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Joshua Cannon

Paul McRoy and WCIL: A Look at Local Radio Culture in a College Town, 1950s-1960s

The U.S. of the 1950s had undergone a tremendous social and political change. In the aftermath of World War II (WWII), the U.S. entered a Cold War with the Soviet Union. As a result, the Second Red Scare of the 1950s left America in a perpetual state of fear over the possible incursion of Communists into U.S. society. However, the fear of communism did not impede the development of social movements. The New Left, whose base was the growing number of college students, emerged in this period. They brought progressive ideas on social issues such as civil rights, feminism, gay rights, reproductive rights, gender roles, and drug policy reforms. These political changes in American society were not limited in their scope. Transformations of American culture reached the entire nation, including the often-isolated Midwest.

Illinois was no exception to the changes that occurred across the U.S. in the 1950s-1960s. Economically, WWII brought about extraordinary economic shifts that benefitted many U.S. industries. The post-war “boom” in the American economy made it possible for veterans to receive a college education should they pursue one. The U.S. introduced the GI Bill in 1944, which allowed veterans free access to higher education as a reward for their service. Education growth, economic prosperity, and political change in the U.S. propelled the suburbanization of America. Large numbers of people left city life for smaller suburbs where traffic was not as clogged. This suburbanization of America ushered in the creating of new highways that connected cities with suburbia and rural life. Due to highways’ growth, America’s incrementally

1 The first Red Scare occurred in the early 20th century as fears over Bolshevism and anarchism arose in the U.S. The extreme level of nationalism during World War I placated to a fear of the incursion of radical ideologies that would cripple the social order of the U.S. Fear and aggression during the first Red Scare was often directed at labor unions whose members were not approving of U.S. entry into World War I.
4 For more information on highways and the interconnectedness of Illinois roads, see Foner and Biles.
connectedness established homogeneous geographical sentiments that eroded differences between rural and city dwellers. These sentiments affected Southern Illinois people as the airwaves challenged their urban and rural life ideas during the age of radio.

The 1950s-1960s brought about unprecedented change and innovation in radio. Broadcasts about the Korean war stirred debate as electronic media started to provide a more accessible format to disseminate information and political ideas.\(^5\) Radio was the standard for entertainment through the 1950s and 1960s. In 1946, the establishment of the radio station WCIL-AM of Carbondale, Illinois, home of Southern Illinois University (SIU), promoted the aforementioned ideas of political progressiveness and homogeneous feelings between rural and urban areas.\(^6\) This article shows that through the 1950s-1960s, WCIL-AM, particularly its owner Paul McRoy, played an essential role in shaping Carbondale’s cultural and political identity. The case study of WCIL-AM reflects political progressivism that occurred during the 1950-1960s in the U.S. This article’s focus takes place as U.S. citizens’ identity in rural and urban areas became more homogeneous, due to America’s suburbanization, in the city of Carbondale as the number of students attending SIU grew.

**Historiography**

There is a lack of academic research on the radio in Southern Illinois. To understand the social-political influence of WCIL-AM (Carbondale) in Southern Illinois during the 1950s and 1960s, one must comprehend the radio’s role in American culture and its development in the region.

In *The Broadcast Century and Beyond*, broadcasting expert educators in broadcasting Robert L. Hilliard and Michael C. Keith looked at the history of broadcasting in the U.S. from its invention through the 2000s. Hilliard and Keith argued that the period from the 1940s to the late 1960s saw the ever-growing change in broadcasting when television dethroned radio as the American household’s primary entertainment source.\(^7\) Hilliard and Keith noted that “In 1948 a person listened to the radio an average 4.4 hours per day; in 1953 that figure was down to 2.7 hours.” This decrease in radio time showed that despite radio loss as the primary source of information, it still commanded a sizeable American entertainment market.\(^8\)


\(^6\) The name WCIL-AM came from the radio naming conventions of using W or K (W for stations east of the Mississippi river and K for stations west of the Mississippi), and adding it to the city initial and then the state.

\(^7\) Hilliard and Keith, *The Broadcast Century*, 133-138.

\(^8\) Ibid, 146.
E. Willis observed that by 1971 (the end of the period under review), radio airtime for listeners had decreased. Listeners listen only about one and a half to two hours throughout the day. Still, more than ninety-eight percent of American homes owned radios. Radio had the edge over television concerning portability. Cars had seventy-five million of the 303 million radio sets in the U.S., continuing radio entertainment on wheels.

