where it appeared. He was soon sponsored by the Pep Boys, a chain specializing in automotive parts.15

The kidnapping of Charles A. Lindbergh's baby brought Carter to national attention. WCAU's owner, Dr. Leon Levy, was the brother-in-law of the Columbia Broadcasting System's president. He enthusiastically described the new commentator to William S. Paley, also a WCAU stockholder. Paley was unimpressed. Levy tried another tack. It was the height of public interest in the kidnapping. The former dentist refused to allow CBS the use of his station's "mobile broadcasting unit" unless the news analyst were given a national hookup. Levy got his way. On March 2, 1932, the newscaster began speaking over most CBS affiliates from Trenton, New Jersey. He "roared at the forces of crime, instead of giving a straight news-broadcast." CBS canceled him. Listeners deluged the network demanding more of Carter's analyses. He quickly returned to the air.16

15 Ibid., 9-10.
16 Block, Current Biography 1942, 138; CBS Talent File (old) for Carter, CBS Program Information, Columbia Broadcasting System, 51 W. 52nd St., New York, N. Y.; Literary
Not everyone was delighted with the broadcaster’s “roaring.” In May, 1932, the Federal Radio Commission received an official complaint concerning Carter’s newscasts as “The Globe Trotter.” The Commission’s Philadelphia office hired a stenographer to take down the news analyst’s “news flashes.” An official declared that “any expense necessarily incurred in procuring the transcript will be borne by the Commission, not to exceed twenty dollars.” The commentator received no reprimand.17

Carter considered himself an authority on air power, based on his experience with the Royal Air Force’s coast patrol during the First World War. He persuaded Brigadier General William Mitchell to appear on his program in October, 1934. He became good friends with Congressman John J. McSwain, Chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee.18 During the next several years, the news analyst devoted many broadcasts to military matters. His support of air power often meant accusing others of preventing its development. “Trans-Atlantic commercial aviation is in one hell of a mess!,” was the way he began one 1938 article.

As to shipping, Carter claimed that:

The U. S. merchant marine has been allowed to slide into decay and rot and not [sic] so very far from ruin. The vessels we do have are ninety-seven per cent ancient, hardly seaworthy old tubs. They crawl when it comes to speed. . . . Other nations laugh at America on this score. . . .19

Digest, Apr. 17, 1937, 30; folder 1, Station WCAU, Station Files, Federal Communications Commission, Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Md. (hereinafter WNRC-Suitland); John O. Downey, General Manager, WCAU, to author, Sept. 5, 1969; Kenneth W. Stowman to author, Aug. 5, 1969. Stowman was a long-time friend of Carter’s. He began at WCAU in 1927 and gathered information for the commentator during the Lindbergh kidnapping.

17 Memorandum, James W. Baldwin, Secretary of Federal Radio Commission, May 19, 1932; G. E. Sterling, Acting United States Supervisor of Radio, to Director of Radio Division, Department of Commerce, May 21, 1932, both in Box 438, Station WCAU, FCC Radio Division, Record Group 173, National Archives.


19 Carter, “Battle of the Airlines,” The Commentator, III (February, 1938), 87; CBS broadcast, Oct. 27, 1936, Box 186, Record Group 122, Federal Trade Commission, National Archives (hereinafter RG 122). These Ediphone transcriptions contain numerous errors in orthography and grammar. The former have been corrected. The latter have not. Broadcasts in this collection are not in chronological order.
The newscaster often hinted darkly of conspiracies. In discussing national defense he was apt to expose unnamed persons:

And we in our small way, try to point toward a better national air defense at less cost. But likewise, never get to first base either. For what reason? . . . Because at the tops in both services, the gold braid and the brass hats like to play politics as much as any politician.20

The administration at first attempted to be friendly toward Carter. In November, 1935, Roosevelt was perfectly willing to talk privately with the newscaster after one of his press conferences.21 When the news analyst praised Cordell Hull’s trade agreement program in a broadcast, the Secretary sent a personal note of thanks:

It is very gratifying to have some of the important facts with regard to this matter made so clear to the public as you have made them.

Will you accept my good wishes for a very happy and successful New Year. . . .22

As late as April, 1936, Senator Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas spoke somewhat tongue-in-cheek on the floor of Congress about “that great radio speaker to whom all delight to listen, Mr. Boake Carter,” and cited one of the newscaster’s recent analyses.23

In February that year, the commentator conducted a number of interviews. Guests such as Postmaster General James A. Farley and FCC Commissioner George Henry Payne discussed what radio networks should do about handling public affairs. Edward L. Bernays, a highly-successful “publicity specialist” then working for the newscaster’s sponsor, had come up with the idea. CBS had no desire to raise the question of how much time the Republican Party should be given or allowed to purchase in the coming campaign. They arranged for the programs to be unsponsored, and terminated the series as quickly as possible. That cabinet members would immediately accept an invitation to appear on a program with Boake Carter indicates something of the newscaster’s importance in early 1936.24

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20 CBS broadcast, May 7, 1936, Box 193, RG 122.
21 Harry C. Butcher, CBS vice president, to Early, Nov. 9, 1935, OF 2103, FDRL.
23 Congressional Record, 74th Cong., 2d Session, 6173 (Apr. 27, 1936).
Another publicity scheme involved the Department of State. The commentator was sponsored by Philco radio of Philadelphia. In May, 1936, Hull not only wrote a letter supporting Bernays' next promotional gimmick, but ended up talking with a number of the company's Canadian salesmen in Washington. Philco chartered the Monarch of Bermuda and took 800 dealers to Cuba. Carter broadcast nightly aboard ship. In Havana, Jefferson Caffery, the American Ambassador, spoke cordially to the radio distributors. That evening, the newscaster told his enormous CBS audience of the ambassador's kind words. On the air, he interviewed James Phillips, Cuban correspondent for The New York Times. "The Reciprocity Treaty and sugar quota granted by the United States," declared Phillips, "are directly responsible for the business improvement of the island." The commentator was equally enthusiastic. Laurence Duggan, of the State Department's Latin-American Division, sent a copy of the broadcast to a superior. "I should say that our effort for the Philco company was richly repaid by this interview," he added.

During the summer of 1936, the broadcaster involved himself in a battle between his sponsor and the Radio Corporation of America. The two companies had long experienced strained relations. In 1927, RCA brought forth a much-improved vacuum tube. Before this, every radio required a storage battery. The development nearly put the Philadelphia Electric Storage Battery Company (Philco) out of business. It had sold 15,000,000 batteries that year. Philco turned to manufacturing radios. The company pioneered in inexpensive sets and models for automobiles. RCA demanded a small percentage of the selling price because of patents it held. In 1936, Philco sued, charging monopolistic practices. Carter infuriated RCA by defending the suit during several broadcasts. Philco ran a full-page adver-

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25 CBS broadcast, May 18, 1936, copy in Laurence Duggan to Sumner Welles, June 15, 1936, o32/Philco/18, RG 59; CBS broadcast, May 15, 1936, Box 189, RG 112; Bernays, Biography of an Idea, 576-577; for additional comments concerning Cuba by Carter, see CBS broadcasts, May 20 and 21, 1936, Box 188, RG 122.

