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Left of the Dial, Right on the Music: 50 Years of Georgia State FM Radio

by

Andreas Preuss

Under the Direction of Joseph Perry, Ph.D.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2021

ABSTRACT

This study places the Georgia State radio station within the historical context of Atlanta cultural production, career development, and as a voice of the GSU student. Race, gender, and economic factors sparked the necessary tension for the station to adjust alongside the ever-changing trends of popular music and the media industry. WRAS/Album 88 started broadcasting from campus at 88.5 on the FM dial in January 1971. Georgia State students played music that spoke to their generation, music that was at first rejected by commercial broadcasters, then appropriated for profit. The station soon became a player in the Atlanta radio market. Throughout its history, the competition between WRAS, commercial, and public broadcasters was a point of contention, as well as the push and pull of the audience. The campus station speaks to the larger picture of American college radio impact and experience as a unique yet under studied field.

INDEX WORDS: WRAS, Album 88, Radio, Broadcasting, Atlanta, Georgia State

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2021

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by

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December 2021

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to the hard-working men and women of college radio, particularly WTUL in New Orleans, LA, WRVU in Nashville, TN, and WRAS/Album 88 in Atlanta, GA. Without their commitments to play music for their audience, who knows if alternative music/college rock would have survived. They did it for free. I can still hear the rambling voices during breaks announcing songs, “before that was,” “and then,” all to provide their listeners with an awareness of great music. I would then rush to the record store, buy the vinyl copy, and put it on the turntable. Thanks for the memories. My wife, Marion (Nonnie) Thompson Preuss, was also a college DJ. I think it was our connection with college radio that sparked our relationship, and for that I am forever grateful. I wish our kids, Charlotte and Lele, listened to college radio, but at least they grew up with the music.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the WRAS/Album 88 alumni who allowed me to interview them for this project. Special thanks to alums Gail Harris and Jeff Walker. Their deep knowledge of the station set me on a course of discovery, and I am forever grateful to them for opening the doors into this fascinating world. My committee chair, Dr. Joseph Perry, stood by me as I explored the option of a digital component to this thesis. He also has a deep knowledge of the culture and the music of college radio. I also thank Drs. John McMillian, and Denise Davidson. Dr. Jeffrey Young, thank you for opening my eyes to a new path in my academic pursuits. I also thank my fellow students in the Georgia State History Department.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SCRIPT KEY

Radio and TV scripts are always in caps for ease of reading and for teleprompter use.

Below is key for script marking

MONTAGE	short, edited interview clips butted together
NATS	natural sound
SOT	sound on tape/interview clips/sound bites
TRANSITION	radio dial noise/transitional sound
PROMO	station ID with voice/music
BOTTOM DROP	station ID usually played at half hour/bottom of hour
Q & A	question and answer
AM DRIVE TIME	Monday-Friday 5a-8a
PM DRIVE TIME	Monday-Friday 4p-7p
GPB	Georgia Public Broadcasting
GSU	Georgia State University
NPR	National Public Radio
GM	General Manager
DJ	Disc jockey
DIY	Do It Yourself
AM	Amplitude modulation
FM	Frequency modulation
HD	High Definition

PREFACE

Think about some of the most popular bands in modern music history — REM, U2, and The Police. These groups, at first, were not embraced by commercial radio broadcasters. Their music was accepted, and their fan base developed, by audiences listening to underground and non-commercial educational radio stations. The process of connecting music, programming and personal narratives is at the core of my thesis, which is an institutional history, centering on an informal network of the radio broadcasting sector loosely known as “college radio.” “Left of the Dial, Right on the Music” focuses on three broad topics: station disruption involving competition with commercial stations and technology, gender and sexuality, and racial staffing tension with management and programming initiatives.

My proximity to WRAS, the campus radio station at Georgia State University, encouraged this scenario. WRAS typifies much of the broader college radio narrative as encountered in my wider research. This essay could be described as a case study of WRAS, using oral histories I have conducted and printed sources to produce a weekly radio program on WRAS, called “88.50 Music and History,” to mark 50 years of broadcasting in 2021. These programs have been uploaded to ScholarWorks@Georgia State University for open streaming access.

There is a written component to the digital thesis. The significance of this thesis is that it will appeal to scholars in history, media studies, and a radio listening audience. It is exciting to have the opportunity to present this project outside of the academic realm with the “88.50 Music and History” broadcasts on WRAS/Album 88 every Wednesday from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. This manuscript is largely comprised of those program broadcast scripts.

INTRODUCTION

Why is it important to produce a history of WRAS? On one hand, the station was under a constant threat of being closed. Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic and higher education budget struggles, some universities are selling off campus radio stations and their valuable broadcast real estate on the FM dial.¹ That may be an easy way to generate money, but universities and campus communities are losing a voice for the students as well as real world experience in audio production and programming. WRAS must remain relevant and placing its history in perspective shows how valuable the station is to cultural production in Atlanta and as a voice for Georgia State students. On the other hand, many developing artists still need access to radio broadcasting, despite streaming audio services. As my project shows, many groups we now take for granted as fixtures in music, were first exposed on college radio. In 2014, a controversial deal between Georgia State and Georgia Public Broadcasting became a rallying point for the “Save WRAS” movement. The station continues to broadcast but under severely reduced student run programming.

Why do I care about college radio? For me, the response must be because I do it. If I felt like my subject position were transparent, or irrelevant, I would skip this part. But all communication is generated from a specific vantage point, so a few words might provide some useful context. I started doing college radio as a communications undergraduate at Loyola University in New Orleans. WLDC 640 AM, “The Campus Alternative,” was broadcast to the Loyola community in a closed-circuit capacity – only to the offices, dining facilities, and residence halls. During my time at the station, I served as music director and program director. Loyola had an arrangement with next door neighbor, Tulane University, so that students also

¹ John Lippman, “Dartmouth College selling FM radio station,” *The Valley News*. July 26, 2021.

volunteered at WTUL 91.5 FM, “Your Progressive Alternative.” WTUL went on the air in 1959 and continues to be an interesting presence in the New Orleans media market. I hosted a shift in the evenings with a fellow Loyola student where we played songs from the station’s playlist along with our own vinyl records. Though Loyola did provide a radio learning experience, WTUL was truly over the air broadcasting. It was thrilling and I was hooked. After a thirty-year career in television news broadcasting, I finally returned to my own media roots. For the past two years, I have been a DJ at Georgia State University’s WRAS 88.5 FM, “Album 88.” I host and produce a news and information program called “88 Affairs” as well as a program called “88.50: Music and History” that features vinyl from the station archives along with program notes written on the vinyl records and produced by station staff. The “88.50” program also uses audio clips from the oral history interviews, covering topics that are listed in this essay’s Notes.

1.1 Historiography and Context

WRAS (Radio At State) is Georgia State’s non-commercial FM radio station that, until recently, was fully managed and programmed by students at the downtown Atlanta campus. WRAS contributed greatly to programming diversity in the Atlanta area. WRAS 88.5 is located on the lower FM non-commercial frequency range, already crowded by WREK 91.1 (Georgia Tech radio) and WFRG 89.3 (public radio). The ability of WRAS’s staff to recognize the station’s importance to a burgeoning interest in progressive, underground, and alternative music in the city shows how the station was flexible, starting shortly after its inception. The influx of commercial rock radio in the mid-1970s ended a market dominance by WRAS. The station signed on the air in January 1971 with Top 40 programming, popular already in Atlanta on AM frequencies. The station’s student led management decided to veer from the popular AM format

a few months later and switched to a rock music formula. Former General Manager Jeff Walker said “WRAS owned the town (Atlanta)...there was no FM competition.” That was until 1974 when WKLS dumped its easy-listening format in Atlanta and switched to album-oriented rock (AOR), branding itself 96 Rock. A former WRAS staff member, Drew Murray, was hired to program the new format. The competition with new stations triggered yet another WRAS format change; the station began playing deeper album cuts, punk, and new wave. The programming moved away from hit songs off albums, toward less popular cuts and songs from more esoteric bands. WRAS also embraced the rise of British and American punk rock in the mid to late 1970s in specialty shows, then moving to new wave and post-punk in the 1980s.

