

From Radio Adman to Radio Reformer: Senator William Benton's Career in Broadcasting, 1930–1960

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William Benton's career in radio began at his advertising agency, Benton & Bowles, founded in 1929. During the 1930s, radio's so-called "Golden Age," Benton & Bowles was one of the major producers of network radio programs, including Maxwell House's Showboat and Town Hall Tonight. However, while heading one of the most successful radio advertising agencies, Benton approached NBC to argue that sponsor control of programming undermined radio as a medium and proposed an alternative business model. Frustrated with radio's direction, Benton left advertising and pursued careers in education (at the University of Chicago) and politics (in the Truman administration and the Senate). Benton oversaw the educational radio program The University of Chicago Round Table; founded an independent subscription radio service, Muzak, and the Voice of America; and vigorously promoted radio as an educational technology. Benton's efforts to reform broadcasting reflected both his experiences as a radio "adman" and his deep commitment to liberalism. His unusual career and willingness to challenge conventional wisdom may be instructive for us in a later era of technological change.

In 1937, near the peak of radio's so-called Golden Age, William Benton argued that radio should not "be permanently left in the hands of the manufacturers of face powder, coffee, and soap," but instead should be used as an educational technology (quoted in Hyman, 1969, p. 176). Benton's objection to advertiser control of U.S. radio was not unusual in itself. The political and cultural resistance during the 1930s to the development of broadcasting as a commercial enterprise is well documented (McChesney, 1993; Smulyan, 1994). Political activists, labor unions, and educators argued that broadcasting should inform and enlighten rather than shill for business. Benton, however, was not one of these anticommmercial critics; he spoke out against sponsor control of programming as the leader and founder of an advertising agency,

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Benton & Bowles (B&B). Benton was, in fact, an “adman” (then the colloquial term for advertising executive).

Benton was deeply involved in the formation of radio as both an advertising and entertainment medium. His agency was responsible for some of the top network hit programs during the 1930s: *Town Hall Tonight* featuring comedian Fred Allen, the variety program Maxwell House’s *Showboat*, and Palmolive’s *Beauty Box Theatre*. And as a representative of advertisers’ interests, Benton had helped innovate many of the features of broadcast commercialism. However, even during his time representing advertisers’ interests in radio, Benton was concerned that broadcasting’s potential could be diminished or lost without some effort to serve the interest of the public.

Benton was active in many facets of broadcasting as a producer, reformer, and critic throughout his life (1900–73). After he sold his advertising agency in the late 1930s, he pursued careers in education, politics, and business, including stints at the University of Chicago, the State Department, the U.S. Senate, UNESCO, and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Throughout those careers, he remained engaged in broadcasting policy and practice. Benton was a consistent proponent of educational broadcasting: he helped establish Voice of America, oversaw the radio program *University of Chicago Round Table*, started a commercial-free subscription radio service, and in the 1950s participated actively in debates surrounding television’s future. While many others contributed to alternatives to commercial broadcasting and many others criticized the overcommercialization of broadcasting, Benton provides an especially interesting case study because his critique of commercial broadcasting was informed by his deep involvement in it.

A New Deal Democrat, Benton evolved into a Cold War liberal who worked throughout his careers to direct free enterprise toward furthering the public interest. He believed deeply in the power of broadcasting to educate and inform, and once he had developed radio skills in the service of advertising, sought to apply those same skills toward education and public service. In his evolution from ambitious salesman to moderate liberal politician, his contributions to debates over the appropriate use of broadcasting continue to be relevant in the present age of technological change.

A Career in Advertising and Commercial Radio

Born in 1900, the Yale-educated grandson of a clergyman, Benton sought to make his mark as a reformer quickly, and so chose to enter business, since it was a field wide open for reform. Benton apprenticed with master salesman John Patterson at the National Cash Register Company in the 1920s, where he learned essential selling strategies, or what Patterson called “scientific salesmanship.” Patterson had rethought the conventions of salesmanship, previously dominated by “drummers” who represented multiple manufacturers, in the 1890s, when he decided to build a sales force dedicated to stimulating demand for a new product, his cash registers, by dramatizing the product. Patterson taught his salesmen to “Analyze! Visualize!