26 Duggan to Welles, June 15, 1936, RG 59.
tisement in *Time* denying that its commentator was influenced by company policies.27 Few, particularly RCA, were convinced.

Carter’s next crusade involved the Department of State. In June, 1935, Lawrence Simpson, an American sailor, was arrested in Hamburg. German police charged him with treason. According to custom, the American consul was present when the prisoner was taken into custody. The State Department official reported that for “a native-born American,” Simpson demonstrated “an astounding knowledge of German.” Two months later, Hull wired Hamburg. He told the consul to request a speedy trial for the seaman.28 One year later, the seaman was still in prison. He had never been indicted. Gifford A. Cochran, wealthy associate of the National Committee for Defense of Political Prisoners, went to Germany to see whether he could secure a trial for Simpson. On July 29, 1936, Hull spoke with the German ambassador in Washington. He asked whether the Nazis were not being overly severe in their treatment of the prisoner, even if he were a Communist who had conspired with seventy German nationals as charged. The Secretary sent a memorandum of his conversation to the American representative in Berlin.29

As late as the beginning of September, Carter obviously was unaware of the Simpson case. On September 6 he discussed Hull’s trade agreement with Nicaragua. “Some day some historian will give him the credit that is his due,” he concluded, “and it will only be just and fair.” He praised the Secretary again on September 9 and 10.30 Suddenly, on Friday, September 18, the commentator learned of the seaman’s case. He devoted much of his broadcast to the matter,


29 Hull to Charge in Germany (Mayer), July 29, 1936; Hull to Raymond H. Geist, Consul at Berlin, Aug. 31, 1936, both in FR: 1936, II, 295, 296–297.

30 CBS broadcast, Sept. 6, 9, 10, 1936, Box 203, RG 122.
taking time out from his daily prognostications concerning November prospects for Alf Landon and Roosevelt. He began:

Well, from the remoteness of his Connecticut farm, the keen eyes of columnist Westbrook Pegler cover much ground and see many things. . . . So he brings to light the story of Lawrence Simpson, a U.S. citizen and a seaman, who has been locked up in a Nazi prison for fifteen months. . . . And columnist Pegler directs a satirical comparison between what has happened to this plain U.S. sailor Simpson, and what might have happened had the prisoner been Vincent Astor, wealthy crony of President Roosevelt. . . . [Gifford Cochran] battered at the doors of the State Department, and an Under Secretary—James Clement Dunn—observed with diplomatic superciliousness: What did he want us to do, send a battleship over for him? . . . And it is to be hoped that its [Pegler's column] sting may shame supercilious under secretaries of the State Department into forgetting their friends of the upper strata of the social scale long enough to bestir themselves to see that justice is done to a plain forty-dollar fo’c’sle hand of an American ship. . . .

Monday, September 21, he eagerly returned to the same subject. The news analyst announced that the Department finally had “prodded” the Nazis into arranging a trial date. Carter continued:

The State Department also let it be known that while his own government will not lift a hand to help him legally, nevertheless it will generously supply U.S. consul observer, to attend the seaman's trial—presumably to observe and then report the observations to Washington. . . . But then, the man is, after all, only a forty-dollar-a-week American sailor, and fifteen months is really very quick time in which to be noticed by the authorities in one's own homeland.

The next night he referred to Hull’s angry comments on the case. The Secretary denounced Gifford Cochran's committee for “presumptuous[ly] . . . asking gratuitous questions and putting themselves above officials who have done their utmost. . . .” Hull's “anger” could be “easily understood,” Carter added, “for nobody liked to be prodded with the charge of official laxity in performance of official duties.” The commentator declared that until the Department revealed exactly what it had done, there was no reason to take the Secretary’s word.

On Monday, September 28, Simpson confessed that he had in fact distributed Communist literature and sought to overthrow the

31 Ibid., Sept. 18, 1936, Box 200, RG 122.
32 Ibid., Sept. 21, 1936, Box 201, RG 122.
33 Ibid., Sept. 22, 1936, Box 200, RG 122.
German government. Hull wired Ambassador William E. Dodd, demanding he “make strongest possible representations” to the Nazis to have the remaining part of the seaman’s sentence revoked, and instead deport him. Simpson appeared “to be of defective mind,” the Secretary added, “in that he had previously refused counsel and that he has refused to accept the offers of assistance of his father and friends. . . .”34 The Germans released their prisoner on December 20. Dodd felt the “Foreign Office ha[d] been very helpful in trying to smooth out this situation.” The following April, in the United States, Simpson attacked the Nazis. He openly admitted to being a Communist. The Germans expressed considerable regret at having freed their prisoner so quickly.35

Carter’s crusade evaporated with the sailor’s public statements. The commentator was forced to admit his error. His apology, however, broadcast on September 28, the day of Simpson’s trial, was less than gracious:

It now seems that Mr. Hull’s anger over the case of sailor Simpson . . . is understandable . . . the U. S. sailor over whose case considerable furor was aroused and over whose plight numbers of U. S. newshawks were apparently genuinely misled by false information, convicted himself before a German court for being a Communist.

Thus, we for one promptly lose interest in the Simpson affair for it never was right and never will be justifiable for a U. S. citizen to use his citizenship privileges to disguise communistic attempts on his part. . . . In reality, he probably gets off with an exceedingly light sentence in Germany. . . . So, thus, while, sailor Simpson now doesn’t seem to rate the sentimental furor stirred up about him by pressure groups who carefully kept hid the sailor’s communistic activities against a friendly government and so misled newshawks, nevertheless, the State Department cannot get out from under, that if giving a man a trial after fourteen months is the best it could do, surely the best was a poor best.36

So much emphasis on one sailor’s fortunes perhaps seems excessive. There are three reasons. First, the Simpson case demonstrates Car-

34 Hull to Dodd, Sept. 28, 1936; Dodd to Hull, Dec. 1, 1936, in FR: 1936, II, 301.
35 William E. Dodd, Jr., and Martha Dodd, eds., Ambassador Dodd’s Diary 1933-1938 (New York, 1941), 354-355 (Sept. 28, 1936); 404 (Apr. 27, 1937). The authenticity and accuracy of this diary have been questioned by many. Robert Dallek, Democrat and Diplomat: The Life of William E. Dodd (New York, 1968), chapter X, footnote 23, provides an exhaustive discussion of the matter. Dallek concludes that a diary was kept by the ambassador and that it is accurate.
36 CBS broadcast, Sept. 28, 1936, Box 199, RG 122.
ter's willingness to condemn the State Department without checking his facts. Second, for this controversy copies of almost every one of the newscaster’s daily broadcasts have survived. Third, important correspondence from officials in the Department of State, including Hull himself, points out not only how carefully members of the Department were listening to the news analyst’s attacks, but in what high esteem they had held his previous commentaries.