The 1980s also saw the explosion of the Athens, Georgia music scene and WRAS became ground zero for delivering the Athens sound to the Atlanta radio market. From 1983-1993, according to Walker, WRAS experienced a “renaissance.” The station received hundreds of records each week, sometimes getting imports directly from Europe, and playing them before they were commercially available in the United States. Music programming focused on what was determined to be the average Georgia State student, a 27-year-old female. This era of college radio was also playing out through audio speakers from other college stations across the nation. Commercial radio responded with a new format in the early 1990s, alternative rock. A rebranded WNNX (99.7 or 99X) in Atlanta debuted in 1992 playing many of the songs that were featured on WRAS. Once again, student managers reformatted the station, this time going even more alternative, but also embracing a new genre popular in Atlanta, hip-hop. Efforts by student managers at WRAS to stay ahead of “underground” musical trends would lead the programming, over time, to border on esoteric. As the college radio format and ensuring adult alternative format (also known as modern rock) proliferated on the FM dial and streaming audio services

(Sirius/XM Radio) WRAS abandoned its semi-professional programming, leaving the station open for the deal with Georgia Public Broadcasting in 2014.

There are a few studies on the significance of college radio in the United States and recent academic journal articles have started to redress the lack of critical investigations into this topic. These studies primarily examine the macrohistory of college radio around the country. By contrast, this study of the history of WRAS focuses on one station and one city, revealing larger tensions within the mediascape. The unique aspects of WRAS's history addresses issues that have defined the broader study of the topic — programming, cultural production, economics, and technology. My creation of an oral history of the station will also contribute to current archival records for future study.

Several years ago, in what many call a “takeover” by Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB), the station's terrestrial FM channel was unequally divided between a GPB radio news (and NPR) format and the programmed music from students and volunteers in a deal announced after GSU's final exam period in 2014. This agreement cut student programming to ten hours a day in the Atlanta radio market off-hours between 7 p.m. to 5 a.m., seven days a week. Some WRAS advocates have expressed concerns that GPB may not be done, and that the remaining student-run portion of the FM signal could again be a target. There is a need for the station to remain relevant, not only to its audience, but to Georgia State as well. The history of WRAS shows how the station was able to adapt in response to competition from commercial stations and uphold its mission of alternative music programming. As WRAS marks 50 years of broadcasting in 2021, the immediate future is crucial to its survival, and not only with the potential for a complete takeover but increasing competition in the age of digital music programming. Once again, the history of WRAS, can speak to the larger picture of many college

radio station takeovers and in many cases, universities selling off their FM bandwidth or going completely online.

The survival of GSU's student radio station is important as a diverse voice within the GSU community and metropolitan Atlanta. As the station marks 50 years of broadcasting, it will be beneficial to pursue a scholarly approach to its history and show its relevance to the university and the larger metropolitan audience. The future of student involvement with WRAS may be in jeopardy and this study will stress the station's importance. My hope is that this project, along with actual on-air presentations, will show why the student-run portion of WRAS is viable, relevant, and worth preserving.

1.2 Methods and Sources

The WRAS Radio Records in GSU's Special Collections archive is a trove of original or facsimile documents involving the station's founding, management, and programming decisions. The archives include music playlists, memos from GSU's administration and station general managers, as well as media clips on minidisc and computer discs.

GSU's student newspaper, *The Georgia State Signal*, has been publishing since 1943, and all of its issues are available in GSU's Digital Collections. A close examination of fifty years of WRAS coverage in GSU's *Signal*, along with more sporadic coverage student in Atlanta newspapers, helped establish a timeline of significant events in the station's history. Official documents in the WRAS Radio Archives also confirmed portions of the timeline.

An oral history project that I have conducted, featuring interviews with former WRAS managers, administrators, and volunteer staff, including DJs, goes beyond the media narrative to provide a personal recollection of working at WRAS, with participants spread out through

the station's history from 1970-2021. More than eighty oral history interviews were done between 2020 and 2021. Most interviews were done sequentially, starting with the 1970s alumni, and proceeding through the decades. The oral history also included independent analysts from the scholarly field, local record stores, local journalists, and musicians for perspective. The phone interviews were recorded in the Adobe Audition, a digital audio workstation. Clips from the interviews were used in the WRAS "88.50 Music and History" program and in this written thesis. The oral histories will be offered to the WRAS Radio Records for inclusion within the Georgia State Special Collections archives. Selections from these oral histories are presented in the following paper as block quotes with the last name of the interviewee and the date of the interview in parentheses.

Other sources will include radio broadcasting trade journals such as *The Gavin Report*, *Radio and Records*, and *Billboard Magazine*. Research on college radio specifically will come from *College Music Journal* and *New Music Report*. There are a few scholarly works that address college radio in general, and recent works on cultural production in the South are more plentiful. These will be examined as secondary sources.

My narrative is constructed through first-person accounts, archival documents, media coverage, trade journals, and some academic writing. The first-person account via oral history provides a personal recollection of working and socializing at the radio station. These sources could diverge from student and local media coverage and are meant to go "behind the scenes." Student media accounts also include letters to the editor and newspaper staff editorials that reflected the recurring public tension over the radio station format. These sources show the flexible nature of WRAS radio programming not only to adjust to market qualifiers, but many times in contrast to personal preferences in music selection. The tension between the private staff

and public audience is another element in the debate over what music to play on the radio. WRAS programming and cultural production will be gleaned from archival station playlists and measurable “top song” lists submitted to college radio trade journals for the Southeast and Atlanta markets.

My training as an historian has helped me develop the ability to identify evolving tension points within the story of WRAS. Recognizing the pitfalls of collective memory and oral recollections, I have frequently checked the stories I’ve heard against various primary sources. My career as a journalist trained me to ask dispassionate and often difficult questions during the oral history interviews.

CHAPTER ONE: COLLEGE RADIO INDUSTRY

The history of WRAS/Album 88, the Georgia State radio station, is intertwined with the business of music. Tension in the Atlanta FM radio market often forced the station to adjust alongside the commercial interests of popular music and the media industry. Its signal reach was valuable, its eclectic format was relevant, and its diverse and growing audience was prized, the Georgia State student body and the Atlanta metropolitan area. Competition between WRAS and commercial broadcasters was often apparent. Commercial stations would change their own format to match playlists of WRAS. Radio stations 96 Rock and 99X are two examples.

WRAS often seemed to be under the threat of a partial or complete takeover from GPB (as eventually happened in 2014). The GPB/WRAS agreement came three years after several high-profile college radio station closures. In 2011, Vanderbilt University's WRVU in Nashville, Tennessee was shut down abruptly and its license sold to a local National Public Radio (NPR) station; Rice University's KTRU in Houston, Texas was sold to a local NPR affiliate; and the University of San Francisco's KUSF was sold to an NPR affiliate that wanted its frequency.² Instead of helping their stations transition into the new technological age and allowing students and the surrounding community to benefit from the programming and training offered by college radio, those schools sold them.

I will use the term College Radio Industry throughout this report to define the intersection between WRAS, the record labels, record shops, artists, and you – the radio listening audience. It's important to note that most college radio stations, including WRAS, are staffed by young people in their late-teens and early-twenties. Student administrators typically receive small

² Tim Brooks, *College Radio Days: 70 Years of Student Broadcasting at Dartmouth College* (Glennville Press, 2013), 11.

stipends, and stations are largely funded by mandatory student activity fees. In turn, a college radio stations serve as a major promotional resource for universities.

1.3 We Were the Freaks, Not the Elites

WRAS's founding was sparked by the decision of another radio station to leave GSU's campus in 1968 to pursue commercial interests. WPLO FM 103.3 was an offshoot on WPLO AM. While the AM signal played country music, the FM signal was operated and programmed by students on the GSU campus. WPLO FM was lent to the school in 1964, one of the only times a commercial station temporarily turned its programming and signal over to a college for broadcasting.³ Plough Incorporated, which owned the station, wanted public service credit by sponsoring ad-free, non-commercial educational (NCE) content on their FM signal. The Top-Forty format was eventually adjusted to include the new sounds of the time. Ralph Merck was the station's assistant News Director.

