

# The 25 Greatest Radio and Television Talk Show Hosts of All Time

## TALKERS MAGAZINE

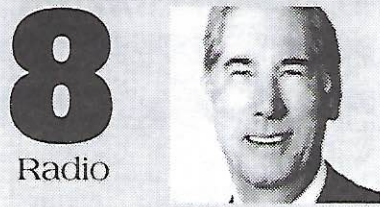


**Laura Schlessinger**

Who can call her the "queen of mean" or "the moral compass" but either way, Dr. Laura Schlessinger is one of the most ubiquitous voices on American radio and a controversial national icon. One of several famous talk hosts to get her start after being a caller to a radio show. She fell under the tutelage of a California talk host Bill Ballance during his show one day. From there she had the chance to do her own program for a number of years developing a loyal following. After a period off the radio while raising her young son, she returned to the airwaves and began reshaping her no-excuses, no-nonsense giving judgmental advice.

She went into syndication in 1994 and, riding the wave of talk radio's ascent, soon became one of the country's most popular radio hosts. Schlessinger struck a chord with conservatives already swarming to talk radio in the mid-1990s. Her often abusive and inflammatory callers mirrored the attitude of many issues talk hosts and cemented her image as one of the most provocative righteousness. This perception was further advanced by her conversion to Judaism which strengthened the moralism of her program's tone. Her impact on talk radio and American culture during the 1990s is important in defining a time when politics and pop culture ruled the talk world, Dr. Laura Schlessinger single-handedly rose up to bear the burden of morality from a personal perspective. Syndicated by Premiere Radio Networks.

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**Barry Gray**

He earned the moniker, "father of talk radio" and though someone else would have started using the telephone as a talk radio tool eventually, Barry Gray did it in 1945.

As the story goes, the technical and legal aspects of using live telephone conversations as part of a radio broadcast were problematic, to say the least, in post-war America. But that didn't stop Barry Gray from trying and succeeding in putting his listeners on the radio even without WMCA, New York's knowledge or permission. But when his interview with bandleader Woody Herman caused a sensation, his bosses loved it and he began doing more celebrity interviews. Thus, the call-in show was born.

But that wasn't the only reason Gray is on this list. During the 1950s, he was an outspoken critic of bigotry, the red scare and incurred the wrath of conservative columnist Walter Winchell. He flew in the face of the establishment and wasn't afraid to lambaste that which he found hypocritical. He was one of the first talk hosts to utter what many people were thinking but afraid to say out loud.

Gray's enduring love for his craft kept him on WMCA for 39 years. He would also work at WOR, New York later in his career. If Gray's contribution to talk radio can be summed up in a sentence it is this: He used his creativity and summoned up the courage to create a style of talk radio that not only proved to be successful then but continues to be utilized by nearly all of today's talk radio hosts.

Springfield, Massachusetts before heading to California in 1961. While at KEWB, San Francisco he began an overnight talk program that launched him on a road from which he would never stray. He moved south to Los Angeles and landed at KABC. It was there he established himself as the erudite, thinking man's talk host.

The list of greats from the fields of politics, show business, science and literature who have appeared as guests on Michael Jackson's programs over the decades is probably among the most luminous in all of talk radio history.

By the mid-1990s, Jackson was criticized by talk radio's new guard for being too liberal and curious minded. It led to

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**Barry Farber**

He might not be called the father of modern talk radio but he's certainly one of the New Yorkers who played an instrumental role in the process of taking AM music radio into talk and setting its tone and style.

Barry Farber began his talk career in 1960 on WINS with his "Barry Farber's WINS Open Mike" show, the only talk show on a rock n' roll station. He left for WOR in 1962 doing evenings which eventually led to his becoming the all-night host in 1967. He left in 1977 to delve into politics as the conservative party candidate for New York City mayor and when that didn't pan out, he joined WMCA and did afternoon drive for the next decade. He was part of the line up of ABC Radio Network's original 1990s attempt at creating a national talk stable — Talknet. When that effort was abandoned due to ABC's other priorities at the time, Farber with the help of Michael Castello and Alan Colmes quickly pulled together most of the affiliates and formed an independent network called Daynet. That proved to be one of the forerunners of today's independent talk syndication scene.

The intellectual Farber is currently heard on the Talk America Radio Network.

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**Dr. Joy Browne**

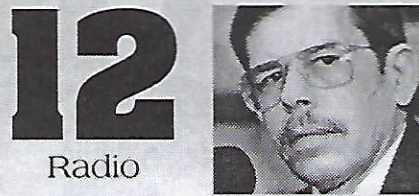
She wasn't the first to take the concept and move it to the airwaves but she's certainly one of the most successful. She took the concept and made it work on content that works on content.

Dr. Joy Browne was in Boston and San Francisco before moving nationally syndicated by ABC Talknet.

Psychologists were on the radio prior to Brown's arrival in the 1970s, some would even say that rock stations late at night were the psychoses of those late at night. She took what was off the air and developed it into a program solving that not only at its goal of helping people with personal relationships, but also addressing the personal needs of the medium.

Her clinical training through the fog of pop psychology and excellent broadcast skills turned her program into something that the medium and those who listen to the most listened-to radio in America year after year. Her Radio Network is not only highly respected for her

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**Art Bell**

Listeners either worship him as the only man who dares to seek the truth or think he's one of the nuttiest guys on talk radio.

But, Art Bell took the realm of the paranormal to new heights during the 1990s to become the most listened to late night talk host in the modern talk radio era.

Bell's radio career goes back beyond his initial foray in the paranormal. He got the radio bug fairly early in his adult life and went to college to get a degree in engineering. After years as a DJ and a relatively unknown issues talk host, he got out of the on-air business until he was offered the

gradually began to explain the unexplained. When the medium was greater to this new medium moved into that domain embracing it exclusively.

Art Bell was not the paranormal on the radio. He was a minded approach, excellent skills and keen interest in the paranormal helped propel him into the domain during talk radio's early 1990s. (It's not just broadcasts from very close to the Nevada desert!)

He also pioneered the use of a website to accompany his broadcasts building one of the Internet's most interesting meeting places for fans of the paranormal. He's inspiring other talk show hosts to follow suit. Bell has a large repertoire by publishing a magazine, selling audio cassette interviews, and becoming a best-selling author.

His highly publicized

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**Michael Jackson**

His British accent sets him apart from other African American contemporaries but his track record of intellectual conversation that's a part of Southern California for 40 years is a majority of which were spent on the great KABC during its heyday.