On September 30, U. Alexis Grant-Smith, a retired foreign service officer, wrote a long letter to the broadcaster concerning the Simpson analyses. He sent copies to Westbrook Pegler, Cordell Hull, and Assistant Secretary of State Wilbur J. Carr, among others. Grant-Smith began:

Your attack on Secretary Hull, made some days ago in your broadcast with regard to the American citizen Simpson . . . was a source of great disappointment to me, and, to be quite frank, it seriously shook my confidence in your fairness and objectivity. You obviously had made no attempt to confirm the statements made on the subject derogatory to the Secretary of State and his subordinates before launching your attack.

Last night you made partial amends to Secretary Hull personally . . . Comparative immunity from the consequences of malicious or positively false statements undoubtedly adds somewhat to a journalist’s natural courage. I am seriously disappointed, because you were one of the few commentators, either on the radio or in the press, whose judgment and fairness I had long counted upon. You can imagine, therefore, how I felt when, after your first broadcast on the Simpson subject, a masseur at a western sanitarium introduced the subject and, referring to your attack, remarked, “It’s that sort of thing which makes us little fellows feel dissatisfied.”

As for your criticism of the failure of the State Department and its foreign agents to obtain prompt satisfaction for an American citizen who may get into trouble in foreign countries, it is pertinent to inquire just what measures you and other critics along the same line would propose in such cases.37

Wilbur Carr responded enthusiastically to Grant-Smith:

Your letter of September 30 to Boake Carter gave me a real thrill. . . . I have always had a great deal of confidence in Boake Carter’s statements over the radio but last summer I listened nightly to his broadcasts and found those in regard to the Department of Commerce very much at vari-

37 Grant-Smith to Carter, Sept. 30, 1936, Box 39, Correspondence II, Cordell Hull MSS, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
ance with the facts as I personally knew them and I began to lose confidence not in his honest intention but in the care with which he gathered his information.\textsuperscript{38}

Though appreciative of Grant-Smith's effort, Hull was pessimistic: "Confidentially, I doubt if it is [sic] has any effect whatever upon his system and methods."\textsuperscript{39} Apparently, he had long since given up his attempts to be cordial to the commentator, such as the New Year's message of the previous December. Actually, the Secretary's gloom was unwarranted, which suggests an essential difference between Carter's methods in 1936 and 1938. On October 21, 1936, the broadcaster returned to a favorite subject: Hull's trade agreements and the wonders they had wrought in Nicaragua. After offering effusive praise for the Secretary's magnificent achievements, including his ability to bring "bright young boys" such as Dean Acheson "back to the administration bandwagon," the newscaster declared that the transformation of Nicaragua represented "a personal triumph for one of the most unselfishly patriotic gentlemen in America, bar none."\textsuperscript{40} There is no indication that Hull heard these fine words.

The letters of Grant-Smith and Carr also point out how much some important government officials thought of the broadcaster's analyses in 1936. These were two extremely conservative foreign service officers whose antipathy towards the New Deal was common knowledge. But such faith in Carter suggests the extent of the news analyst's influence. Surely these men did not consider him a "mercenary poseur." Two years later, the newscaster had lost the confidence of this sort of listener. Of additional interest is Grant-Smith's reference to the masseur. It indicates the commentator's appeal among a variety of socio-economic groups.

The Simpson broadcasts reveal that Carter would start a crusade on no more substantial evidence than a column by Westbrook Pegler. The news analyst was attracted to the story because it contained two of his favorite themes. The little man, the "forty-dollar-a-week

\textsuperscript{38} Carr to "G-S," Oct. 8, 1936, Box 13, Wilbur J. Carr MSS, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Carr's Diary contains no references to either Carter or Simpson during this period.

\textsuperscript{39} Hull to Grant-Smith, Oct. 3, 1936, Box 39, Correspondence II, Hull MSS.

\textsuperscript{40} CBS broadcast, Oct. 21, 1936, Box 197, RG 122. The broadcaster seems to have had a special affinity for Nicaragua, possibly because of time spent there between 1921 and 1924.
sailor," had been ignored by his government. Listeners who themselves had achieved little might be counted on to believe this sort of thing. Second, the case presented an opportunity to attack not so much Cordell Hull as the "supercilious under secretaries" in the Department of State. As Roosevelt himself declared openly that there was dead-wood in the foreign service, the commentator hardly needed to worry about remarks of this kind resulting in any serious difficulties.

The crusade also was effective because there was a fragment of truth in the newscaster's charges. The department had done little about the sailor for almost an entire year. Even the editor of the Foreign Relations series apparently was unable to find much correspondence concerning Simpson in the State Department files between August 17, 1935, and April 28, 1936. Had Simpson been an influential person, it seems reasonable to assume that something more would have been done during this period. However, after July, 1936—well before the broadcaster learned of the case—Hull and his staff did a great deal to secure the seaman's release or a shorter sentence. They succeeded, as even Carter admitted.41

The commentator took unscrupulous advantage of diplomacy's necessary secrecy. When he suggested that Hull was concealing information and that to clear himself he should report exactly what the Department had done, the newscaster knew his request could not be fulfilled while negotiations were in progress. In the meantime, many listeners assumed that the Department was hiding something.

The Simpson case demonstrates that the broadcaster, while stumbling on to something with the faintest bit of truth to it, used familiar stereotypes of the forgotten common man and rich disdainful foreign service officers to manufacture an incident of considerable proportions. Hull found himself spending as much time with the American press as he did trying to free Simpson. Finally, Carter dropped the case when the seaman confessed to being a Communist. The newscaster had something of a phobia about Communists, in part because of his abiding belief in all manner of conspiracies.

A discussion of Carter's broadcast style—including vocal mannerisms—helps make clear why he enjoyed such an enormous audience. When the news analyst first went on the air, he spoke with a very proper British accent. Listeners could not understand him. Carter quickly changed his style. As one writer commented: "What he employs now is a sort of pseudo-accent, about as authentic as the Negro dialect of Singing Sam, the Barbasol Man. The intonation is British, but the qualities and emphases are American." "Predecessor" became "pre-duh-sessuh"; "year after year," "yeahr ahter yeahr." Otherwise, pronunciations were free of noticeable affectations.  