Dramatize!" (Hyman, 1969, pp. 77–78). Rather than approach sales as a problem of distributing a seller's goods, he viewed them as a problem of understanding what would attract a buyer, who must therefore be analyzed, and then visually and dramatically positioning the product so as to appeal to that consumer. Beginning with the consumer, rather than the product, was an important lesson in salesmanship that Benton took with him after he left NCR.

He went on to hone his skills at two major advertising agencies in the late 1920s, Lord & Thomas (L&T) and the George Batten Co., even though, as Benton recalled in a later interview, advertising in those days "looked a bit like a back alley business, a sort of shady business" (Benton, 1968, p. 73). As a profession, advertising was still tainted by associations with patent medicine fraud, hucksterism, and consumer suspicions of mass mediated selling strategies. In an effort to raise standards and bring some form of accountability and hard data into advertising decisions, Benton pioneered advertising research at L&T, devising questionnaires for consumers for Colgate-Palmolive. His boss Albert Lasker disdained such research: "Research is simply something that tells you that a jackass has two ears" (quoted in Hyman, 1969, pp. 119–120). But developing credible information about consumers proved to be crucial to the advertising industry's future growth and importance and Benton claims to be one of the first to emphasize this (Benton, 1968, p. 90).

As an overeducated highbrow in the world of advertising, Benton eventually realized he would need to run his own shop in order to apply new ideas to the field. In 1929 he founded Benton & Bowles (B&B), with a partner, Chester Bowles, whose business connections with General Foods helped land their first accounts. During Benton's career at the agency, from 1929 to 1936, B&B had great success despite the Depression, which had hit the advertising industry hard. The agency thrived in part by cannily challenging conventional wisdom. First, rather than scatter his resources over many small accounts, Benton focused on a few large companies that were heavily advertising dependent, including packaged good producers such as Colgate, drug companies such as Bristol-Myers, and food companies such as General Foods. By keeping the number of clients small, B&B could provide exceptional client service (Benton, 1933). Each client, however, had to spend heavily because the agency charged commissions on how much advertising time and space the client bought, not on the production of the advertising itself. Second, B&B urged clients to cut prices and raise quality. B&B suggested that Maxwell House improve its coffee quality, vacuum pack it, lower its prices, and reduce its advertising expenditures. Although Maxwell House was concerned that this would cut profit margins even closer to the bone, the strategy increased sales, garnered consumer loyalty, and ultimately increased profits. Maxwell House thrived; so did B&B (Hobler, n.d., p. 101; Webber, 1979, pp. 32–33). This willingness to try new strategies and ignore conventional wisdom attracted clients and established B&B as a dynamic agency during a period of agency failures and bankruptcies.

B&B also countered industry trends toward the "hard sell" by developing entertaining "soft sell" strategies. Made desperate by the Depression, advertisers bombarded consumers with lists of "reasons why" to buy, hoping that enough claims

about the product, however dubious, would stimulate sales (Marchand, 1985). These “hard sell” strategies were heavily criticized and lampooned by advertising’s critics for their repetitiousness and exaggeration. For example, Claude Hopkins, a well-known practitioner of the art, wrote in one advertisement that Schlitz beer bottles were washed in “live steam” for better hygiene, as if other beer bottles were not (Hopkins, 1966, p. 242). In contrast, some agencies appealed to consumers with “soft sell” strategies, which were “user centered,” or about the user rather than the product, and designed to evoke positive associations and feelings. B&B’s foray into radio entertainment as an advertising vehicle was a form of “soft sell,” in that the sponsor provided free entertainment to make listeners feel so good about the sponsor that they would gratefully buy the product (Hobler, n.d., p. 102A).

B&B’s exploitation of the emerging medium of radio was unusual in the early Depression. Radio was disdained by more established advertising agencies as a fad and dismissed by most advertisers as an unproven selling medium (Acute Inflammatory Radioitis, 1928). However, the networks’ reluctance to invest in programming themselves (as one advertising executive noted, NBC and its parent RCA were in “the business of manufacturing electrical gadgets—not entertainment” (Angus, 1931)) provided an opportunity B&B was eager to seize. Networks shifted the cost of program production to advertisers, who in turn looked to their advertising agencies to develop entertainment and advertising strategies that would attract audiences and sell products. In its top network radio programs for its clients, such as *Showboat*; *Town Hall Tonight*; Rudy Vallee’s *Variety Hour*; and the soap operas *Portia Faces Life*, *When a Girl Marries*, and *Young Doctor Malone*, B&B pioneered a number of broadcast advertising and entertainment strategies.