We were the freaks; we were not the elite. We were the great unwashed. We were just an eclectic group of students. I guess we had an inferiority complex. (Merck, 01/30/21)⁴

Those "freaks" played what was called underground rock, the music from iconic groups that are now lumped into the classic rock category like The Jimi Hendrix Experience, The Grateful Dead, and The Jefferson Airplane. An advertisement (Figure 1.1) in Atlanta's underground newspaper, *The Great Speckled Bird*, showcased psychedelic music on WPLO FM, Tuesday through Thursday from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.⁵ The Plough Corporation pulled WPLO FM off campus in 1968. Students were apparently "losing control" of the programming and Plough

³ "GSC's FM Station Broadcasts Oct. 19," *Georgia State Signal*, October 8, 1964, 5.

⁴ Oral history interviews identified by interviewee last name and date of interview

⁵ Psychedelic Music Radio advertisement, *Great Speckled Bird*, May 10, 1968, 15.

was having commercial success with its stations in Baltimore and Maryland. Ralph Merck witnessed the event.

They simply pulled the plug. We're not going to be affiliated with Georgia State anymore. You're not on the air anymore. So, they pulled the plug literally. (Merck, 01/30/21)

The late 1960s and early 1970s coincided with the end of AM radio domination in the Atlanta market, and the rise of FM radio nationwide.⁶ Jim Morrison was a WRAS Music Director.

If you zoom out all the way, we got to ride the FM elevator all the way to the penthouse. We really did. There were things outside of our control that helped make that happen. Right time, right place. (Morrison, 12/05/20)

1.4 The Record Companies Were All Over Us

In 1969, the effort started to get a new FM radio station on the air, one solely owned and operated by Georgia State. Richard Belcher, a business major, was appointed as the station's first General Manager.

We were dealing with three bureaucracies in 1970. The university system and the university itself. The city of Atlanta, the Atlanta Board of Education which owned the tower where WRAS wanted to put its antenna. So, we had to negotiate with them to put our stick on their tower. That's WABE. And then of course the FCC. (Belcher, 03/07/20)

After two years of delays, equipment difficulties, and technical problems, the station started broadcasting live on January 18, 1971. The call letters WRAS signified "We're Radio At State." The first voice on the air was Kenneth England, GSU's Dean of Students. He laid out the purpose of the station in its inaugural broadcast.

⁶ Christopher Sterling and Michael Keith, *Sounds of Change: A History of FM Broadcasting in America*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 147.

We have the duty of answering with this station, WRAS, the high and weighty and privy summons to promulgate the truth. And I shall believe and trust this is exactly what this station will do.⁷

The station (Figure 1.2) went on the air seventeen hours a day with a modified Top-Forty format that included jazz, classical music, news, sports, and public service material.⁸ The station mission was to entertain and provide a unifying force for GSU's student body and serve as a training ground for students interested in a broadcasting career. Carl Heyward, a disc jockey who had some professional radio experience, said two factions developed at the station.

There's such controversy for so long, the more strait-laced kids – sorority and fraternity during the Vietnam War people were turning their back on the class-oriented gathering. These were crew cut pop radio kids who wanted to get into broadcasting in the most traditional, strait-laced, narrow way possible. Then there was another faction that emulated the feel of WPLO. There was a big explosion of album-oriented music of progressive rock, and we were right there in the beginning, middle and possibly end of that wave. (Heyward, 12/13/20)

The albums requested for record service by the labels included The Doors' *Strange Days*, the first Led Zeppelin album, and *In a Gadda Da Vida* by Iron Butterfly.

To get more listeners, WRAS managers supported a national effort to put mandatory FM radio receivers in car stereos. FM radio became standard in all American made cars by the mid to late 1970s, bringing stereo programming to drivers stuck in traffic, eventually becoming a key factor for delivering the radio product to consumers. WRAS Promotions Director Eddie Reece talked about the impact of the station's "Stereo Odyssey" (Figure 1.3) format on college radio industry.

The record companies were all over us. Because they wanted us to play all the albums, so they interacted with us all the time. I had backstage passes to every concert, every club. Everybody knew who we were. And if you were into drugs and alcohol, you had all you wanted. We'd go to those listening parties and just tables of anything you wanted. (Reece, 12/27/20)

⁷ Transcript from Inaugural WRAS broadcast, January 18, 1971, WRAS Radio Archives.

⁸ "WRAS-FM On the Air," *Georgia State Signal*, January 21, 1971, 1.

1.5 We Were Slick, But Not Slimy

The successful music programming of WRAS soon sparked interest from commercial broadcasters in Atlanta. Once again, Carl Heyward, a DJ at WRAS.

We were slick but not slimy. We were also very open, but we were tight. It really was an undeniable force. For us it was about communication. (Heyward, 12/13/20)

WKLS, a radio station that was broadcasting easy listening (so-called “beautiful music,”) flipped its format in 1974 becoming 96 Rock. Drew Murray was a WRAS Music Director in 1973.

Question: What is beautiful music?

Answer: Dentist office music for lack of a better term. Background music. All instrumental. Occasionally with covers of popular hits as you will. You’d hear the Bert Campfert Orchestra doing the Beatles *Yesterday*. (Murray, 12/19/20)

The new station slogan for WKLS referenced its placement on the radio dial.

“96 Rock – Atlanta’s pure rock and roll.”

Its dramatic switch to album rock forced programmers at WRAS to move away from album hits and play deeper cuts, songs from records that still resonated with their target audience, 18–34-year-old men. Murray and his colleagues facilitated their own music transition.

Certain things we seemed to be ahead of the curve on. That started making an impact in the marketplace. The record companies started paying attention to that. Record stores would start bugging the record companies, hey we got a bunch of kids in here asking for this. And we need you to send it to us. Because that college station down at 88.5 is playing it. The concert promoters started paying attention too. There was a demand for the band to come play Atlanta and people to buy tickets. (Murray, 12/19/20)

Though there were several attempts to program Top 40 or popular music, the essence of WRAS stayed in a stereo rock, and sometime progressive free form, format. That was until the

explosion of punk and new wave music in the mid to late 1970s. Mark Williams was the WRAS Music Director in 1980.

Roughly around 78 to 82, 83 where music was radically evolving and changing. You had influence of bands out of New York and UK, and Los Angeles and fortunate enough to be in Georgia where you had the scene happening simultaneously in Athens and Atlanta. (Williams, 01/23/21)

College radio industry once again took notice, pushing WRAS to play their artists and report to the radio trade journals. Cledra White was another WRAS Music Director.

They're trying to get you to play their records on your station and hopefully it will go into a rotation and that more people are going to hear it, back in the day they would go and buy it. So, if was a progressive station they wanted to get the progressive records that they couldn't really go to another radio station at the time that was only playing Top 40 or had a set playlist. It was hard to break a new artist. They wanted us to break these artists. At the time, RAS was one of only two college stations that reported to Billboard, like once a month, twice a month. (White, 12/20/20)

The changes in WRAS's programming caused an adverse reaction for some who thought things were getting too esoteric. In one disruptive moment in 1979, the station's new General Manager Michael Garretson banned and even destroyed albums to force staff to play music more in tune to what he called the Georgia State student audience. Banned groups included Captain Beefheart, Ultravox, and Tangerine Dream. Garretson specifically destroyed a Devo album (Figure 1.4) with a song he considered offensive, "Mongoloid."