Carter spoke at a tremendous rate of speed. Either the listener followed every word, as Carter rushed on, or understood nothing. The news analyst made comprehension simpler by employing myriad bromides, platitudes, stereotypes, and the flashy, gauche language—sort of a vocal zoot suit—found in "as told to" books. Nobody ever said something, he "retorted" or "shot back." Descriptions at first seemed exciting. But the same few phrases appeared over and over. A person whom the newscaster liked was "young, two-fisted, red-haired." Officials were not defeated. Voters would "sweep them from the seats they have warmed for the past four years." Opponents were "on the outs" with the administration. Liberal professors became "as pink as a midsummer sunset" or "academic gentlemen." Government leaders in disfavor turned into "our erudites, learned savants [who] do not understand the essence of the bicycle."  

The Postmaster General might be described as "the bank of brilliant white lights reflecting the sheen of his shiny dome . . . the smiling affable ring-master, two-job man James Aloysius Farley." The commentator talked of Senator "Bob" Wagner or "young Mr. Hop-
kins.” He loved to refer to Roosevelt as “the Boss.” The barely suppressed sneer and the intimate language helped convince listeners that this was a person close to the mighty, who saw through their every pretense.

The news analyst occasionally reported alleged conversations with well-known officials in verbatim fashion. “Well, last Friday, a week ago,” Carter would say, “National Committee Chairman Farley said to me over the telephone, ‘Monday, Boake, I’m going to come out and claim forty-six states for Roosevelt. . . .’” In 1940, the broadcaster claimed to have talked with Wendell L. Willkie at the Republican convention: “‘Hells bells!’ he [Willkie] retorted . . . ‘I get your point exactly.’ I answered . . . ‘Exactly,’ shot back the blue-eyed, square-jawed Hoosierite.”

Carter delighted in dramatizations of foreign affairs. David Lloyd George did not make a speech, “the fiery Welshman pointed a bony finger. . . .” The British-born commentator had special insight into what was happening abroad. “The ferment in Europe continues to gurgle and bubble,” he would announce.

Overseas events also offered a chance to work in a commercial for Philco radios. Carter read his own advertising copy, and introduced it with absolutely no warning:

Thus when the shadows of two mail fists etch their dark outlines across war-torn, fire-ridden Madrid today, there stretched another dark shadow across the whole of Europe.

So today too we find many a new Philco tuned to the far-flung capital cities of Europe to keep many an American home informed of these critical events of history in the making on the anvil of time. For it is indeed a simply easy thing to follow the world the Philco way now, especially when you have a Philco high efficiency aerial attached to your set. . . .

46 78 rpm original transcription, CBS broadcast, June 18, 1936, NBC warehouse; CBS broadcast, Oct. 22, 1936, Box 184, RG 122; MBS broadcast, Mar. 5, 1942, “Daily Radio Digest No. 50,” Box 1848, RG 44. Beginning shortly after Pearl Harbor, the Media Division of the Office of War Information made daily surveys of news broadcasts. Frequently they provided extended excerpts in their reports.

47 CBS broadcast, Nov. 4, 1936, Box 184, RG 122.


49 78 rpm original transcription, CBS broadcast, June 19, 1936, NBC warehouse; CBS broadcast, Nov. 18, 1936, Box 183, RG 122.

50 CBS broadcast, Nov. 18, 1936, RG 122.
No matter how breathlessly the commentator spoke—and it was so fast that sentences were incomplete and phrases such as “a simply easy thing” occurred frequently—one was aware of the endless clichés. Within two sentences, the news analyst had introduced “war-torn,” “dark shadow,” “whole of Europe,” “far flung . . . cities,” “critical events,” “history in the making,” and the “anvil of time.”

For a change of pace, Carter frequently turned to the afflictions of the blind. Helen Keller, “gradually like a flower opening its petals beneath the caresses of a warm sun . . . grew to love life and all that it meant to one snatched from the very depths of suffering.”51 In 1936, the newscaster berated Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins for favoring strikers in San Francisco. He suddenly switched to a lengthy story about seeing-eye dogs. The commentator described a school in New Jersey for “man’s best friend.” Two years later, he talked of the death of one of these animals. He ended by vowing that this was “a dog who will live forever after, for his service to mankind.”52

Carter’s popularity with the average listener is better documented than for most commentators. Only sponsored news programs received regular Crossley and Hooperatings—devices employed by advertisers to determine the size of radio audiences. The newscaster’s Philco contract began in 1933. Generally, from 1934 until August, 1938, he was as popular as the highest-paid news broadcaster of the decade, NBC’s Lowell Thomas. In January, 1934, the news analyst had a Crossley rating of 8.1; Lowell Thomas’ was 30.7, one of the highest for any radio show. A year later, the CBS broadcaster was up to 18.9; Thomas led by only five points. In February, 1936, Carter’s rating was sometimes higher than his chief rival’s.

Until 1936, the newscaster spoke five times a week over twenty-three CBS stations at 7:45 P.M., eastern standard time. In July, 1937, the network increased his coverage to sixty stations. His schedule, however, was reduced to Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. When General Foods began its sponsorship in February, 1938, the commentator was heard over eighty-five stations five days a

51 Ibid., Oct. 20, 1936; see also Oct. 23, 1936, both in Box 195, RG 122.
52 Ibid., Nov. 13, 1936, Box 183, RG 122; 33 1/2 rpm original transcription, CBS broadcast, May 24, 1938, Record 5832, Box E-38-2, NBC warehouse.
week at 6:30 P.M. Thus, in terms of number of affiliates, the news analyst's greatest national coverage came between July, 1937, and August 26, 1938, when he was taken off the air.53

Other measuring devices suggest why the newscaster was listened to enthusiastically in so many cities. In June, 1938, Carter was voted the most popular radio commentator in the Fifth Annual Radio Guide program poll. As late as January, 1940, a Fortune survey showed that Boake Carter's newspaper column was behind only Walter Winchell's and Dorothy Thompson's in number of readers. The same month, an American Institute of Public Opinion poll reported that even though the broadcaster had been off the air for more than a year, he was favored over such influential commentators as Elmer Davis or Raymond Gram Swing by a substantial margin.54

In spite of this, by late 1939, Carter was much less prominent than two years earlier. He was not heard in Chicago again before 1941. When he returned to the air in September, 1939, he was sponsored by a few individual advertisers, such as the First National Bank of Kalamazoo, Michigan, or the Gander Motor Company in Des Moines, Iowa. He tried sending recorded transcriptions to MBS affiliates. Each station could listen to the analyses before broadcasting them. Listeners complained of stale news.55

53 Harrison B. Summers, compiler, A Thirty-Year History of Programs Carried on National Radio Networks in the United States 1926–1956 (Columbus, Ohio, 1958), 40, 46, 54, 62; CAB Crossley rating, Feb. 25, 1936, July 28, 1936, 4-Q, Broadcast Pioneers History Project, Fifth Progress Report (New York, 1969). The Broadcast Pioneers Library is now located at 1771 N St. N. W., Washington, D. C.; “Boake Carter” folder, CBS Program Information; CBS Talent File (new) and (old), Carter, CBS Program Information. Since a study of Carter's listeners, discussed in Paul Lazarsfeld, Radio and the Printed Page: An Introduction to the Study of Radio and its Role in the Communication of Ideas (New York, 1940), 187–189, showed that station popularity and the size of the commentator's audience were directly proportional, the fact that the newscaster was heard over CBS affiliates is especially important. See also, Hadley Cantril, “The Role of the Radio Commentator,” Public Opinion Quarterly, III (October, 1939), 658, for similar findings.