Charles Fairchild, professor of music and the globalization of popular culture, examined in his book, *Community Radio and Public Culture*, community radio, and its global effects. Fairchild argued that access to media was a significant prerequisite to an open and democratic sphere. As a result, radio laid the foundation for the importance of radio to cultural identity. WCIL-AM of Carbondale was not a community radio station because advertisers rather than public donations funded its operation. Fairchild noted that community radio’s “central problem has always been how to pay for it,” WCIL-AM as a private business never had to worry about that. The business model of the station relied on their advertisements rather than listener support. This practice enabled WCIL-AM to have a consumer mindset, and as such, it did not have to appease their listenership fully. The station aired advertisements that directly profited from its sponsors. This increased wealth played into Fairchild’s assertion that the radio performed a vital role in a nation’s cultural identity: capitalism. In the context of the global Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. was an outrider of consumer capitalism. WCIL-AM perpetuated the idea of capitalism and the nations’ cultural identity through its choice of funding.

The analysis of WCIL-AM inextricably correlated the history of radio with that of Illinois of the 1950s and 1960s. Historian Richard J. Jenson’s *Illinois A History* chronicled the state from the 1800s until the late 1970s. Jenson noted that Illinois “became more homogeneous” as urban and rural distinctions began to vanish by the 1970s. This gradual assimilation led to an atmosphere for local Carbondale radio to thrive as Southern Illinoisans felt more of a draw to their northern urban neighbors. Jenson and Illinois Historian Roger Biles noted that higher education began to expand by the 1960s drastically. Biles directly credited this increase to the GI Bill, which paid for veterans’ education after World War II. From that point, “Higher education enrollment in Illinois

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10 Ibid.
12 Ibid, 139.
14 Ibid, 156.
increased from 107,000 in 1940 to 164,000 in 1956 and reached 500,000 in the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{15} Biles also mentioned Southern Illinois University (SIU) and their expansion in the number of students that attended SIU during the tenure of Delyte Morris.

Furthermore, Biles and Jenson both noted the push for higher education brought an increase of populations to the towns that housed universities. Jenson’s work faltered from primarily focusing on Chicago and Northern Illinois. At the same time, Biles’ study included the scope of the state of Illinois’s entirety. These historians’ research coincided with Robert A. Harper’s \textit{The University That Shouldn’t Have Happened, But Did}. Harper, a professor of geology at SIU during the tenure of then university president Delyte Morris wrote about SIU under the leadership of Delyte Morris which lasted from 1948-1970. He noted that SIU in 1953 was in excellent condition for expansion due to the focus on higher education from the state. The staff at SIU expected an increase in enrollment in the late 1950s and 1960s.\textsuperscript{16} Jenson, Biles, and Harper all agreed that all Illinois universities experienced the same phenomenon of significant student enrollment during this period. Students’ constant stream gave WCIL-AM a much-needed audience in a geographical area where they lacked financial autonomy. Most jobs centered on agriculture and coal fields blue-collar jobs that did not provide money to donate to local radio stations in Southern Illinois.\textsuperscript{17}

In “Cultural Production, Media and Meaning: Hillbilly Music and Southern Textile Mills”, sociologists William F. Danaher and Vincent J. Roscigno described how “radio was instrumental in developing a collective identity” in the traditional American South (Virginia to Texas).\textsuperscript{18} Danaher and Roscigno noted that southern textile mill towns embodied the idea that media transformed identity and behavior through radio and music.\textsuperscript{19} Danaher and Roscigno’s writing on the same topic in “Media and Mobilization: The Case of Radio and Southern Textile Worker Insurgency, 1929 to 1934” further discussed the importance of radio in southern textile strikes. Danaher and Roscigno posited that local radio stations lost autonomy because of corporate political hegemonies. These controls and policies skewed radio stations’ complete autonomy through the Federal Communications Commission

\textsuperscript{15} Biles, \textit{Illinois A History of the Land}, 263.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 54.
Both of these articles illustrated the importance of radio in the formation of identity. In sum, radio and radio stations influenced cultural identities through programming and the messages they aired. Radio built cultural identity within communities; similar processes occurred through the U.S. during the 1950s and 1960s.

As mentioned above, the idea supports an imagined community, a term coined by political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson. Anderson believed that the nation as an imagined community linked the concept of print capitalism and national identity. In his study *Imagined Communities*, he explored the idea of nationalism and communities as socially constructed by people who believed themselves to be a part of the larger group. Anderson wrote that print capitalism laid the basis for national consciousness. Base on that idea, it is plausible to imagine how radio further consolidated this notion in Carbondale as part of a homogenous nation-state. Instead of using printed materials, WCIL-AM used the radio to link members of the Southern Illinois community to the rest of Illinois and the U.S.

Finally, these studies served to broaden the radio concept in the U.S. of the 1950s and 1960s by increasing radio’s historiography in Illinois. While broad in their scope, these ideas provided a historical window into the management and distribution of materials embedded with powerful ideas on the airwaves of WCIL-AM’s operations during the period under examination. This article contributes to the broader historiography of radio and Illinois, specifically during the 1950s and 1960s. It also contains information regarding the formation of the current identity of Southern Illinois, particularly the regions around Southern Illinois University. This article looks at WCIL-AM as a case study illustrating the vast changes occurring in the U.S. during the 1950s and 1960s to identify how those changes circulated rural audiences; and how this audience responded to change.