The main thing I wanted to do at the time was tightening things up more. To be more consistent. If I'm listening to RAS at three o'clock in the morning, I'm going to hear the same thing at three o'clock in the afternoon. A lot of people had issues because things were changing. (Garretson, 01/02/21)

Garretson told the *Atlanta Constitution* that the dispute stemmed from "ideological differences" about the station's music.⁹ Some staffers were fired, others quit. WRAS went off the

⁹ Bill King, "Format Dispute Temporarily Takes WRAS-FM Off Air," *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 27, 1979, 30.

air for four days. There was no one left to operate WRAS. Things got nasty at a hearing by the Georgia State student communications committee. DJ Jeanne Potter led the resistance to the format change.

Staff members were accused of serious breaches of conduct. Drug use on campus. Illicit sex on campus. Lying and failing to follow FCC rules. Michael Garretson, his admin staff were removing from the WRAS collection. They had taken large nails and scratched records so they could not be played on the air. (Potter, 12/27/20)

Mark Williams, who recently joined the station, was one of the few people left under Garretson. Under his term as Music Director, punk and new wave was relegated to evening specialty shows. One program was called “Pure Mania.” A playlist (Figure 1.5) featured bands like the Dead Kennedy’s, the Circle Jerks, and the Buzzcocks. Williams said the record industry responded to the Garretson format change.

Most of the record labels got together and said to Mike and myself: “We don’t need another commercial station, we like you guys, and we pay attention to you because you have this reporting status to all the trades and do affect breaking new bands, so if you’re just going to play Hall and Oates and Michael Jackson like everyone else, that’s no interest to us.” (Williams, 01/04/21)

That pressure from the record industry ultimately led WRAS to switch its format back to resemble what other college radio stations around the nation were playing.

1.6 Album 88 Was 100 Percent an Elite Radio Station

The 1980s are sometimes referred to as the “Golden Age of College Radio.” Student-run stations around the country were the first to expose audiences to now iconic groups like the B-52s, U-2, and R.E.M. Mike Mills, the founding guitarist from R.E.M., referred to a DIY (do it yourself) spirit that led artists, college radio programmers, and their audiences away from the established commercial record industry.

Our interaction with college radio was massive. We were contemporaries in our initial years in the beginning and really the rise of college radio. It was a mutually beneficial agreement. We could make a cassette or a 45 and send it to college radio stations around the country. Extremely helpful, particularly good foot in the door, we provide content, they provide bodies, if you want to bring it down to those mercenary terms. (Mills, 01/26/21)

Artists would deliver materials in person to WRAS, which would promote groups that travelled specifically to Atlanta to perform for audiences built by the college station. Vanessa Hay is the singer and founding member of the Athens, Georgia group Pylon.

You make your own music, you put out your own single and take it to the record stores yourself, you design the artwork, you promote yourself. We saw the creation of what became known as the college rock thing. (Hay, 02/06/21)

In 1982, WRAS's general manager Jeff Walker and his program director Jane Davis determined that the average Georgia State student was a 27-year-old female. They started programming what they called "softer edged music" to appeal to that audience member, and ultimately all listeners. Davis said women hear music differently than men.

As a rule, women don't listen to that harsher stuff for long periods of time, they may like one song like that, maybe an anthem song but they don't tend to go that direction. I'm not going to program punk in the regular rotation unless it was punk and kind of pop. It had to have that pop hook somehow. It had to be soulful. It had to be danceable. If a woman were listening to it and she didn't even know it, it wouldn't necessarily bother her and send her running from the room. (Davis, 01/23/21)

Steve Backer, of CBS Records, noted the relationship between WRAS and Atlanta commercial stations. "The major record labels," he wrote in the radio trade journal *New Music Report*, "are realizing the potential of a viable, professional college radio station, like WRAS. College stations must continue to pick the early hits and when the commercial station reacts positively to that college hit, the college radio station should then pick a second and third track to influence the lifespan of the record." Backer concluded by telling his colleagues in college radio:

“You are the trendsetters, believe me, commercial radio is listening, and your influence can be incredible.”¹⁰

WRAS, which had a legacy of professionalism, started programming morning and evening drive time, and heavy, medium, and light music rotation for consistency, and it conjured a slogan, Album 88, to set itself apart from other local broadcasters. These standard commercial radio tactics would not only be used to attract and hold an audience, but to make the case for a massive power increase for its transmitter range. In 1983, WRAS/Album 88 applied for a construction permit to build a broadcast tower that expanded the signal from 20-thousand watts to 100-thousand watts. The college radio industry again took notice and so did Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB), which was seeking a statewide radio network. This led to the first of many takeover attempts by GPB. Jeff Walker was the 1982-1984 WRAS General Manager.

They went to the Regents and said, “we think you need to define college radio as 100-watts and if a station has more than 100-watts, we want you to transfer the license for that station from the institution, the university, to Georgia Public Broadcasting.” The raise in power at WRAS would create a liability issue, a liability issue that would be too much for college students to deal with. The premise that it would create a liability was false. (Walker, 05/07/21)

During the mid to late 1980s, as the station progressed with the 100-thousand-watt tower construction in the Panthersville neighborhood in Dekalb County, a palpable air of responsibility, which some even called paranoia, fell over the station. Student administrators knew the power increase, putting WRAS on par with commercial broadcasters, made the station valuable, and with more listeners, came responsibility to follow Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules on public service programming and obscenity violations. Tod Elmore was an Album 88

¹⁰ Steve Backer, “Dialogue,” *New Music Report*, 1983, WRAS Radio Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

Promotions Director in the mid-1980s. He described what would become the “elite nature” of the station’s relationship with its audience and the connection with the record industry.

In the 80s in Atlanta, the radio station was really treated by the industry as a tastemaker, influencer radio station. There were other radio stations across the country that were similar, but I think we were an elite. Album 88 was 100 percent an elite radio station to the industry because Atlanta was a major market, the station had a major signal. (Elmore, 01/04/21)

On March 26, 1987, WRAS/Album 88 flipped the switch on 100-thousand watts of FM radio power, making it the most powerful student run college radio station in the country. Local and national media took notice as well as the popular TV program *Jeopardy*.

Alex Trebek question: Here we go double jeopardy time. WRAS FM in this largest Georgia city, is the USA’s most powerful college radio station.

Contestant answer: What is Atlanta.¹¹

WRAS played on the uniqueness of its student body as metropolitan in nature since there were no dormitories at the time and students lived throughout the area. As Album 88’s general manager wrote in *The Signal*, the power increase provided geographical unity and “broadened the range of its academic and social pursuits” for the citizens of the Atlanta community.¹²

The station became the darling of the college radio industry. It’s music charts featured in national trade magazines, like the *College Music Journal* (CMJ). Staffers who attended trade conventions were mobbed by fellow college radio programmers and record label reps. Though most of the attention was positive, some critics questioned whether Album 88 was becoming too professional, too formatted, and too commercial. Wasn’t college radio supposed to be more free-form, like’s the station’s Atlanta radio dial neighbor, Georgia Tech’s WREK? Album 88’s Kim Saade was the 1990 *Gavin Report* College Radio Music Director of the Year.

¹¹ “Radio Cities,” *Jeopardy*, Show#5256, June 18, 2007.

¹² “A Tower for WRAS,” *Georgia State Signal*, July 26, 1983, 8A.

Interview Question: What do you say to that kind of criticism that it was just over formulated?

Answer: Well, you know maybe I must answer that yeah, maybe it was. You can look back critically and say maybe we fine-tuned it a little too much at one point. You know it's true. I never felt that way at the time, I think we provided a true alternative to what was out there. (Saade, 01/25/21)

Pressure from the record industry also manifested itself in the WRAS playlist. Record stores in Atlanta often featured a "As Heard on WRAS" section in prime real estate, the so-called end caps of shopping aisles. Newspaper advertisements (Figures 1.6) from the local Turtles Records store chain featured the "As Heard on Album 88" banner with records and prices below.¹³ College radio already was acknowledged with breaking The Clash, Adam Ant, The Police, The Go Go's, Joan Jett, Human Leagues, Elvis Costello (Figure 1.7), The Psychedelic Furs, and Eddy Grant. WRAS Music Director Jeff Clark oversaw the selection of songs in the late 1980s.