Benton has always claimed credit, as admen are wont to do, for the “integrated” commercial, which naturalized the sales pitch through sound effects and character endorsements of the product throughout the program. As Benton later described it, “When we had Captain Andy [sic] drink coffee and smack his lips, you heard the coffee cups clinking and the coffee gurgling as it was poured. It put action and actors into commercials” (Terkel, 1970, p. 62). Tiny Ruffner, the well-known radio announcer for the variety show and “old south” themed *Showboat*, would open the program with the line, “Come aboard, folks. Your ticket of admission is just your loyalty to Maxwell House Coffee” (Hobler, n.d., p. 97). At a later point in the program, after singers and dancers and comedians had performed, the program’s chief character, Captain Henry, would draw the announcer into a conversation about Maxwell House, as in this transcript of a 1935 broadcast:

Captain: And now, I’m going to ask Tiny Ruffner a question. Tiny, exactly what do you mean when you say that everybody who buys Maxwell House Coffee gets full value for his money?

Tiny: Well, I refer to three separate things when I say that—three things that added together *mean* full value. You might get one or two of these three advantages in other coffees—but in Maxwell House you get all *three*— First, there’s the Maxwell

House blend of choicest coffees—for more than fifty years the favorite of people who really enjoy good coffee.

Captain: And the favorite of all of us!

Tiny: Right you are, Captain Henry. The second, there's the new improved method of grinding that assures you a more perfect cup of coffee by any method of coffee making—by drip, percolator, or boil. Third, there's that marvelous exclusive Vita-fresh method of packing which always brings Maxwell House coffee to you roaster fresh . . . and no coffee can be fresher than that! And it's this combination of all three points that assures you *full* value in every pound of Maxwell House Coffee you buy. The stage is yours, Captain Henry! [Emphasis and ellipsis in original] (Varencove, 1935, p. 54)

B&B's success in radio propelled it to the top ranks of advertising agencies. By 1937, B&B's "billings" reached \$15 million, 60 percent attributable to radio (Webber, 1979, pp. 47, 49).

Benton's efforts to reform radio actually began while he was still at the advertising agency and responsible for major broadcast advertising accounts at the networks. Despite his agency's great success in radio, in 1933 Benton peppered NBC executives with memos and presentations arguing that the network must either "improve" broadcasting or risk losing its listeners. Although a representative of advertisers' interests in his negotiations with networks, Benton made a presentation to NBC in which he complained that programs were built "to suit client whims," that is, the advertisers', rather than the listeners', thus lowering programming quality (Randall, 1933). He proposed that the networks change their business model. Instead of selling blocks of time to an advertiser, who then had programming control over that "time franchise," and who then subcontracted production to advertising agencies like B&B, the networks should, like magazine publishers, produce the programs (or editorial content), and then sell interstitial minutes to advertisers.

Why would Benton, as a major program producer for his advertiser clients, argue that the networks should take over the task of programming? Because he was concerned that radio would fail as a commercial medium if advertiser abuse of airtime alienated audiences, as other admen of the era had also pointed out (see *An Advertising Executive*, 1931). Benton was all too aware of his clients' narrow interests vis-a-vis the broadcast medium or the "public interest." Congress's mandate, in the Communications Act of 1934, that broadcasters, who are granted access to the electromagnetic spectrum by the FCC, must in return act in the "public interest, convenience, or necessity," did little to clarify the situation or end the potential for conflict. As one NBC executive put it, "Opinions may differ as to which kinds of programs are most heavily weighted with public interest . . . a debate between two college professors or a debate between Fibber McGee and Molly" (Trammell, 1946, p. 12).