**WCIL-AM before 1950**

The founder of WCIL-AM was Paul McRoy, a native from Carbondale, IL, born on June 25, 1912. McRoy earned his bachelor’s degree in Education from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale in 1934. In 1939 McRoy received his master’s degree in Philosophy from the University of Wisconsin. While getting

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21 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd ed. (London: Versa, 2006), 44. Print capitalism is a theory on the concept of nation building and nationalism. It states that a group of people who form a community by using the printing press to create a common language and discourse has been influenced by a capitalist marketplace. Therefore, print capitalism is a method of creating imagined communities.
his master’s degree, McRoy married Mary Helm in 1937 and had two children (Paul H. McRoy and Ann McRoy). From 1934 to 1943, McRoy was a teacher and director of the Audiovisual Education department in Houston Public Schools. McRoy also served as an instructor at the University of Houston from 1940-1943. In 1943, he joined the Navy for a short stint in which he left as a Lieutenant Commander. McRoy returned to Carbondale in 1946, where he announced the plans for the construction of his new radio station in July of that year. The period between the 1920s and the 1950s became known as the Golden Age of radio because there were about 303 million radio sets across America. For McRoby, it was a smart choice to get into the radio station business. McRoy’s background in education, along with his management skills, from his time in Houston public schools, Audiovisual Education Department, and the Navy, meant his foray into radio was not a foolish choice. The decisive reason for McRoy’s venture into radio is not precisely known. However, his background certainly made it a viable career choice.

In August of 1946, McRoy obtained permits for building the station. WCIL originally signed on as an AM and FM station due to pressures by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to have both signals. However, due to the FM medium’s unpopularity, WCIL soon dropped its FM signal except for television. The survival of WCIL through our current time shows that McRoy has been a savvy businessman. Not only did he create a radio station during the height of the Golden Age of radio, but he established a radio legacy that had survivability.

Carbondale, Illinois, in the 1940s was a small college town home to some three thousand students. When WCIL launched its broadcasts, it began in the turbulent years of SIU. The university president suddenly left following criticism from faculty, students, and alumni about his poor administrative abilities. The fate of SIU was financially bleak when Delyte Morris became president of SIU after the departure of Chester Lay in the mid-Summer of 1948. When Morris inherited SIU leadership, the board had yet to pass a budget for Fall 1948-1950. An ambivalent budget combined with the fact that SIU was

22 Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Special Collections Research Center Archives, Southern Illinois Music Archives, [Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA], Box 7, Folder 21.
24 Chester, Television and Radio, 5.
25 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 2.
27 Harper, The University That Shouldn’t, 11.
28 Ibid, 19.
in a less prosperous part of the state than any other university in Illinois led to the fear that SIU would close.\textsuperscript{29} During his tenure, Morris achieved massive success in saving the university with his “vision, leadership, political skill, organizational know-how, and powerful persuasion.”\textsuperscript{30} Two decades after Morris assumed leadership, Carbondale and its university had transformed radically. SIU had become a major research university, and its reputation pulled in twenty-eight thousand students in 1968.\textsuperscript{31} WCIL-AM reached more people due to the expansion of its business that the university brought with it. It was under Morris’s tenure at SIU that WCIL-AM evolved alongside its growing student population.

The 1950s for WCIL

During the 1950s, WCIL-AM experimented with different programming formats to find a niche on the airwaves; specifically, programming created by students. On January 27, 1950, \textit{The Daily Independent}, a local Southern Illinois daily, reported WCIL hosting a student-led program that furthered WCIL’s connection to children and parents in Southern Illinois. The article described how a group of students from Longfellow Middle School debuted on WCIL and “were in top-form” as they performed over the airwaves.\textsuperscript{32} Middle schoolers’ “top-form” denoted that they could perform in some form for the community’s entertainment. More important was the potential reaction of parents to this article and the airing of the performance. WCIL used the medium of local student performances to endear themselves to the local communities surrounding Carbondale.

McRoy worked to make his station invaluable to the local community. In 1953, SIU students produced a production aired on February 12, and it revolved around George Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue.”\textsuperscript{33} Life performances included multiple SIU students, such as pianist Bill McGuire and George Gershwin,

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 15. When Delyte Morris took over as acting president of SIU in 1948, the state of affairs at SIU was dreary. The inability of the board to pass a budget has been blamed on Chester Lay for ineffective leadership abilities. That, combined with the fact that SIU was the only university in Southern Illinois meant that most students were from the local area and had little money implying that SIU was in a tight spot financially.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 15.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 161, 175, 210.