With 100-thousand watts album 88 had a lot of influence on record sales and concert attendance in Atlanta for these acts. It had a huge impact and so the record labels, the college radio reps would put extreme pressure on the music director of the station. I was music director for two years, so I got a lot of pressure to play all kinds of stuff you know heavy pressure. And I resisted most of it and I gave in on certain occasions and I regret doing that. (Clark, 02/21/21)

In a top ten radio market like Atlanta, music directors made contentious choices, some of which could make or break record sales. Pressure from the industry was exerted by music access and competition. WRAS intersected with the local economy through record store sales and promotions.

¹³ Turtles Records advertisement, *Creative Loafing*, WRAS Radio Archives, 1988.

1.7 They Wanted to Hear from The College Radio Bunnies

The 1990s at WRAS saw the rise of the commercial alternative format and the burgeoning rap, hip-hop, and urban music scene. In 1992, another Atlanta commercial FM format switch happened that mimicked Album 88 programming, like 96 Rock a decade earlier. Classic Rock Power 99 made its debut as 99X in October, becoming one of the most influential commercial alternative or modern rock station in the country. The station hyped its new format on air with a countdown to the 12-noon launch. The 99X DJs took caller questions. Here's the DJ's stumbling response to a question about Album 88.

Interview Question: To what extent is your new change a reflection of the success of college radio?

Answer: It's not a reflection of college radio success. It's a reflection of the changed attitudes and mentality of the listening public that a lot of them have been disenfranchised or left radio all together. It's a response to that not a response to any success of college radio station. (Question) So you're going to kind of diverge from what Album 88 plays? (Answer) It's hard to explain. We're not intending to compete with them. You may hear a few songs on here that you hear there. We are going in our very own kind of direction.¹⁴

Some WRAS staff members applauded the new 99X format. Cecily Walker, the WRAS General Manager, called the station.

The day that they flipped the switch I took the day off, all morning trying to get through on the phone, I finally got through, told them who I was, they put me on the air, and I welcomed them to, hey have at it. I'm glad you guys are here, have fun. It's a great place to be, the music is awesome, rock on. And that was it. And then I realized what I did might be taken as an act of betrayal to the WRAS people. (Walker, 03/14/21)

Some at Album 88 felt betrayed. Though supporting the wider commercial exposure of alternative music, staffers at WRAS said they should have been acknowledged for their work in

¹⁴ MRC Networks, "Power 99 Flips to 99X Atlanta," YouTube Video, 18:37, October 26, 1992, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASPFmHmqrgc>.

exposing the Atlanta audience to alternative music for decades. At least one WRAS staff member worked at Power 99 when the station was considering changing its format. Album 88 DJ Kim Turner was an intern in their promotions department.

They were taking credit for everything. Believe me. They were taking credit for all of it like they had taken credit for the format is how it came down. That's the way I would describe it. (Turner, 02/20/21)

Turner said she was called into a meeting at the station to discuss college rock programming before Power 99 became 99X.

I was taken into a room. Me and the guys from WUOG, the Athens station, they took us into a programming meeting, and they played REM. They asked us do you think we should play this, and I said yeah you need to play it and they were the first commercial station to break REM. I just remember they wanted to hear from the college radio bunnies, and we said add it add it. They became darlings of that format, and that's when they changed it. (Turner, 02/20/21)

In comparing 99X and WRAS playlists from the week of January 26, 1993, there is crossover. Groups both stations were playing included The Sundays, Catherine Wheel, Overwhelming Colorfast, The Gin Blossoms, Annie Lennox, Suzanne Vega, and Sugar.¹⁵ WRAS soon scratched the crossover songs from their playlist and focused on deeper cuts and lesser-known artists. This well-worn path of resistance to commercial radio would play out through the rest of the 1990s and into the 2000s and was one factor that contributed to the station eventually becoming irrelevant to its core audience.

1.8 College Rap Radio Ran This Town

Some station alums consider the rise of commercial alternative rock as the beginning of the end for the relevancy of WRAS within the Atlanta radio market. There certainly were some huge college rock groups in the 1990s like Nirvana, The Pixies, and The Smashing Pumpkins.

¹⁵ Playlist comparison given to me by former WRAS GM Jeff Walker, July 14, 2021.

Those groups were launched by nationally by college stations in the late 1980s but were then equally embraced by the commercial broadcasters in the 1990s. WRAS featured many of the lesser known and local alternative groups at its “Sonic Sunday” concerts. The WRAS staff also released two compilation CDs in the mid-1990s. *WRAS 88.5 FM Presents: Radio Oddyssey* (Figures 1.8) was released in 1996 and *Radio Oddyssey Two: The Georgia Music Show* came out one year later. Album 88 Production Director Shachar Oren led the project.

I worked for a year to get all the publishers and all the record companies to sign over the rights legally to Georgia State and I worked with the GSU legal department to get all the paperwork done, all the waivers done so we could release a compilation called *Radio Oddyssey* with two CDs with 19 tracks recorded live on 88.5. And we released it globally through EMI. (Oren, 04/27/21)

Almost five-thousand *Radio Oddyssey* CDs were sold at \$15 each, generating more than \$30,000 for the station budget. (You can still find them on Discogs, a popular audio database, selling for about \$5 each.)¹⁶

As commercial interests embraced one format, other musical genres were on the rise. Rap and hip-hop, under the umbrella of so-called urban music, were making headway on the Album 88 programming schedule. The “Rhythm and Vibes” show started in 1989 and gave way to the “Weekend Wrecking Crew,” with “Tha Bomb,” and “The Drop” programs on WRAS. Commercial Adult Urban Contemporary radio in Atlanta, stations like V-103, at the time first rejected the music. Their tag line was “No Rap” due to the music’s reputation for violence and misogyny. Throughout the 1990s, Randall Moore and Talib Shabazz hosted the “Rhythm and Vibes” program.

College rap radio ran this town in the early 90s because V103 wouldn’t play hip-hop at all. That was their policy – no rap. People don’t understand you could

¹⁶ *WRAS 88.5FM Presents: Radio Oddyssey*, Discogs database, August 9, 2021, <https://www.discogs.com/Variou WRAS-885FM-Presents-Radio-Oddysey/master/361700>.

literally not find this music on the air, much less in record stores. (Moore, 03/09/21)

This is during the time of the PMRC, the Parents Music Resource Coalition, Tipper Gore. You know the whole Luke Skywalker censorship era. Major market radio stations, Black music, urban music stations were really frowning on rap music at that point. (Shabazz, 04/08/21)

As listeners came to notice, the music spoke the truth of the urban community and stations would again embrace another feature of Album 88 programming. Again, allegations of commercial appropriation, in this case urban slang that Talib Shabazz called “biting.”

If you were caught copying somebody, that was a term we called “biting” – biting someone’s style, someone’s rhymes and that was like the big sin in hip-hop not being original. We caught V103 biting our playlist. One of the DJs, Harold Banks, said that he didn’t screen music, he just listened to our show. (Shabazz, 04/08/21)

WRAS was the first to play Outkast, a now famous duo from Atlanta, that is one of the most successful hip-hop groups, selling over 25 million records.¹⁷

Electronic music, or House Music, was also made an impact on the Album 88 schedule. At the time, there were no outlets on the radio for this genre. The music was mostly performed live at clubs or at warehouse parties. “Planet 8” host Eve Payor said, WRAS became the center of the electronic and house scene in the 1990s, first with a program hosted by the House Fairy, and then her program promoting shows and spinning the records.

I was able to bring in some of these promoters and the acts they were having on the next night or even later that evening and showcase them. And then bring in different styles of music, so everybody was doing their part. It was a little fragmented, but we all came together. And I think WRAS was a big force for making this happen in a more cohesive way. You didn’t have to have money to tune into the radio, you just turn it on and enjoy – live streaming so to speak. (Payor, 03/26/21)

¹⁷ Phil W. Hudson, “Big Boi talks Outkast, Organized Noise, Boomiverse,” *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, July 3, 2017, <https://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/news/2017/07/03/q-a-big-boi-talks-outkast-organized-noize.html>.