55 Based on daily radio schedules in The Chicago Tribune, 1939–1941; Variety, Sept. 13, 1939, 19; Dec. 20, 1939, 24. At least one New York judge found even the transcriptions full of pro-German bias. Cf. a series of letters between Jacob Marks, the FCC, and the State Department, Sept. 13—Dec. 8, 1939, 811.76/432, 433, RG 59.
Other sponsors and schemes followed. For a few weeks, beginning in October, 1940, United Airlines sponsored the commentator over a national network. In New York during May, 1941, the news analyst appeared Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 8:30 P.M. From September to December, 1941, he was speaking only on Monday. In Washington, D.C., Carter broadcast on Saturday at 7:30 P.M. in March, 1940. A year later he appeared Tuesday and Thursday at the same hour. By June, 1941, he was heard Monday and Wednesday at 7:30 P.M.; he presented a different program on Tuesday and Thursday at 6:30 P.M. In November, 1941, he was down to twice a week at 7:30 P.M. This dizzying succession of programs, times, and days shows that there is absolutely no comparison between the enormous CBS audience the newscaster reached five nights a week at an excellent hour in 1938, and the sporadic Mutual coverage of 1939-1941.

After the war began, things became even worse. The commentator received a Hooperating of only 3.2 for his broadcasts in January, 1942. He was appearing once a week at 4:45 P.M., sponsored by Land O'Lakes butter. An evening show was doing considerably better, but it lasted only a few months. A year later, he was heard at noon. In 1944, the last of Carter's life, he was sponsored by Chef Boy-Ar-Dee. His rating was 2.3.56

A central question in any consideration of Boake Carter is why he was forced off the air in 1938. Exactly who was responsible? In contrast to the time of the Simpson affair, only a few actual broadcasts for 1937 and 1938 have survived. The commentator began a nationally-syndicated daily newspaper column on March 1, 1937, but these accounts do not deal with exactly the same sort of things said on the air. In spite of this absence of material, however, it is possible to reconstruct a surprising number of Carter's broadcast statements.

The CBS news analyst took on two powerful opponents beginning in 1937, and both were able to affect the content of his talks. The first was organized labor. During the Little Steel strike of 1937,
Carter attacked the C.I.O. day after day. Labor responded by picketing the newscaster's home station in Philadelphia. The C.I.O. voted a general boycott of Philco products. Radio sales dropped precipitously, although not necessarily solely because of union action. Since the company had pioneered in low-cost radios, it is hardly surprising that they were frightened by the C.I.O. boycott. Carter admitted that pressure on Philco could be effective:

What we couldn't understand was the sponsor's multiple fears and piling up of problems where problems didn't exist. Company executives were always eager to drop important business to dabble with their radio program... When it proved vexatious, [they] were scared out of their wits. ... 57

The commentator tried to come to an understanding with John L. Lewis during the fall of 1937. C.I.O. members voted to continue the boycott anyway. Philco terminated its contract with the broadcaster on February 18, 1938. 58

In the meantime, another corporation, General Foods, decided to sponsor Carter over an increased number of stations. Colby M. Chester, chairman of the board of the corporation, was an active antagonist of the New Deal. He served as president of the National Association of Manufacturers and had been prominent in the American Liberty League from its inception. Not surprisingly, the board chairman was no friend of organized labor. Chester, however, was not the only one involved in deciding what kind of talent the company might pay for. Some questioned whether a firm which manufactured breakfast cereals should risk sponsoring anyone so controversial.

One of these people was Joseph E. Davies, ambassador to the Soviet Union. His new wife, Marjorie Post, owned a substantial amount of stock in General Foods. As Davies later explained to Cordell Hull:

Last winter [December 1937] we learned of this broadcasting contract; we then expressed our concern to the officers lest a merchandising and commercial business should alienate possible customers by antagonizing them through sponsoring a broadcast that took sides on controversial questions. We were then assured that the arrangement made had expressly precluded such a possibility and that the broadcasting reports were to be confined exclusively to reporting the news.69

During much of 1937, Carter had attacked the administration with increasing viciousness. In July, 1937, at the height of the battle over whether to increase the number of Supreme Court justices, the newscaster, according to a listener, accused the President in a "sneeringly derisive" manner of trying to avoid paying his proper income tax. In the same broadcast, he made even wilder accusations:

In commenting upon the tragic death of Senator Joseph T. Robinson, Carter directly and unequivocally charged that the Senator's fatal heart attack was due to the extreme pressure brought to bear upon him by the President. In fact, Carter unmistakably implied that the Senator's death was caused by the President; that the Senator was NOT in accord with the President's program; that the Senator would have liked to be relieved of the distasteful ordeal being imposed upon him by the President, and get away from the "mess" which John N. Garner left because he "Could not stomach it."

The same person decried the commentator's "attitude of an infallible omniscience... [and] his very obviously contemptuous vituperation." Others, equally livid, sent angry letters and telegrams to Philco.60

In spite of this, Roosevelt tried to accommodate the news analyst. In September, Carter telephoned the White House, hoping to see "the Boss" privately. Roosevelt agreed. The chief executive still indicated a spirit of resigned tolerance toward the newscaster in December. "Boake Carter's statements," he told a worried acquaintance, "as a general proposition, are half of them untrue and the

69 Davies to Hull, Mar. 28, 1938, Box 42, Correspondence II, Hull Mss.
60 Albert Stanhope Brown to Philco Radio, July 15, 1937, copy in OF 2103, FDRL. Brown sent a copy to White House Press Secretary Steve Early, "one of a great number" that he had written, and asked Early to pass it along to Charles Michelson. Others who heard the broadcast sent protests to Philco and copies to Roosevelt. Cf. Rev. W. R. Robinson, House of Representatives, State of Washington, to Philco Radio, July 14, 1937; unsigned telegram, Los Angeles, Cal., to White House, n.d. (filed July 19, 1937), both in OF 2103, FDRL.
other misstated. The particular ones you wrote about fall into both categories."  