\textsuperscript{32} Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 3.

\textsuperscript{33} “Rhapsody in Blue” was a piece of music written by American Composer George Gershwin in 1924. The piece is known for its mixture of classical music with jazz. The students performed a radio broadcast of the piece along with performing a dramatization of Gershwin’s life. In 1945 \textit{Warner Brothers} released a film dramatization about Gershwin.
played by Bob Robertson. This performance was one of WCIL’s first college student productions. WCIL’s involvement in the student population at SIU meant that they reached the university audience of Carbondale and the surrounding area.

In 1956, an experimental show eventually named “The Student Workshop” debuted at the station. “The Student Workshop” took elementary, high school, and college students in and around Carbondale. The program gave them a stage to perform their music. Paul McRoy produced the show providing students the ability to perform live at no cost to the students. McRoy got free performances while also gaining listener support. WCIL received many letters of praise from Carbondale residents and the cities around Carbondale for the program. One woman wrote, “I can’t resist writing you a note to tell you how much I enjoyed your program Student Workshop.” Another fan of the show claimed that the program filled these young performers with “poise and confidence.” From Anna, Illinois, Mrs. Harry D. Albert wrote, “Our musicians of tomorrow so seldom have an opportunity to perform on the radio while they are just “learning” and it is fine of your station to give them this most needed opportunity.”

WCIL’s use of students and residents in their programming meant that they garnered favor with the friends and families of the students who performed on their broadcasts. Since most students who attended SIU were from the Southern Illinois region, WCIL cemented itself as a friend to the region. WCIL continued to receive many local attention and fan letters due to their constant stream of student programming. McRoy’s inclusion of local students in his programming schedule enabled the station to endear themselves to the local region within their first ten-fifteen years of broadcasting. WCIL achieved its goal of tying itself to the community. Their programming that oriented itself to displaying local community and student talent allowed listeners to create a sense of identity. Listeners of WCIL-AM were satisfied with the content, and they kept asking for more. Ultimately, WCIL and its listenership were satisfied with the results of the student-focused programming.

Since its birth in the 1940s, WCIL-AM’s format and programming reflected a stance on social progressiveness, social justice, and inclusivity. Its hiring practices, for instance, reflected this. In February 1954, the station hired Dick

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34 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 6.
35 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 8.
36 Ibid.
37 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 7.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
Smith, the first African American disc jockey in Southern Illinois. The station had been on the air for eight years prior Dick Smith’s employment. Most African Americans in Illinois during the 1940s-1950s lived in or near Chicago. Southern Illinois had a dominantly rural white population; the addition of a black disc jockey to WCIL was a change for mostly white residents. The late 1940s had seen a push for black employment in the mediums of radio and television across the country. The Coordinating Council for Negro Performers was established in the late 1940s to “change the impression of the viewing public to a more realistic image of blacks.” This push for equal employment practices for African American performers played a role in Smith’s employment at WCIL. McRoy showed a tendency toward progressive thought. Dick Smith’s hiring at WCIL paralleled the Civil Rights Movement’s emergence after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision. At the same time, the Democratic Party began its fight towards a progressive platform.

Employment of the first African American disc jockey was not the only progressive move Paul McRoy, and WCIL achieved in the 1950s. WCIL aired the show “You and your Congress,” a program designed by SIU Political Science professor Dr. Orville Alexander. In a letter to Paul McRoy, Matt Hall, Secretary for the Carbondale Chamber of Commerce, praised WCIL for airing the show. Hall stated that the show instructed residents about the “workings of their government”; he also claimed that listeners became better citizens due to the show. While Hall’s characterized the show as progressing Carbondale’s citizens towards higher learning and better citizenship, WCIL airing political programs’ deeper implications are visible underneath his comments. WCIL’s ability to air political messages over their airwaves meant that the station could disseminate information across the Southern Illinois region. The push for higher education in the 1940s-1970s in Illinois was an effort that included the education of the entire community, in WCIL’s case, education about the

40 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 6. Radio disc jockey’s (DJ’s) much like today, are the on air personality that introduces recorded music to the audience and they are often considered radio personalities.

41 Hilliard and Keith, Broadcast Century, 119. The Coordinating Council for Negro Performers was formed in the late 1940s to garner jobs for blacks in the entertainment industry primarily radio and television. They wanted to change Americans’ perceptions of blacks by getting black actors and personalities into the entertainment industry.

42 Foner, Give Me Liberty!, 925. The 1956 Democratic platform was calling for voting rights, desegregation of public schools, multilateral disarmament, more funding for welfare and equal opportunities for employment.


44 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 7.
workings of state government. Through his station, McRoy was laying the groundwork for community education via the radio.