Forces in the next two decades would forever change the music industry and in turn alter the history of WRAS. The 2000s brought more unique cultural production to Atlanta from WRAS. The station started a magazine called *Eighty-8*, featuring music reviews, short articles, program, and concert schedules. To cover the burgeoning Atlanta alternative music scene, Album 88 hosted live concerts on the Georgia State campus and at the station's annual fundraiser, 'RAS Fest. A local group, The Black Lips, provided one memorable show on campus, captured by a GSU TV crew and available on YouTube.

“1,2,3,4...music...”¹⁸

Adam Devore, known as the DJ Adam Bomb, served two terms as WRAS General Manager.

It was just huge, everyone showed up. People from the school, people from outside the school, everybody showed up because the Black Lips are huge and barely get to play in town. (A. Devore, 03/24/21)

Unlike previous decades where the Athens, Georgia music scene made big contributions to college radio with groups like R.E.M., Pylon, and Love Tractor, Devore said it was Atlanta's turn to rock the 2000s.

Athens was kind of old guard and resting on its laurels regarding R.E.M. Every time I went to Athens I was not impressed with the music. I thought it was overplaying its music city hand. When you got into a group of industry people – you know a lot of people are saying Atlanta is the next Seattle. Deerhunter and The Black Lips were huge. (A. Devore, 03/24/21)

Artists like T.I., Outkast, and Cee Lo Green helped establish Atlanta's hip-hop scene. Jibril Antar, of the “Weekend Wrecking Crew,” played those groups but more often took the time-honored WRAS path of resistance to commercially available music.

We would play their music, but again the deeper album cuts not necessarily their radio singles, the record that were being pushed on other stations like 95.5 or V-

¹⁸ indieATL, “Black Lips – Live Juvenile,” YouTube video, 4:52, January 25, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhpozXYaDBQ>.

103. We would get more into the album cuts and to the songs that weren't popular. (Antar, 04/01/21)

Marcel Daniels hosted the "Rhythm and Vibes" program.

Breaking new records from national underground artists highlighting our local underground talent even though Atlanta of course had been huge for all kinds of music, especially Black music in terms of R&B and hip-hop since the early 90s. (Daniels, 04/13/21)

1.9 It's College Radio on Steroids

A force that started in the 2000s and exploded virtually overnight was not a band or a new genre, it was the distribution of music via the internet. The launch of Napster, then legal file sharing sites, along with portable digital media players like the iPod, allowed users to create a personal music library of thousands of songs. "Houseworks" DJ Mike Zarin adopted the new technology but said there was a cost to one local part of the college radio industry.

It was in 06 for me that I went with a laptop and started doing digital files which is now the most popular way for DJs to play at that point, not just with a laptop but MP3s. It became more difficult to find records locally in Atlanta. Record stores closed. (Zarin, 01/04/21)

In 2008, GPB attempted yet again to take over WRAS. Adam Devore, WRAS's general manager, said GPB was just waiting for the station to make a mistake. The entire staff was always on alert.

Everybody knew GPB has always been sitting there waiting for somebody to really mess up and play something super explicit. (A. Devore, 03/24/21)

Georgia State sent a letter to GPB defending the station. It reads in part.

"...the GPB proposal limits our ability to fully promote Georgia State University. While GPB is offering compensation, the value to the University of our 100,000-watt FM signal and our ability to maintain an independent program format is much greater.

In our efforts to engage students in student life at Georgia State, we believe that WRAS is one of our greatest assets, and one which should not be compromised.”¹⁹

Diana Espero, known as Nina D, was a GSU student from California who hosted a hip-hop show.

Because it was 100 thousand watts, I remember getting calls from Alabama, it would reach that far. And you’re thinking oh my gosh I’m controlling all this. I might be on the most popular station, we were not a corporation, it’s college radio but it’s college radio on steroids so we had to be careful. (Espero, 04/07/21)

Former General Manager Millie De Chirico said the responsibility of running WRAS professionally was always a factor in beating back these types of takeover attempts, even though the staff was not professional and young student volunteers.

When I started at ‘RAS I was 18 years old. I think it’s actually shocking to have an 18-year-old kid on a radio station as powerful as ‘RAS, I was like oh my god what was I doing on a hundred thousand watts. That’s totally insane. (De Chirico, 03/25/21)

1.10 We Didn’t Want to Lose It Completely

The early 2010s represented a major turning point in the history of Georgia State radio. Declining student involvement due to internet streaming platforms, increasing competition in the Atlanta radio market, and efforts to take over the station by Georgia Public Broadcasting were building slowly. In the final days of the Spring 2014 semester, Georgia State and GPB announced an agreement. Alum 88 General Manager Alayna Fabricius was shocked to get the news during what she expected would be a routine meeting.

I step in, and they start talking and it’s kind of like, record scratch – what. I was very confused to say the least about this whole deal they were telling me about and honestly, I feel kind of. I wish the story was like me standing up like no, you’re not going to take the station away from us, this is the student station.

¹⁹ Ciara Frisbie, “Documents reveal GSU-GPB partnership discussions date back to 2012,” *Georgia State Signal*, May 28, 2014, <https://georgiastatesignal.com/documents-reveal-gsu-gpb-partnership-discussions-date-back-to-2012/>.

Doing some big dramatic. But it was like – what? Not really knowing what to do. Shell shocked, not fully grasping what had happened. (Fabricius, 04/08/21)

The GSU student voice and the student programming is on ten hours a day, seven days a week. That means student's program less than 50 percent of the FM dial air from 7 p.m.-5 a.m. Georgia Public Broadcasting airs National Public Radio and local news and talk fourteen hours a day seven days a week, including key audience slots, morning and evening drive time, and midday. WRAS broadcasts on a high-definition radio signal in those hours, but with limited distribution. HD signals, which are carrier signals on the FM band, are not usually available on radio receivers. Most new car radio receivers can pick up HD signals, but it depends on the make, model, and year of the vehicle. Otherwise, special HD receivers would have to be purchased separately. Fray Devore was the WRAS Music Director in 2014 when the arrangement occurred.

It seemed like it was such a terrible consolation prize, well at least you get the HD stream and we realized, and we felt very strongly that we were losing our influence and our power and our voice. (F. Devore, 04/13/21)

This was a financial partnership deal brokered without input from student organizations or campus public notice. The deal resides in the realm of Georgia political and media elites and an ambitious university President, Mark Becker.²⁰ It will be a win-win for Georgia State, Becker and GPB CEO Teya Ryan said of the partnership. The agreement sparked public protests and a lawsuit by station alums. Students proceeded carefully with a constant feeling of retribution if challenged. Jenny Nesvetailova also served as Music Director in 2014.

Interview Question: Do you think that was for fear of retribution?

Answer: I think so. I think we were all just scared. Maybe some of us thought that if we did all that stuff, they would take away the little that we had. At the end of the day, we still had the after seven slot on the radio and during the day even

²⁰GSU President Mark Becker and GPB CEO Teya Ryan both declined to comment for this essay.

though it was on HD radio and online it still was something. We had read articles about other college radio station where they just placed a lock on the door and take it away completely. We didn't want to lose it completely. (Nesvetailova, 04/12/21)

The GPB flip to the FM signal was delayed by one month. Protests died down, the lawsuit was dropped, and the arrangement altered the course of student-led programming. Hannah Frank took over the General Manager position in 2015.

Interview Question: What was that like trying to pick up the pieces?

Answer: Bizarre honestly. My year as general manager was very bizarre, I think everyone was still healing and it was an uncomfortable time at the station. And I hope the culture has healed at this point to be fun and exciting again. At the end there, at least for me, just losing all that airtime it lost some of its shine for me. (Frank, 04/27/21)

Despite failed attempts to wrestle the station's full airtime back to student programmers, some alumni believe the FM signal should be totally abandoned and WRAS should instead focus on their high-definition signals and internet streaming. Dave Hill was an Album 88 Program Manager in the 1990s and is still working in commercial radio after thirty years.

