

On the night before Halloween, 1938, Orson Welles and his colleagues at *Mercury Theatre on the Air* played a prank on the American people.

Over a six-day period, they had created a radio play (written by Paul Koch and edited by Orson Welles) which ultimately panicked about one million people around the country.

Not everyone who listened to the program, that Sunday evening, heard its start. Those who did, knew they were about to hear an interpretation of *The War of the Worlds*, a novel by H.G. Wells. Those who tuned-in later thought they were hearing reportage of real events.

Four decades on, a made-for-television program - called "The Night that Panicked America" - recreated the events which took place in 1938. It was first broadcast on the ABC network on the 31st of October, 1975.

Beyond observing how the radio play was performed, we see fictionalized American families, from different parts of the country, reacting to what they perceived was "news."

With 21st-century eyes, one wonders how intelligent people could be so gullible. On the other hand, 1938-Americans were still living through the "Great Depression" and, nearly every day, were hearing reports about a madman named Hitler.

At a time when Europe was on the brink of another catastrophic war, was it so far-fetched to believe that America could be invaded, too? (That the invaders were from Mars was apparently not enough of a stretch to convince people they were hearing a tall tale - if one believed the contemporary national news stories, that is.)

This clip is part one of "The Night that Panicked America."

See, also:

The Night that Panicked America, Part 2

The Night that Panicked America, Part 3

The Night that Panicked America, Part 4

The Night that Panicked America, Part 5

The Night that Panicked America, Part 6

The Night that Panicked America, Part 7

The Night that Panicked America, Part 8

The Night that Panicked America, Part 9

AND ...

War of the Worlds, the Original Radio Dramatization

Credits:

Clip from "The Night that Panicked America," a made-for-television film (1975). Copyright ABC, all rights reserved. Online, courtesy YouTube. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the program.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/The-Night-that-Panicked-America-Part-1)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/The-Night-that-Panicked-America-Part-1>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/The-Night-that-Panicked-America-Part-1)

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