When the commentator started flaying the Department of State, he created at first only a small stir. In October, 1937, the newscaster exposed the Department's alleged persecution of an American shipping line operating in South America. Assistant Secretary of State George S. Messersmith explained to a worried associate that the company had been "notoriously inefficient in operations. . . ." He noted that the Munson Line generally had been unfriendly to the Department, snidely adding: "this attitude has done us more honor and credit than otherwise."  

In November, 1937, Congresswoman Virginia E. Jenckes became infuriated when Carter twitted her in a broadcast. She had spoken before a meeting of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Mrs. Jenckes urged that every cherry tree around Washington's Jefferson Memorial be cut down to show Japanese spies that the United States meant business. The news analyst suggested sarcastically that all foreign trees in America be felled. "Where is the lady from Indiana and her handy little ax?," he added. Enraged, Mrs. Jenckes began an investigation of the broadcaster's background. The Congresswoman sought to have Carter declared an undesirable alien. After receiving a formal report from the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, she read it into the Congressional Record.  

At the same time, the Special Intelligence Unit of the Treasury Department began its own inquiry into the newscaster's origins. Carter learned of at least one of these attempts to deport him. He told his radio audience all about the conspiracy. He explained that although born in the Soviet Union, he was no Communist agent. The broadcaster then filled out an official Unemployment Report.

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62 Memorandum, Messersmith to J. E. Saugstad, Division of Trade Agreements, Nov. 12, 1937, 800.8830/607, RG 59.

63 Report from the Commissioner to Jenckes, Congressional Record, 75th Cong., 3d Session, Appendix 1005-09 (Mar. 14, 1938). Jenckes even told members of the House that "Boake" was the way Russians pronounced "Baku," the newscaster's birthplace. Others as well demanded action concerning the cherry trees, to Roosevelt's annoyance. See James E. Pollard, The Presidents and the Press (New York, 1947), 791.
Card and sent it to the White House. “Who said that I should be Deported? Beware! Libel me at your Peril,” was one of his remarks. The commentator asserted that his job was “Hatching canards ‘Yellow’ Revising and Editing U.S. History 1776-1937...” For Carter to have sent such an irrational outpouring to the President suggests that perhaps he believed himself genuinely threatened. Unfortunately for those opposing him, the report which the Department of State received from London indicated nothing amiss in the newscaster’s background.

The commentator’s antiadministration onslaught continued unabated. On January 25, 1938, he spoke at the District of Columbia’s Washington Forum. The news analyst “opposed America’s joining any movement against nondemocratic nations on the ground that it would lead us into war.” His broadcast the previous evening was exceptionally strident in tone. On January 26, Pierrepont Moffat described how some reacted:

Mr. Hull is in a state of repressed rage with Boake Carter who is leading the attack against the Administration on foreign policy, but Mr. Hull’s rage is nothing to that of Norman Davis and Stanley Hornbeck who would like, I think, to emulate the Nazis in silencing embarrassing critics. Stanley in particular thought that making use of Carter’s foreign birth and upbringing would scare him off, instead Boake Carter beat them to it and announced over the radio his whole past history. Whatever one may think of him he’s a clever one.

Harold Ickes reports Roosevelt told Frances Perkins “that he would be happy if she could discover that Boake Carter... was not entitled to be in this country. It appears that an investigation of his record is being made.”

On January 31, Moffat noted with “amusement” that the newscaster had termed him a “member of the Anglophile group who is ‘trying to educate the country to war.’” The same day, members

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64 Carter to White House, n.d. (filed Jan. 18, 1938), OF 2103, FDRL.
65 Handwritten note, Pierrepont Moffat to Sumner Welles, n.d. [Jan 26, 1938], 811.108 Carter, Boake/1; Herschel V. Johnson to Secretary of State, Feb. 2, 1938, 811.108 Carter, Boake/4, both in RG 59.
of the Committee for Concerted Peace Efforts wrote to Philco protesting Carter’s “distortion of facts [and] his aspersions on the Secretary of State...”69 But the news analyst knew that Philco would soon have no control over him. He continued his tirades. As of February 8, 1938, he had apparently devoted every broadcast for three solid weeks to assailing the President and the Department of State.70

The commentator began selling Huskies, a breakfast cereal manufactured by General Foods, on February 28. He found a new area of attack in the Naval Expansion Bill of 1938. In Congress, Representative Noah M. Mason of Illinois, himself a naturalized citizen, told members that three government departments were investigating Carter. The Congressman added that he himself had “dared to express doubt about the proposed Navy expansion program...” He feared for free speech in America.71 On March 14, Martin L. Sweeney, “a professional Irishman from Cleveland, Ohio” and another long-time opponent of Roosevelt’s, introduced legislation concerning the newscaster. House Resolution 436 told of an alleged secret meeting recently held in New York City. Norman H. Davis, among others, had attended. The participants supposedly plotted to force Carter off the air and prepare the country for war. H.R. 436, which demanded exhaustive study of these matters, was quickly buried in the Committee on Rules.72

If investigations of Carter’s entrance into the United States did not bring any results, something else did. On April 7, 1938, a reviewer noted that the news analyst had praised Cordell Hull and Roosevelt for their Latin American policy and their efforts to keep the United States out of war. Broadcasts on May 24 and 25 in large part are so pallid as seemingly to come from another person. On May 24, the commentator admittedly discussed the marriage of

69 Moffat Diary, Jan. 31, 1938; members of Committee to Philco, Jan. 31, 1938, copy to Department of State, 711.00/787, RG 59.
70 Ickes, Secret Diary, II, 430; Dr. William G. Hanrahan, Springfield, N. J., to L. E. Brubb, president, Philco Radio, Feb. 8, 1938, copy in OF 2103, FDRL.
71 Congressional Record, 75th Cong., 3d Session, 3120 (Mar. 9, 1938); Variety, Mar. 2, 1938, 28.
72 Congressional Record, 75th Cong., 3d Session, 3320; a copy of the original resolution may be found in 811.108 Carter, Boake; 6, RG 59. Sweeney description in Warren F. Kimball, Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939–1941 (Baltimore, 1969), 186.
“Secretary Honest Harold Ickes” to that much younger girl in a thoroughly unpleasant fashion. He mentioned a mechanical horse which many “of the biggest New Dealers” rode every morning. The broadcaster hinted darkly that there was something wrong with such people exercising. But he also debated whether night baseball actually would prove profitable. He spent much of his time discussing the death of an old friend, a seeing-eye dog. The next day listeners learned about an honest carpenter in Rochester, New York, an airplane crash in Ohio, a new regulation for small boat owners in the New York City area, and some other trivia. Someone had finally brought pressure to bear on the news analyst.\textsuperscript{73}

One person was Frank C. Page, of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation. On March 18, 1938, he wrote a careful letter to Colby M. Chester of General Foods. It began:

I sincerely regretted to hear the program sponsored by General Foods yesterday. It so happens that I believe in the foreign policy and principles enunciated by Secretary Hull and fully approve of the actions the State Department has taken. It so happens in my business I have had close contact with the State Department for nine years and I have known it well since 1912. Today it is most efficiently and farsightedly run. Boake Carter's criticisms and unwarranted attacks on the State Department are utterly unfair and based entirely on what he picks up in gossip and in the papers. He has not contacted the State Department nor does he know the underlying facts of many of the things he talks about. I sincerely regret that General Foods is willing to sponsor irresponsible comments on this particular subject. It is perfectly obvious that the State Department cannot and will not give for public consumption all of the facts and things it knows. . . . It would seem to me that a commercial company allowing partisan comments under its sponsorship, no matter how much it disclaims agreement with the comments, is bound to get a certain amount of unfavorable commercial reaction.\textsuperscript{74}

On March 21, Page informed Cordell Hull of what he had been doing:

Last time I saw you, you expressed considerable concern over the remarks of one of the commentators over the air. I thought maybe one way to do

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Variety}, Apr. 13, 1938, 30; 33\frac{3}{4} \text{ rpm original transcription, CBS broadcast, May 24, 1938; 33\frac{3}{4} \text{ rpm original transcription, CBS broadcast, May 25, 1938, Record 5833, Box E-38-2, both in NBC warehouse.}

\textsuperscript{74} Page to Chester, Mar. 18, 1938, Box 42, Correspondence II, Hull MSS.
was to find someone who could and would possibly utilize his ability to refute Boake Carter's remarks. . . . I then talked to some of my good friends in Columbia Broadcasting and they informed me that under his new contract Carter was going to stop his commentaries on situations and merely pass out the news. It seems that this assurance on the part of the Columbia Broadcasting [sic] was not correct although I think it was made in good faith on their part. I talked to them this morning and they assure me that now they have it straightened out and the comments will only contain news. . . . Meanwhile I wrote the enclosed [March 18] letter. . . . I also know a number of other people who have written in a similar vein.\textsuperscript{76}

Page had already sent a copy of his March 18 letter to Joseph Davies. As soon as the ambassador received it, he wired Hull. "I cannot adequately tell you," he added in the accompanying letter, "how shocked, grieved, and chagrined I was by this news. I was mad clean through."\textsuperscript{76} He explained that because his wife had only a minority control in General Foods, they had not been able to alter the company's decision to hire Carter in the first place.

The same day, he also replied by telegram and letter to Frank Page. The letter began:

What you tell me is the worst news I have had in many a day. It has really distressed me beyond measure, for you know I have the greatest admiration and respect for Cordell Hull. Apart from that, I am pulling foot, horse and dragoon [sic] for what he is trying to do.

Davies continued: "I am going to find out what happened. It is a direct breach of faith somewhere along the line."\textsuperscript{77}

From April on, Carter did not dare attack the State Department on the air. In his daily newspaper column, however, he now accused the administration of destroying radio commentators' freedom of speech. As Moffat had remarked, "whatever one may think of him he's a clever one." This time the administration was not without its own guile. James Roosevelt solemnly told members of the press that the White House, far from attempting to throttle the newscaster, "had used its influence to keep Carter's radio chain and sponsor from bearing down on him lest Carter become a martyr."\textsuperscript{78} In a

\textsuperscript{75} Page to Hull, Mar. 21, 1938, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{76} Davies to Hull, Mar. 28, 1938, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{77} Davies to Page, Mar. 28, 1938, \textit{ibid.} There is nothing concerning Carter in the Joseph E. Davies MSS, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Time}, Apr. 25, 1938, ii. Carter's columns may be found in \textit{The Boston Daily Globe}, Mar. 1—Dec. 15, 1938; the Carter White House files contain newspaper stories about the com-
private letter, Roosevelt happily returned to his earlier attitude toward the commentator: “The President of the United States cannot engage in a radio debate with the Boake Carters and Father Coughlins of life.”

There are two unresolved problems in connection with what happened to the newscaster in April, 1938. First is the general question of freedom of speech, which the broadcaster talked about for months after in lectures all over the United States. Even in the absence of transcripts of Carter’s commentaries, available information indicates that the news analyst relied almost entirely on innuendo, invective, distortion, and misinformation in his attacks. Does a newscaster have the right deliberately to misinform his audience? And who is to decide if someone is guilty of such an offense? Such are the fundamental concerns of censorship. It seems clear that Carter became irrationally extreme by January, 1938. He moved so far beyond what is considered journalism’s code of ethics concerning the truth that he deserved to be bridled. But his example made others afraid to criticize the administration. By 1941, almost all of the important radio commentators openly favored Roosevelt’s foreign policy. Some, such as Raymond Gram Swing, went so far as to accept unquestioningly that every word which the President said was true. Unfortunately, the chief executive did not enjoy a reputation for complete candor. In sum, radio commentators were no longer fulfilling their function as independent critics.

The second consideration concerns CBS. Why was a network allegedly friendly to the New Deal so reluctant to censor Carter’s comments? After all, the president of CBS himself owned stock in the Philadelphia station where the news analyst originated his broadcasts. What finally persuaded network officials to do what they could have done anytime after 1935 with some justice—order the newscaster to restrict himself to what had some likelihood of being true? The answer quite possibly has a great deal to do with money. Carter made enormous profits for the network in its leaner early days. CBS knew that the broadcaster’s popularity stemmed from

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79 Roosevelt to Arthur B. Sherman, Apr. 6, 1938, Personal Letters, II, 774.
his being controversial. The commentator's personal manager was the brother-in-law of William S. Paley. This put him in an excellent position to protect his investment. In fact, Carter may have felt invulnerable because of his connections. Thus the company, fearful of government regulation by the FCC, and eager to cooperate with Roosevelt, still was willing to allow the newscaster to remain on the air. Certainly CBS would not have banned the broadcaster from its network forever in August, 1938, unless most persuasive pressure had been brought to bear. One suspects that only Carter's irrational and unfounded attacks on the administration provided sufficient reason for the efforts of Joseph Davies, Frank Page, and others to be effective.