The growing monster of the music industry is streaming media. And Album 88 has a chance to make a transition to that and if handled properly and handled appropriately there is a huge upside to what this radio station can be. Everybody's got to get over the delivery process of being just over the air, it's about the brand. The brand is Album 88, and the brand will continue to be Album 88. The way it's delivered may be radically different to what we are accustomed to, and we shouldn't fear that. (Hill, 03/28/21)

Zach Lancaster, who led the WRAS alumni group during the protests, said nothing can replace the FM, or terrestrial signal, experience and that student were robbed of an opportunity to do what the station has always done.

From the standpoint of a student what does a terrestrial station mean. It's more than a thing for money, it's more than something for ears. It's a way of being thrust into a kind of position of responsibility where you must sink or swim. You must program the time; you must be on the air. You must uphold the image of the

station. But I would flip the question around. What is GPB's obsession with a terrestrial line? Why do they want it, what's their stake? (Lancaster, 04/22/21)

Though the 2014 agreement motives seem unclear, the GPB and GSU deal involving the radio station may have been a part of a bigger plan by former Georgia State President Mark Becker to cement his legacy. Local journalist Max Blau covered the story for *Creative Loafing*.

I don't know his motives pushing that deal forward, I do know there's a shift away from that weird, storied bubbles within Georgia State back then and one moving towards a larger more mainstream sort of university experience.

Interview Question: But the alums say the WRAS-GPB deal is the stain on that legacy and the students that went through it said they were pawns. So there does appear to be some wreckage left over from this legacy.

Answer: That's what students told me as well. I do think this is emblematic of the way Atlanta has developed in the modern era of the city. The idea of big development and growth for some supposed greater cause is the story of Atlanta. The idea of growing and making big decisions in hopes of achieving something greater in a quote, unquote "world class level" often comes at the expense of ordinary Atlantans that are cast aside. Those deals are often made in the name of them, but it often rarely serves them in the same way as the people in power are saying. (Blau, 05/02/21)

Through fifty years of success, struggle, and tension within the GSU community and the metropolitan Atlanta radio market, Album 88 is still on the air. It is one of the most celebrated and powerful American college radio stations. Down, but not out, WRAS staff is looking toward the future in uncertain terms, but with a legacy. The once symbiotic relationship between local college radio and the music industry that exposed artists to a population, sold records, and spurred concert ticket sales is no longer a successful business model. Most artists now release their new music on personal social media accounts and sell directly to the consumer. The force of WRAS student programming to impact cultural production in Atlanta is therefore diminished. Joel Nash was an Album 88 General Manager when the station went to 100-thousand watts in 1987.

Despite the best efforts, that signal 88.5 FM was taken, at least in part, by another faction. The idea back then that there are factions that would love, who have expressed, and come to the university asking to have that signal. They want it. And they tried to make arguments that it should go to some other faction rather than the students of GSU. (Nash, 02/28/21)

Time and changing technical culture impact the broadcast market, with radio stations bought and sold, commercial format whiplash, and station staff hired and fired. This is the cold hard business of media. Once again, 2014 WRAS alumni Fray Devore.

From a legal standpoint the station belongs to Georgia State, and they made a business decision, and they disrespected the history of the station and they disrespected Atlanta. I think as far as we were a part in some ways the culture of Atlanta and suddenly, we had no platform. (F. Devore, 04/13/21)

What's left of the WRAS signal should be preserved and with a new incoming Georgia State president, M. Brian Blake, maybe there is an opportunity to bring back Album 88 as the complete, diverse voice of the GSU student. As the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic proved, news and information for the Georgia State community is vital. The *88 Affairs* program featured GSU administrators and experts talking directly to students and staff through the radio.

88 Affairs Host: Provost Wendy Hensel thanks for joining me.

Hensel: Good to be here thanks for the invitation.

Host: Provost Hensel, we've seen the first week of classes at GSU both in person and online...what is your early assessment.

Hensel: So far so good. (Hensel, 09/01/20)

In the University's quest for diversity, Blake may want to consider the lack of difference between daytime WRAS/GPB programming and its National Public Radio competitor, the well-established Atlanta public station WABE. The radio stations broadcast some of the same national programming (often at the very same time, as when WRAS and WABE both air NPR reports simultaneously). There is a line in the 2014 agreement with GPB that says with thirty days'

notice either side could pull out of the arrangement and the station would be handed back to students within a year. This possibility would have to be driven by the GSU students but seems unlikely with the apparent lack of interest by those students to return to full 24/7 programming.

As noted earlier, the boom of streaming audio and internet music archives that started in the early 2000s led to a decline in radio audience listenership and therefore a lack of interest by students to fully embrace and work at their campus station. Another possibility is that the station's FCC license could be sold by the University to the WRAS alumni group, which would run it with professional staff and student volunteers. A similar arrangement kept Princeton University's WPRB on the air. WRAS was valued at \$25 million in 2014. That price has probably decreased in recent years and is a multi-million-dollar purchase even possible by WRAS alumni?

Regardless of ideas to save WRAS and restore it to its full relevancy, the station's history exemplifies a general rise of college radio in the 1970s and 1980s across the United States. College radio may have plateaued in the 1990s with commercial radio embracing the alternative music format. In recent years there's been a regrettable decline and even elimination of college radio. This trend reflects the higher education move away from humanities funding. A national commercial radio trend has placed stations in the hands of corporate giants with little or no reference to localization.

Commercial broadcasters and cash-strapped universities made substantial profits at the expense of college radio. In the end, both students and local communities lose an asset for freedom of expression, as the public-owned airwaves turn into a homogenous, bland cacophony of voices and music.

CHAPTER TWO: RACE AND RADIO

One of the key components of college radio programming involves decisions made by staff, usually the program director, to determine what music to play. Often these decisions are guided by professional resources such as national charts and local ratings books. But in surveying WRAS's fifty-year history, it is also important to look at currents below the surface, which show the importance of racial and gender considerations in Album 88's programming. Salient issues included divisions amongst staff on what it means to be Black, who should decide what is Black music, and the challenging the prevailing conservative climate at Georgia State.

Urban music in the late 1980s and 1990s, which would eventually encompass rap and hip-hop, forced changes in WRAS's playlist and staff training. Data on WRAS's potential audience in the early 1980s contributed to programming music specifically for the average Georgia State student, a 27-year-old white female. This section looks at racial issues beginning shortly after the founding of WRAS in 1971.

It's important, once again, to note that station staff were students in their late teen and early twenties and with the changing demographics of GSU and the rise of urban music on college radio, those students were having to deal with real world problems. Some staff admitted to making mistakes and many now look back with changed perspectives.

2.1 We Were Attacking What Had Been Established

The history of WRAS/Album 88 aligns with the growing numbers of African American students on campus and their struggles to impact University programs and culture. A July 1972 article from the *Signal* newspaper announced, "Something different added to the program log at

WRAS.” The headline, “new ‘African Vibrations’ relates Black culture.”²¹ Carl Heyward, one of the few Black students at the station, was one of the hosts of “African Vibrations.” He came in to WRAS from WPLO and had professional radio experience. He admits he had a bit of attitude.

I walked in one day and what came out of my mouth was not planned and I kind of laughed at myself, but it was kind of telling, I said something to the affect that I’m here to be your star or some sh*t like that you know. I don’t even know where that came from. (Heyward, 12/13/20)

Heyward, who later went on to become the WRAS Program Director, said the early 1970s were a transitional period in American culture.

We were attacking what had been established without question. Understand that culturally, artistically, racially, politically there was nothing but change going on in those times. So those foundations were either going to erode, adapt, change, or prevail. And they did not prevail. (Heyward, 12/13/20)

There was a noticeable divide among African American staff at WRAS in the early 1970s. DJs like Carl Heyward (Figure 2.1) were well versed on the aspects of programming progressive music, mainly for a white, college-aged audience. He wanted to strike a balance between what music the white audience expected from WRAS and the expectations among other Black students.