The sense of progressive political awareness continued to be part of the radio station in the late 1950s. The Carbondale League of Women Voters (CLWV) promoted their agenda for a council-manager government for Carbondale’s city through WCIL’s broadcasts in 1958 and 1959. These broadcasts included a debate over the measure for a council-manager government for Carbondale. Individuals pro or against the measure could speak on air and openly debate the topic through various broadcasts leading to the vote. Thus, McRoy embroiled his station in political debates around Southern Illinois.

A more direct use of his station for political reasons occurred when McRoy invited Paul H. Douglas, a senator from Illinois, to promote his political ideas. Serving three terms in the Senate, Douglas was well-known for his liberal ideas in the postwar era. He was one of many top Illinois politicians who wrote to WCIL in the 1950s, often writing McRoy to thank him for airing their live interviews. McRoy frequently acquired interviews with top Illinois Democrats and denoted the amount of power and coverage a small radio station could have.

Paul Simon also joined the list of politicians who wrote to the station. Simon contacted WCIL about their airing of his series “Sidelights from Springfield.” Simon was a popular Illinois politician from the Democratic Party who served in the Illinois House of Representatives from 1955-1963, Illinois State Senate from 1963-1968, U.S. House of Representatives from 1975-1985, and the U.S. Senate from 1985-1997. He also made an unsuccessful 1988 presidential run. By 1957, he wrote a newspaper column titled “Sidelights from Springfield”, which he provided freely to over three hundred newspapers in

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46 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 7. The Carbondale League of Women Voters was founded in 1926, a year after the Illinois League of Women Voters was founded in 1925. The league was created after women received the right to vote from the 19th amendment (The amendment was passed in 1919 and ratified in 1920). Their focus was on local, state, and national level issues. A council-manager government is a form of city government where an elected city council or board of aldermen works on establishing policy for the city along with setting goals for the city.
47 Carbondale, Illinois is now run by a council-manager government.
48 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 7.
49 Biles, *Illinois A History of the Land*, 261. Douglas was well known for his Civil Rights advocacy, even taking a stand and voting against the confirmation of James Eastland, a well-known racist, as chairman of the Judiciary Committee. Douglas was also known for his stance on the environment, truth in lending laws and public housing.
50 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 7. Other politicians included, Paul Simon, Adlai Stevenson, William G. Stratton.
51 Ibid.
Illinois.\textsuperscript{52} Judging by his letter to McRoy, Simon, in 1959, began to create audio recordings for radio audiences. Simon was an advocate for Southern Illinois, an often-forgotten part of the state. In particular, he supported the children and the elderly. In the mid-1950s, he opposed a state sales tax that would harm low and moderate-income families.\textsuperscript{53} The majority of WCIL’s audience fit into this bracket as all Southern Illinois counties had a lower per-capita income than the rest of the state in this period.\textsuperscript{54} Therefore, Simon was a popular choice for McRoy to put on his station. The “Sidelights from Springfield” show, much like his newspaper column, depicted Simon’s view on what was happening in state and local government. This personal appearance meant that people in Southern Illinois who listened to WCIL had straight access to Simon’s perspective on politics. The overall effect that Simon’s rhetoric had is unknown. However, WCIL played a part in including that rhetoric into their broadcasts, essentially introducing Southern Illinois residents to Democratic policies.

Furthering WCIL’s large cast of Illinois politicians, Illinois governor William G. Stratton wrote to WCIL during the 1950s, expressing his gratitude for McRoy’s concern over the 1955 SIU budget (Stratton was responding to a letter McRoy had written him expressing his concern over the budget issues).\textsuperscript{55} McRoy’s interest in the SIU budget stemmed from his desire to see SIU grow, which directly affected his station. If SIU had financial issues, then challenges would also arise for WCIL. Situated in a relatively small community, SIU was a large employer in Carbondale and the surrounding region. If the financial crisis negatively affected SIU, it eventually would have led to less profit for WCIL. While Stratton merely wrote a thank you note to McRoy; his legacy left a large impact on the state. Residents remembered Stratton for reforming the state court system and saw an increase of highways in Illinois.\textsuperscript{56} These roads helped to demolish the sense of isolation felt by small towns throughout Illinois, which led to the entire state gaining a homogenous atmosphere among urban and rural citizens.\textsuperscript{57} These roads and highways systems benefitted Illinois by increasing the volume of travel that state roadways could handle – this occurred at the same time SIU was growing in the number of students.


\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} Harper, \textit{The University That Shouldn’t}, 10.

\textsuperscript{55} Carbondale, SIUC-SRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 7.

\textsuperscript{56} Biles, \textit{Illinois A History of the Land}, 262. During Eisenhower’s presidency, a large push for highways and interconnected roadways was occurring. By the time Stratton left office, over 7,000 miles of highways had been built.