While networks had to demonstrate to the FCC they were serving the "public interest" in some fashion, advertisers were interested rather in selling products than in the integrity of radio as a whole. If advertisers' excessive use of unverifiable

claims and "hard sell" exhortations threatened to alienate audiences, their control over program content threatened to alienate performers as well, as singer Jessica Dragonette (1951) complained. In Benton's view, having self-interested advertisers shape programming was akin to having the fox guard the henhouse. If the government, unable to infringe on the broadcasters' "free speech," was not going to become a programmer, as it had in the United Kingdom, then the networks offered the most obvious site for rationalizing, centralizing, and professionalizing U.S. radio, so as to make it an effective commercial medium.

In Benton's view, in order to continue to attract audiences and maintain credibility, radio needed editors-in-chief. Local stations and individual advertisers had too narrow a purview to accomplish this oversight function. National networks, which worked with both advertisers and local stations, were better positioned to oversee a process of editorial responsibility, a process that could ensure that programming was designed at least in part for the audience's benefit. Networks were best positioned to build a broadcast schedule by programming entire blocks of time appropriately for audiences, thereby building "audience flow," unlike advertisers who could focus only on their own program. Benton's idea for a more effective business model for broadcasting would not come to fruition until well into the television era of the late 1950s (under the leadership of other admen such as Pat Weaver). The greater expense of television programming would stimulate advertiser interest in shared sponsorship and then, eventually, in buying only interstitial minutes within network-owned programming (Mashon, 1996). In 1933, however, NBC executives were confident that the existing time franchise business model was too well established to change. NBC executive Wayne Randall (1933) responded to Benton's proposal to shift to network control of programming: "Not a chance. Development of present sponsored program has gone too far."

Benton's Corporate Liberalism

Benton's direct experience with managing clients' whims, balancing advertisers' needs to sell against the audience's interest in receiving free entertainment, and his frustration with the short-sighted policies of the networks during the Depression contributed to his decision to leave the advertising business. He sought to contribute to reform and political change from a position in which he would not be constrained by a need to cater to advertisers' views. Even while he was at B&B, he had become involved in political debates.

As early as 1932, Benton was involved in discussions with corporate leaders about how to respond to the Depression. In a letter to his mother describing a secret session among 15 corporate leaders that year, Benton expressed disappointment in their lack of interest in reform: "It is astounding, however, how narrow the viewpoint of such men. . . . How limited their vision. . . . How unconscious, apparently, of the broad social problems which underlie so many of the economic questions the business world is facing" (Benton, 1932). Benton's disillusionment with the business world reflected his liberal concern that narrow self-interest could ultimately undermine

the future stability of the American economy. Capitalism, wrote Benton in 1935, has "its back to the wall" (quoted in Hyman, 1969, p. 153).

In a general sense, Benton was a "corporate liberal" in that he attempted to reconcile the ideals of liberalism to capitalism (see Sklar, 1988). While no enemy of the free market, he felt also a need to protect the public from its worst excesses. Historian Jeffrey Lustig (1982) describes corporate liberalism as an effort to be "pro-business *and* pro-state, dedicated to private profit *and* to regulatory reform" (p. 7). Corporate liberals believe the checks and balances of state power need to be brought to bear on free enterprise, not as an oppositional force but rather to check the destructive tendencies of raw capitalism and to ensure the benefits of economic growth for the many rather than the few. In an era in which socialism or Soviet communism appeared as viable alternatives to the capitalism that appeared on the edge of collapse, Benton sought other solutions to the crisis.

Benton believed that interaction between academic economists and business leaders would benefit the American economy. In 1938, he organized a group that would sponsor seminars and cement relationships between educators and businessmen. Initially this group was called the American Policy Commission, but it evolved into the Committee for Economic Development by 1942. The CED was a think tank dedicated to postwar economic planning. Benton hoped to coordinate ideas from academia and industry to formulate policies that would help avoid postwar depression and social unrest. Participants included a wide roster of well known corporate liberals, including Bayard Colgate of Colgate-Palmolive, Charles Wilson of General Electric, Harry Scherman of the Book-of-the-Month Club, Beardsley Ruml, and various bankers, industrialists, and educators.