After the newscaster left CBS he had but six years to live. He did not disappear. His daily newspaper column was filled with hatred of the New Deal, although quite often he offered philosophical advice about such matters as America's youth, or business, or topics of equivalent immediacy. The old Carter returned briefly to combat census enumerators in a bizarre episode during 1940. The columnist was convinced that these persons were subversive agents of a giant Roosevelt conspiracy, as was the Congressman who had the exposé read into the Congressional Record. The reporter insisted:

That is the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, replete with its staggering army of "snoops and peeps," its philosophy of materialism and its chicanery and double-dealing, which seeks to pry into the most intimate matters of every citizen's private life, is [sic] the factor which has created most of the public nausea.80

After this hammer and tongs assault, one would hardly have expected the commentator's actions a few months later. Following Roosevelt's third-term victory in November, Carter told radio listeners he had telephoned the White House to offer congratulations and support. In a telegram to "Dear Boss," the news analyst added: "Since Yesterday's decision puts you again at the tiller, I'm ready to fall to and help trim sheets when you shout: 'stand-by.' " On the air, Carter quoted the President's secretary as "expressing amazement."81

80 Column in the Philadelphia Public Ledger, Mar. 11, 1940, in Congressional Record, 76th Cong., 3d Session, Appendix 1446.
81 Variety, Nov. 13, 1940, 38; Carter to "Dear Boss," Nov. 9, 1940, OF 2103, FDRL.
Shortly after, a brewing company wrote Steve Early concerning the advisability of sponsoring the broadcaster, "who might be construed as having opinions not in sympathy with the administration's policy. . . ." The firm was told that the White House "would not express an opinion one way or another." 82 Piel Brothers decided that they had better not take the chance.

Others held the same attitude. The agency handling another commentator's sponsor's account wrote that H. V. Kaltenborn's anti-labor broadcasts could result in a situation which might "grow to dangerous proportions as it did in the case of Boake Carter." 83 The president of the Pure Oil Company believed that something besides attacks on the C.I.O. explained why Carter had lost his sponsor: "Their [Kaltenborn's analyses] influence was tremendously increased because Mr. Kaltenborn had in the past avoided the pitfalls of partisanship in a way which Boake Carter, for example, did not." 84 Only a few members of Congress, such as West Virginia's reactionary Senator Rush D. Holt, continued to claim that the British had forced the broadcaster off the air. 85

By 1941, a new element crept into Carter's newspaper columns. On May 5 he told readers that "the war had helped to clarify much in a mind that was disordered a great deal by material things and personal suffering." He continued:

I am quite certain that God had decreed that England and America, to win today's battle, must rearm so totally that we will both be broken economically. I am equally convinced that our political systems, and the filth and decay that is in them, will be destroyed in the next five years. 86

Six days later, the journalist reported that he had been reading the Bible intensely, particularly "Ezekiel, Daniel and St. Paul's revelations," and had "applied the simple rules of the science of nature to

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82 Bruce Berckmans, General Sales Manager, Piel Brothers, to Early, Jan. 30, 1941; file memorandum reporting White House response to telephone call, Berckmans to White House, Jan. 31, 1941, both in OF 2103, FDRL.
83 F. H. Marling, advertising manager, Pure Oil Company, to Kaltenborn, Mar. 21, 1942, Box 150, Kaltenborn MSS.
84 Henry M. Dawes to Marling, Mar. 24, 1942, ibid.
85 Congressional Record, 76th Cong., 3d Session, 10732 (Aug. 22, 1940); see also the comments of Republican Congressman Roy O. Woodruff of Michigan, Congressional Record, 78th Cong., 2d Session, 8936 (Dec. 6, 1944).
each day's news..." Increasingly, religious comments filled his column.

On the air, at least after Pearl Harbor, Carter generally supported the war effort. On March 24, 1942, he devoted much of his newscast to the need for war bonds. "Give thanks that this is the United States and not Germany," was a typical remark. Another broadcast told of the President's need for an adjective to describe a war "for the preservation of the democracies and for the small people of the world." Carter had become a patriotic booster.

The commentator's interest in religion first led to his being accused of virulent anti-Semitism. His mother was a member of the anti-Jewish British-Israel World Federation. Carter joined its counterpart in the United States, Howard B. Rand's Anglo-Saxon Federation of America. This organization, which distributed The Protocols of Zion and included the former editor of Henry Ford's Dearborn Independent as a chief officer, invited the broadcaster to address its annual convention at Grand Rapids, Michigan, on October 18, 1941. At the last minute, the newscaster backed down.

A year later, papers such as the New York Journal American carried a headline story, Carter's "Why I Embraced Biblical Hebrewism." Having given up anti-Semitism, he had become a mystic. Divorcing one wife, he married a second, and "instituted a biblically kosher kitchen." The commentator now believed that citizens of Britain and America were descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel. He was certain that Moses Guibbory, a religious zealot living in Jerusalem, had made the first correct translation of the Bible. Carter wrote to Roosevelt in March, 1943, trying to interest him in his new project. That year, the first volume of

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87 Ibid., May 11, 1941, 22.
88 MBS broadcast, Mar. 24, 1942, "Daily Radio Digest No. 67"; "Daily Radio Digest No. 50," MBS broadcast, Mar. 13, 1942, "Daily Radio Digest No. 57," all in Box 1848, RG 44.
89 David Horowitz, Thirty-three Candles (New York, 1949), 252, 305-308. Horowitz was a close companion of Carter's during this period. The weird events he describes in great detail seem to be true. At least there is important corroboration of details in OF 2103, FDRL. The commentator was accused of being anti-Semitic and pro-fascist in The Hour, No. 112, Aug. 30, 1941, 4, copy in 800.20211/578, RG 59. The editorial board of The Hour, which was a mimeographed weekly in New York City, consisted of Frederick L. Schuman, Leland Stowe, and Hendrik van Loon.
The Bible in the Hands of Its Creators, nearly two thousand pages long, was published at five dollars a copy. The book is essentially an interpretation of the Old Testament, with Hebrew and English in parallel columns. Its mystical language makes it difficult to be sure exactly which passage is being reinterpreted.

According to David Horowitz, the person most closely associated with the newscaster during this time, in September, 1943, the commentator divorced his second wife. She forthwith married Abner Goldberg, a black Jew who was another of the cell’s leaders. Shortly thereafter, Goldberg was charged with draft evasion. Carter continued to live in the same house with the Goldbergs. Finally, he argued violently with Horowitz and withdrew from the sect.

The news analyst continued to broadcast at noon a couple of times a week for Chef Boy-Ar-Dee during 1944. He died of a heart attack in Hollywood, California, on November 16, 1944. He was barely forty-two. Carter’s actions, as described by his friend during these last years, sound highly irrational. His membership in the Anglo-Saxon Federation, followed immediately by advocacy of Biblical Hebrewism, raises the possibility that he was partially insane during this period. At a minimum, Carter was under severe mental strain from late 1940 until his death.

The student of Harold Thomas Henry Carter’s life is left with a curious feeling. Here is a man whose origins are so concealed that one knows little of his whereabouts before 1924. Enormously popular for a few years, after 1938 Carter rapidly disappeared from public notice. Copies of broadcasts heard nightly by millions of listeners now can be found only in obscure places. Unlike Ozymandias, there is not even a pedestal warning the mighty to despair of Boake Carter’s works. His only accomplishment seems to be that for a time he successfully attacked the administration. Yet in the process he also helped develop radio as a source of public comment in America.

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