\textsuperscript{57} Jenson, \textit{Illinois A History}, 154-155.
The postwar boom of the 1950s affected WCIL for the better. Industrial growth, employment, and greater purchasing power had created postwar economic growth in the U.S. Between 1945 and 1950, the per capita income rose by six percent.\(^{58}\) In the 1950s alone, per capita income rose fifteen percent.\(^{59}\) In turn, this growth transformed the Illinois landscapes as suburbs began to spring up across the state. The federal government mostly paid for highways through the Highway Act of 1956. Metropolitan decentralization was popular as people who moved to the suburbs received numerous incentives such as reduced pricing.\(^{60}\)

Along with the change in U.S. culture amid suburbanization and the Civil Rights movement, there were also changes in the political realm. In Illinois during the 1950s, the Democratic party pushed for progressive reform. They sought to revitalize the Illinois government by posting dynamic men into leadership positions. Paul Douglas was one of these men, so was Adlai Stevenson (another popular member of the Democrat party of Illinois). The push for liberal-progressive ideas began to spread in the state as they did across the U.S.\(^{61}\) McRoy involved his station in politics by airing radio segments containing some of the most progressive legislators in Illinois of the 1950s. He used these segments to appeal to his audience, primarily poor rural whites, and created a more educated Southern Illinois region that heard WCIL’s broadcasts. This unorthodox education was especially true when considering policies from Paul Simon or Paul H. Douglas – Simon tended towards advocacy for people in Southern Illinois. At the same time, Douglas was popular for his public housing initiatives.

McRoy kept WCIL active in the community through its programming, which brought advertisers and the community’s reliance on the station. WCIL aired a program titled “Know Your Illinois” to educate farmers and poultry-men on the Illinois housing board.\(^{62}\) One of these radio programs’ primary goal was to help educate farmers on building their own homes or how to apply for public housing. In Jackson County alone, there were almost two thousand farms.\(^{63}\) This type of programming meant that farming and housing information was incredibly important to the residents near WCIL. Before this program, in 1949, Congress passed a Housing Act that authorized the

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58 In Illinois, per capita income went from $1,488 to $1,842.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid, 261.
62 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 7.
construction of 800,000 public housing units due to the growing U.S. population. The Baby Boom that followed WWII increased the U.S. population by thirty million, which expanded the demand for houses. The program that WCIL aired directly addressed the changing U.S. housing issues based on population growth. Carbondale’s community relied on WCIL for important information such as airing local sports games, news about sports, and school cancellations. WCIL used their station to cement themselves into the community based on their dissemination of information to the Carbondale area.

The 1960s for WCIL

Consistently WCIL used its power as a radio station to broadcast statements, news flashes, and announcements that directly affected the Carbondale area in the 1960s. On November 20, 1961, there was a gas scare at SIU. WCIL helped coordinate authorities’ actions by giving live updates on the developing situation and reconnecting families during the event. Incidents like this secured WCIL to the SIU (which had its radio station) campus and the local area. Students from across Illinois or other states could more easily fit into the local community via WCIL’s commitment to the area. WCIL’s involvement in a wide variety of broadcasts such as student-centered shows and political broadcasts about state government allowed them to reach a wide mixture of rural residents and local students. In 1962, WCIL even airing Internal Revenue Service (IRS) news releases aimed to educate and inform citizens about their rights and responsibilities during tax season. The vast amount of information WCIL provided genuinely assisted the Carbondale community, as evidenced by the numerous notes and letters the station received in this period.

Over this decade, WCIL began airing more content that directly appealed to voters. In 1960, there was a campaign for a second fire-station in Carbondale. WCIL utilized the airwaves to support an election supporting the creation of the second fire-station. Soon after, the mayor of Carbondale, D. Blaney Miller, wrote a note to thank WCIL for their assistance in progressing Carbondale’s safety. The growth of Carbondale directly affected WCIL. More people living in Carbondale meant an increasing number of listeners. Based on the letters WCIL received, a good portion of the local political events they endorsed was successful. The airtime WCIL provided to candidates or ballot items was invaluable.

64 Foner, Give Me Liberty!, 925.
65 Ibid.
66 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 9.
67 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 10.
68 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7.
69 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 8.
Simultaneously, some endorsements that the station sponsored failed, indicating that WCIL did not have a complete hold on Carbondale’s community’s thinking. One such failed backing occurred in 1964 when Judge Peyton H. Kunce wrote McRoy to offer his thanks for the ad aired on WCIL. Kunce wrote that he appreciated the “personal and palpable” support of the Appellate Court judge’s candidacy.\textsuperscript{70} Evidence suggests that the sponsorship included advertisements and radio interviews. While Kunce did not win the appointment, in 1964, he eventually won and took office in 1970.\textsuperscript{71} WCIL’s initiatives did not always have the backing of their listenership. This is evident by the failure of the Kunce campaign in 1964. Kunce’s loss underscored that WCIL, alone, did not have enough sway among the local community to get him elected. While WCIL played an important role in Southern Illinois locals’ lives, it did not hold ultimate influence over their decisions.