Under the auspices of the CED, Benton published an essay in 1944 entitled "The Economics of a Free Society." He argued that the common good was more important than narrow economic interests, and that a free economy could only flourish if the state devised rules to encourage competition and innovation, including antitrust laws and protection for collective bargaining. Businessmen ought to throw off their "hostility to evolution and change" and allow new policies that would "help stabilize the economy against the effects of the business cycle" (quoted in Hyman, 1969, p. 291). Careful to distinguish his ideas from fascism or socialism, Benton concluded, "A system of free enterprise, based upon the principles herein set forth, can act as the provider as well as the safeguard of democracy" (p. 292). In Benton's view, clinging to a pure or raw capitalism was risky and dangerous, for capitalist and worker alike, and the best way to reconcile capitalism to democracy, so that it did not slide into fascism, was to stabilize it with government regulation while supporting liberal ideals.

Benton and Educational Broadcasting

In 1937, CBS chief William Paley, who considered Benton a friend, asked him to give several short lectures on radio, in part to demonstrate CBS's commitment to public service. Benton chose to contrast the work of researchers and educators

with businessmen. Claiming that the businessman's "God is money," and the only innovations praised in business were the ones that produced profits, Benton argued that business had to have a stake in innovation beyond profits. And what the business world needed was better educated leaders to sponsor innovation in technology and business practice (Hyman, 1969, p. 198). Education, then, could provide the means for building a better world, pursuing a larger sense of the public interest than just private profit. And, after he left the ad agency in 1936, Benton himself looked for a position in education.

Benton became vice president to Robert Maynard Hutchins at the University of Chicago, then the leading exponent of the Great Books curriculum of timeless ideas. In this position, he not only provided the university key connections among business elites but also helped fund the school by purchasing and operating the *Encyclopedia Britannica* for its benefit. His attraction to the Great Books curriculum demonstrates his belief in the importance of education for education's sake, and his subsequent purchase of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* illustrates a belief that if knowledge could be easily accessed, it could then be applied. However, while the *Encyclopedia* could summarize and distribute a vast body of proven knowledge, it could not reach everyone. Neither could everyone attend the University of Chicago. As an educator, Benton saw radio as the bridge between educational institutions and the wider public.

Radio's power should not be limited to advertisers, Benton argued: "If the great universities do not develop radio broadcasting in the cause of education, it will, perhaps, be permanently left in the hands of the manufacturers of face powder, coffee and soap, with occasional interruptions by the politicians" (quoted in Hyman, 1969, pp. 176–177). Subsequently, Benton oversaw the program *The University of Chicago Round Table*, during which "experts" from the academy and the business world would debate issues of the day, occasionally with "nonexperts" such as Benton himself, about issues such as the economy and political reform. Because of a grant Benton obtained from the Alfred Sloan Foundation, the program was able to offer listeners a printed transcript of each program, along with suggestions for further reading. Through his connections to network chiefs, including Niles Trammell at NBC, Benton was able to convince the network to carry it unsponsored in a time slot that would probably otherwise go unsold, the ratings ghetto of Sunday mornings (Hyman, 1969, pp. 167, 203, 204). Because the program had an educational mission, it served to counter commercial radio's critics, who deplored the networks' emphasis on entertainment at the expense of education.

Benton's Subscription Radio Plan

While pursuing his interests in education, Benton sought to develop for-profit alternatives to advertiser-controlled broadcasting. In 1939 he invested in Muzak, a wired music subscription service, and expanded it beyond its existing markets of

hotels and restaurants into banks, hospitals, and department stores. Believing that there was an even greater market in individual households for a wired subscription radio service without intrusive commercials, in 1944 Benton set about establishing such a service in direct competition with the broadcast networks. He proposed offering subscribers several channels of musical, cultural, and educational programming, uninterrupted by commercials, for about five cents a day.

