

The Blue Riband - Part II

Lead: One of the most interesting developments in the history of transport was the role of government in subsidizing the pursuit of the Blue Riband.

Intro. *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: With the coming of the global economy in the 1900s speed in ocean transport became one of the vital goals of shippers. No prize was more valued than the Blue Riband, the mythic reward for the fastest crossing of the Atlantic. At first American ships

dominated the route between New York and Liverpool, England, but in the 1840s British ships, especially the Cunard steam and sail side-wheelers began to take the lead from the all-sail American packets. The foundation of Cunard's initial success was the mail subsidy. Parliament voted a large cash payment for regular transatlantic service to carry the mail. Ships could then carry cargo and passengers for a lesser fee than if they had to charge actual cost of transport. Speed and regular service were the key to obtaining the government subsidy. The faster the better.

It is one of the great economic myths of history that the market economy has grown up without

government assistance or participation, that the great titans of industry and commerce, such as Ford, Bell, Stanford and the like without aid built the giant economy of the United States. This is not quite true.

Government participation and subsidy has been essential to attract and secure the capital necessary to build many of the great industries. Railroads were built in part to secure vast grants of free government land. The automobile became practical only as a network of tax-supported highways began to stretch out across the land. Radio and television, though requiring large outlays for equipment and production, reach their audience on frequencies controlled by the

government, distributed mostly for free. Transatlantic shippers American, British, German, French or Italian, reached for the glory of the Blue Riband, sought the fastest crossing, subsidized in part by government mail subsidies. Next time: The rise and fall of the transatlantic ocean liner.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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Resources

Post, Robert C. "The Thrall of the Blue Riband," *American Heritage of Invention and Technology*, 11 (3, Winter 1996): 8-21.