The success of WCIL also opened the door for criticisms. While the 1950s saw triumph for WCIL with little to no evidence of complaints, some listeners of WCIL lodged criticisms over the station’s content a decade later. On February 11, 1961, McRoy wrote a letter to address a complaint by Mr. George Nathdurft of Oak Ridge, Missouri. Mr. Nathdurft’s complaint stated that he did not want any advertisements for “intoxicating liquor” coming into his home. McRoy responded by simply stating that WCIL only carried beer advertising and that McRoy himself refused to carry liquor promotion.\textsuperscript{72} Mr. Nathdurft’s letter illustrates the continuous changes in American culture, showing Nathdurft was either man who grew up during the Prohibition Era (1920-1933) or a religious man who saw alcohol as corruptive of men. In contrast, a college campus was a bastion of cultural transformation because it provided a space for exploring new ideas and theories, and Mr. Nathdurft appeared to neither understand nor like these changes. Besides, this letter provides further insight into the coverage area that WCIL reached. According to McRoy, the listenership of the station was around one million people.\textsuperscript{73} Considering the percentage of American homes equipped with radio sets by 1971 was ninety-eight percent if McRoy’s numbers were correct. Many people inside and outside Jackson County heard WCIL.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{70} Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 12.
\textsuperscript{72} Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 9.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Chester, \textit{Television and Radio}, 5.
residents at the time. Mr. Nathdurft lived in Missouri, which demonstrated that the WCIL audience’s scope extended beyond Illinois. McRoy’s choice to maintain his station promotions regardless of Mr. Nathdurft’s complaint showed his resolve for the growth of WCIL. His progressive beliefs bolstered by a college town environment.

Nathdurft was not the only person to send a complaint to WCIL. Mrs. Joan Carter of Carbondale wrote to WCIL to inform them that she had “written to Congressman Gray” about extending WCIL’s airtime. At the time of Mrs. Carter’s letter, there was a bill in Congress that would allow radio stations to operate beyond their normal schedule (from what time to what time), Mrs. Carter’s letter intended to convince Congressman Gray to vote for that bill. Mrs. Carter sent a copy of the other letter she had written to Congressman Gray with her letter to WCIL. In her letter to Gray, she mentioned that WCIL needed to extend its operating hours due to the threat of natural disasters. Also, because multiple stations muddled and congested Southern Illinois’ airwaves. Mrs. Carter was very concerned about getting her announcements from WCIL, for herself and others in Jackson county, as WCIL was their main radio station. While SIU had a radio station which worked twenty-four hours a day, that station was FM based. FM did not become popular until later in the 1960s. In 1960, only eleven percent of people in the U.S. had FM radios. This low number meant that the majority of the radio audience only listened to AM stations like WCIL. In her letter to Congressmen Gray, Mrs. Carter stated, “for some reason, I do not know, radio reception here, except for WCIL, is very poor and congested.” Poor radio reception implied that during the evenings, no other radio station broadcasted clearly in Carbondale.

In addition, Mrs. Carter also complained about the type of music WCIL played during the day. She pointed out that playing “go” and “twist” music, all the time, scared off women like herself. Carter talked about middle-aged women, mostly stay-at-home mothers; the type of people who would be at home or shopping during the normal daytime hours. Mrs. Carter claimed

76 AM stations were not allowed to air broadcasts beyond certain hours of the day as to not interfere with broadcasts in other parts of the U.S. In the evening there are shifts in the ionospheric layers (inner most layer of the sky) that would allow AM signals to go hundreds or even thousands of miles. Shutting down operation of an AM station allowed for less interference for stations that could broadcast overnight.
77 Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 10.
78 Ibid.
79 Hilliard and Keith, The Broadcast Century, 164.
80 Ibid.
that the women who had buying power (like herself) were influenced by the commercials that WCIL aired did not want to listen to this new type of music.\textsuperscript{81} This new type of music that Mrs. Carter talked about was part of the broader American culture change. African American music crossed over black and white segregation through Elvis Presley, and teenage dance music such as twist and go-go music; music reflecting teen rebellion similar to that of the New Left's ideology for change.\textsuperscript{82} The popularity of new music followed a shift in the popular culture of the time. In order to stay relevant, WCIL had to play what the audience wanted. New music did not take up all WCIL's broadcast hours, but the station wanted to ensure their ability to reach as many listeners as it could. The fact that Mrs. Carter complained about the music played at WCIL, her comment on having buying power, and her letter to Gray that insisted that no other stations can be reached in the Carbondale area supported the unique and important position WCIL held as the dominant station for Carbondale. Thus, people were willing to complain about the station; they still backed its continued survival and growth. This commitment to WCIL was something that the station had been working on since its inception in 1946.