NBC and CBS were alarmed at the potential competition and did not want their advertising-supported business model undermined by a commercially viable alternative. They attacked Benton's plan to offer the service to individual households by upholding their commitment to "free" broadcasting. The *New York Times* editorialized against subscription radio, arguing that it would "inject a poll tax on radio—the payment of a fee in order that the public might enjoy what is already free and their property—the air. This is hardly a liberal conception of the 'freedom to listen'" (quoted in Hyman, 1969, p. 296). Benton's response was informed by his experience in commercial radio:

"The air" may be free. But broadcasting certainly is not. It must always be paid for . . . somehow. Under our present system, people pay for radio through their purchase of radio-advertised goods, all listeners having to submit to the interruptions of commercial announcements. . . . We propose to give the listener, for the first time, an opportunity to pay for some radio programs *directly* rather than indirectly. (1944)

Noting that no federal broadcast regulations, including the Radio Acts of 1927 and 1934, include "any suggestion that advertising should prevail in this field," Benton pointed out the historical contingency of the commercial broadcasting system: "Certainly there is nothing in legal theory and very little in tradition that makes broadcasting solely a venture for advertising." Offering listeners a choice to pay directly for programming, he concluded, would increase "the freedom of the air." A subscription-based business model, Benton hoped, would offer more audience-responsive programming than the advertiser-sponsorship model. Freedom of the air, to Benton, meant the freedom of audiences to choose among programs without enduring compulsory advertising. However, for the defenders of commercial broadcasting, freedom was both the First Amendment right to broadcast commercially supported programming and the supposed freedom of listeners not to pay for their radio programming. In the end, Benton's effort to expose the disingenuousness of the commercial broadcasters' attack on his subscription service fell victim to the commercial broadcasters' successful invocation of freedom in the latter sense: the freedom from payment.

Like his 1933 proposal that broadcasting follow the magazine business model, Benton's subscription radio service failed; however, as the earlier proposal anticipated the broadcast television model of the 1950s and 1960s, the later one anticipated the cable television business model of the 1980s and 1990s. In another few decades, cable operators would offer programming in exchange for subscription fees.

The Voice of America

Benton's effort to provide an alternative to advertiser-supported broadcasting ended in 1945 when he withdrew his license application at the FCC because he was appointed an Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs in the Truman Administration. At the State Department, Benton applied his zeal for the educational potential of broadcasting to developing postwar government information services. Charged with consolidating the OWI, the OIAA, and the OSS, Benton was instructed to purge employees, specifically any who might have Soviet sympathies. Then Benton lobbied Congress for an international shortwave radio service that could reach Europeans who might be tempted by communism and educate them about free enterprise and democracy in the United States: "We request no money for building 'good will' indiscriminately, or for 'selling America,' or for propaganda. This is not an advertising program. . . . It deals only in facts. Its purpose is to gain understanding for America, as America actually is" (quoted in Hyman, 1969, p. 355).

The commercial radio networks were at first deeply resistant to Benton's proposal, concerned that the service would be a prototype of a BBC-like service in the U.S. (Hyman, 1969, p. 345). Only after persistent lobbying of his broadcast industry contacts, including David Sarnoff, chief of RCA, did Benton finally gain their support. Pointing out that paying to produce commercial programming for the newly opened markets of Europe would be expensive, Benton convinced the commercial broadcasters they would do better to allow the U.S. government to produce the programming while the broadcasters reaped transmission fees for carrying the shortwave broadcasts (Hyman, 1969, p. 356). While Benton won his battle by appealing to the commercial broadcasters' short-term economic interests, the commercial broadcasters were able to claim that their concession to government-sponsored radio was actually meant "to render a public service of genuine world magnitude," as Sarnoff wrote—that is, a contribution to the fight against communism (quoted in Hyman, 1969, p. 356). Thus, the *Voice of America* was born with the support of the commercial broadcasters who otherwise opposed government involvement in radio as an infringement on "free speech." Benton was able to position a government-supported broadcasting service as a vehicle for the liberal ideals of civil rights and democracy while catering to the commercial broadcasters' primary goal of profitability.

Senator Benton and Broadcast Reform

Benton's career also included a short stint as the U.S. Senator from Connecticut, 1949–52. During his brief senatorial career, which he began by being named by his former partner and then Connecticut governor Chester Bowles to an empty Senate seat, Benton was involved in the Democratic resistance to Senator Joseph McCarthy far earlier than most. Bowles had left B&B in 1941 and worked in the Roosevelt

and Truman administrations before becoming governor of Connecticut in 1948. Both Benton and Bowles became known as New Deal Democrats, horrifying many of their former colleagues in the business world. In 1946, the heads of the Benton & Bowles agency considered changing its name to distance themselves from its founders and their politics. Meanwhile, both Benton and Bowles complained that their background as “admen” preceded them in politics to negative effect (Webber, 1979, p. 64).

While in the Senate, in 1951 Benton was concerned that the FCC was preparing to lift the “freeze” on television station license allocation without having implemented reforms to improve the overall quality of broadcasting. He worried that “the entire future of television—the most extraordinary communication device ever devised—was about to be crystallized, and possibly irrevocably crystallized, for generations to come” (quoted in Hyman, 1969, p. 468). He thought that television could better serve the “public interest, convenience, or necessity” if broadcasters had closer public oversight. He proposed a Citizen’s Advisory Board that would simply issue reports on the public service progress, or lack thereof, of broadcasters. That proposal, and another one for free broadcast time for election campaigns, failed in part because broadcasters complained that their First Amendment rights were jeopardized by both initiatives.

Later, in a 1960 speech in which he referred to television as a “teen-age Frankenstein,” Benton argued that television “could be the greatest force ever known to deepen our understanding and broaden our knowledge” (p. 572). Pointing out the disingenuousness of networks’ claims that the ratings system guided them towards giving audiences what they want, but conceding the importance of entertainment programming to the medium’s relevance, Benton argued that television had yet to make its “due contribution to human security and human advancement.” He revived his proposal for a National Citizens Advisory Board for Radio and Television “to foster a national policy on broadcasting which best serves the interests of the American public” (p. 573) and to provide a “conscience” for the industry (p. 574). He also criticized the state of funding for educational television at the time: stations were prevented from accepting sponsorship financing or subscription fees and so had few program financing options, weakening what should have been an opportunity to bring alternative programming to audiences.

Conclusion

Benton lost his Senate seat in 1952; however, he remained active in publishing and education, putting out the Great Books of the Western World series under the auspices of the University of Chicago, as well as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and educational filmmaking through Britannica Films. He invested further in Muzak, which he hoped to develop into a subscription television service. But he missed the opportunity to apply for television station licenses while he was Senator and after successfully expanding Muzak to airports and elevators, he sold it.

President Kennedy appointed Benton Ambassador to UNESCO in 1963, where he resisted Soviet efforts to use UNESCO works as propaganda vehicles. He conceptualized UNESCO as part of a larger "Marshall Plan of Ideas," in which education via mass media was a key element (Hyman, 1969, p. 429). During the formation of UNESCO at the end of World War II, Benton hoped for the development of a global radio network that would educate people everywhere in such things as reading and writing or in how to grow food more efficiently. He dropped the idea only when he realized that Communist bloc countries would have to be involved in a truly global network (Hyman, 1969, p. 337). However, he believed that international agencies such as UNESCO could spread knowledge and understanding that would prevent a third world war (p. 546). His faith in human educability was unshakeable. Like his involvement in Voice of America, Benton's work for UNESCO reflected his belief that the best ideas, once spread, will prevail.

Benton spent his life applying basic lessons he learned in the advertising industry: he did not limit the audience for his ideas. His careers in broadcasting bridge the worlds of business, education, and politics and provide a model for engagement. Although he did not actually reform the commercial broadcasting system he had helped to develop, his continual engagement both in creating commercial alternatives to existing commercial radio and in increasing broadcasting's educational and political potential arose from his ongoing commitment to corporate liberal ideals. His willingness, despite risks, to counter the conventional wisdom of his day by rethinking the broadcast business model, and by fighting for greater accountability from broadcasters, indicates the depth of his commitment. He was an innovator, some of whose ideas were ahead of their time, and his maverick roles in advertising, broadcasting, politics, and education complicate facile views of historical inevitability. If, as an individual, he did not effect dramatic change, he did instead provide an alternative voice from within, sincerely trying to reform radio in accordance with his liberal ideals. And his successes and failures, resulting from his odd combination of prescience and naivete, show more clearly than the careers of more conventional figures the detailed complexity of his world. As we pass through yet another fundamental change in media technology, it is useful to remember Benton, an interesting example of a man unafraid to challenge conventional wisdom and to rethink the use of technology.

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