As WCIL grew, the idea of adding an FM station became vital to the expansion of the station. FM radio was hardly used in the early 1960s, though there was eventual growth in the FM radio market near the end of the decade. Most AM stations did not need FM in the early days. The common practice of stations with AM and FM capabilities was to air the same information or entertainment over both airwaves. In 1964, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) began to eliminate AM-FM program duplication.\textsuperscript{83} That led to stations buying up FM signals to switch their programming to FM for better signal quality. The next year, in 1965, thirty million radio sets were sold in the U.S., a fourth of those sales were FM sets.\textsuperscript{84} These events set in motion WCIL, beginning a push towards FM capabilities. Paul McRoy filed a petition to the FCC on February 20, 1967, to get an FM license to make WCIL a class B

\textsuperscript{81} Carbondale, SIUC-SCRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 10.
\textsuperscript{83} The FCC is an agency of the U.S. government that regulates radio and television. It has since expanded to regulating broadband and internet services.
\textsuperscript{84} Hilliard and Keith, The Broadcast Century, 181-185.
station by assigning Carbondale as a class C position.\textsuperscript{85} In 1967, the FCC denied McRoy’s request for more wattage. This rejection was because McRoy did not have sufficient evidence to show that Carbondale or the areas around it lacked radio coverage.\textsuperscript{86} A year later, in 1968, the FCC approved McRoy’s request for an addition of FM frequency to WCIL’s repertoire. This station duplicated the AM shows until the evening when the AM station was forced to sign off while the FM station kept going. It was not until 1976 that WCIL had to split programming into their stations.\textsuperscript{87} McRoy knew that getting the FM station was the future for WCIL. FM did not capture the radio market until 1980. At that point, it had 52.4 percent of listenership that it once had during the Golden Age: AM never recovered.\textsuperscript{88}

WCIL ended the 1960s with support going to another local college created for the locals of Southern Illinois.\textsuperscript{89} By supporting another college, WCIL continued to promote the ongoing education of the local people. John A. Logan College had just acquired permanent land in 1969 in Williamson County, adjacent to Jackson County. This new campus meant that more people would be coming into proximity to WCIL’s broadcasts. John A. Logan College was founded in 1967 after the passage of the 1965 Illinois Community College Act.\textsuperscript{90} The Act provided more residents of the state with higher education by creating an Illinois Community College Board to educate more people in Illinois. WCIL’s promotion of John A. Logan College harkened to the already mentioned push for higher education in not only Illinois but the whole of the U.S. As the 1960s ended, it was clear that WCIL had left an impact on the community of Southern Illinois, along with radio consolidating the idea of a state and national identity.

\textsuperscript{85} United States, “Decisions and Reports of the Federal Communications Commission of the United States, March 17, 1967 to May 12, 1967,” \textit{Federal Communications Commission Reports} volume 7, issue 2, (1968): 848-849. The FCC assigns radio classifications in terms of wattage: a class A station has less wattage than a class C station, which means it reaches a smaller audience than a class C station. Therefore, a class B station is better than a class A station (which WCIL-AM was in 1967).

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{87} Riggs Jr., “rockin’ radio” 101.5 CIL-FM Blasts From the Past!”, 91.

\textsuperscript{88} Hilliard and Keith, \textit{The Broadcast Century}, 234.

\textsuperscript{89} Carbondale, SIUC-SRCA-SIMA, Box 7, Folder 15.

\textsuperscript{90} “History,” jalc.edu, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.jalc.edu/admissions/general-information#history.
The Overall Effect of WCIL on Carbondale and SIU

WCIL-AM and then FM played a large role in disseminating information to the Southern Illinois region. WCIL-AM was especially crucial as it served as a case study of the massive change in U.S. culture and radio in the 1950s and 1960s. WCIL was a small radio station that furthered progressive ideologies popular in the 1950s and 1960s. The growth of suburbanization in America began to break down the barriers that divided rural and urban life, and radio consolidated a national community’s idea.

WCIL was founded in a university town on the rise because of a strong push for education in the 1950s-1970s: a push further accelerated by veterans’ returning home and benefiting from the G.I. Bill. While that continued, young people had been encouraged to further their education to move the country toward an educated labor force. WCIL placated to a university and rural audiences, which equated to combining rural and city life through the students who attended SIU. SIU students actively participated in radio broadcasts, bridging the divide that rural residents felt with these students moving into their city. WCIL navigated the political landscape by educating their listening audience via progressive radio messages from progressive liberal Illinois politicians. The extent of their broadcasting reach went beyond a rural community that simply needed a radio station. There were radio stations in surrounding towns such as Marion and Herrin. Nevertheless, WCIL stood out by executing and spreading progressive ideas. WCIL’s proximity to the university was the factor that provided its success.