Fear of a Black Planet. It was that kind of thing. First, I am the program director. To have a Black person in those days – the first this, the first that – wasn’t something I was interested in. The Black fraternities also disavowed me because I was playing progressive, primarily white music even though my balance was with the introduction of African Americans was a two-sided thing. It was introducing the majority white culture to this historical, musical, political thing but it was also putting those same elements into context for the African American student body as well because I wasn’t part of that. I wasn’t emulating the traditional – may I say negro – orientation of perception of stay safe, stay strait-laced, go to school, and just fit in like everyone else. I wasn’t that guy. So, I was dealing with the majority culture’s view resistance to even saying the word Black African culture and then the fixed safe idea of most African American students. (Heyward, 12/13/20)

²¹ Janet Florence, “New ‘African Vibrations’ Relates Black Culture,” *Georgia State Signal*, July 12, 1972,

Others at WRAS were more assertive when it came to articulating and presenting Black culture.

Heyward said it was all about access and getting the right people together.

People like Lucius Gantt – very intelligent guy, very political, extremely street – he spoke a language I didn't speak. He was the one who instigated and kind of brought me to shame – what are you doing playing this white game. And we need something else that speaks to our culture. (Heyward, 12/13/20)

Lucius Gantt became the co-host of “African Vibrations” and brought that “street cred”

Heyward talked about to the program which aired on Wednesday night from 8-10 p.m.

Interview Question: Why was it called African Vibrations?

Answer: You must understand, when we came along the United States was not a “Kumbaya, My Lord” kind of nation. There were assassinations, riots in the late 60s. So, I came to Georgia State in January 69. There wasn't a handful of Blacks there. There were only a few of us but we were angry. We wanted to do something, we wanted to have a purpose. (Gantt, 01/30/21)

For many white students and the administration of Georgia State, Heyward and Gantt said programs like “African Vibrations” challenged the social and political norms.

It was a conservative administration. Georgia state begin to change. And people didn't like that. Black players on the team, Black people on the radio. Any spot a Black person got was a spot a white person used to have. (Heyward, 12/13/20)
This was the people's station. We had a very good relationship with our listeners. And if they had recommendations for music and interviews, we took that into consideration. So that is why we were the peoples show. (Gantt, 01/30/21)

The first General Manager of WRAS, Richard Belcher, who is white also confirmed the conservative climate at GSU in the early 1970s.

Big business school, big night school, which is typically older people, married people. That was not a hotbed of progressive music lovers. So, it made sense to make it a little bit more mainstream, but we did not want to do that. We wanted to be cool. We wanted to do something different. The powers that be thought that maybe this was not quite what they had in mind as the vision of WRAS. (Belcher, 03/07/20)

In 1975, just over 13 percent of Georgia State Spring enrollment was Black.²² The overwhelming majority of students seemed to think everything was OK, regarding race relations at the station. Joel Ackerman was the WRAS General Manager in 1975.

We welcomed everybody. We had some diverse characters. But I don't think Atlanta was as diverse as it is today. Which is too bad. (Ackerman, 12/05/20)

Cledra White was the station's first African American Music Director in 1978 and went on to work in the record industry. She said label reps were surprised when they saw her in person during station visits.

Unfortunately, I don't like being first, but I don't mind being first because that's just the way it goes. When the guys would come in after talking to me on the phone, more than likely they were surprised it was me. That I looked the way I did. I know that Michael Prince from Atlantic, and Jeff Cook was at Arista, when he walked, he said "has Prince come over and seen you yet, I can't wait to tell him." They were stunned. (White, 12/20/20)

It wasn't until 1998 that Black and non-Hispanic Spring enrollment at GSU topped 25 percent.²³ The late 1990s was also when residential buildings opened on campus, changing the geography of Georgia State. As noted earlier, it's important to stress that during the first twenty years of WRAS, a conservative administration oversaw the University. Some Black students referred to it as a "good old boys' network." Noah Langdale was the GSU President from 1957-1988. He's credited with helping change Georgia State from a night business school to a major urban university. John Day, an African American, worked in the GSU Student Affairs office beginning in 1983. He is now in charge of diversity training at GSU and provides some perspective.

Interview Question: Were you ever aware or was there a reputation that the school was being run by the good old boy network?

²² 1975 Fall Quarter Enrollment, "Research & Policy Analysis," University System of Georgia, https://www.usg.edu/research/assets/research/documents/enrollment_reports/qe_fall75.pdf.

²³ 1998 Fall Quarter Enrollment, "Research & Policy Analysis," University System of Georgia, https://www.usg.edu/research/assets/research/documents/enrollment_reports/fall98.pdf.

Answer: It was probably a very traditional southern institution. And you can look at the private and state institutions, which were either Black or white, there were integration challenges and issues for both the University of Georgia and Georgia State. To respond to that I would say yes there was the perception and probably by institutional culture that they were reflective of the times of southern culture. (Day, 04/29/21)

WRAS programmers featured some Black artists on the schedule, but they were typically relegated to specialty shows on jazz, blues, and reggae. These programs were usually hosted by white students, and the station's regular rotation followed a format that focused mostly on music from white artists. This programming seemed to follow a format repeated across the United States at college radio stations that tried to be as professional as possible. With its 1987 power increase to 100-thousand watts, WRAS was fully competing with commercial FM radio broadcasters in Atlanta. Katherine Rye Jewell is a history professor at Fitchburg State University and is writing a book on college radio and the culture wars from the 1970s through the 1990s called *Live from the Underground*.

The tension that you see a lot of times is you might have a general manager like we want to play more new music and we'll mix it in with the stuff that everyone knows. We will expose them to it. The same logic often applies to Black music which is a problem because what they are saying is we got this roster of white DJs and we're just going to throw on a few more Black artists so they get more exposure so our white DJs will become more knowledgeable. But it does nothing to disrupt the broader cultural power structure. It's not making sure they are more Black DJs on staff determining what those musical cuts are and that their voices are directing these rotations. (Jewell, 05/02/21)

WRAS DJ Hank Ernest started a specialty show in 1989 that was designed to specifically target his fellow students, like "African Vibrations" almost twenty years earlier. Ernest pitched the idea of a program called "Rhythm and Vibes," that seemed like a natural offshoot from a jazz program he hosted called "Infinite Vibes." Ernest was met with a rather insensitive reaction from the Album 88 General Manager.

During the time that I was beginning to formulate the idea there should be more music for Black students, I came to him with that idea. He said, this was his official response to me, what do you think we play music for Black people, music for red people, and yellow people, and orange people, and fat people, and skinny people is that what you think? I was stunned, I was blown away. (Ernest, 03/25/21)

“Rhythm and Vibes” was greenlighted after Ernest said he went to Georgia State President John Palms to report the incident.

Hank Ernest and other African American students say they specifically joined WRAS staff to force Black music on to the program schedule. Their logic: Since Black Georgia State students are paying the requisite student activity fee which funds the station, Black music for a Black audience must be programmed. Marcel Daniels hosted “Rhythm and Vibes” in later years.

If people are saying we belong here, we pay here, and we want to be heard and someone says no and continues to do what has been done, we’re comfortable with what we are doing is classic conservatism. This is the way it is, why change. You have a fair argument but we’re not going to listen, we’re not going to hear it. (Daniels, 04/13/21)

The late 1980s and the early 1990s saw the vilification of rap and hip-hop as violent and misogynistic, even though the genre was exploding into popular culture. Some common signals of the era’s culture wars included:

The Parents Music Resource Center got record labels in 1985 to place a warning sticker on albums that contained songs with explicit lyrical content, not only for rap but so-called “Porn Rock” from some heavy metal groups, as well as Prince, and Madonna.²⁴

In 1988, the song “F**k the Police” by N-W-A was an assault on police brutality and racial profiling.

Two Live Crew’s *As Nasty AS They Wanna Be* became the first album in history to be deemed legally obscene in 1990.

²⁴ Mathieu Deflen, “Popular Culture and Social Control: The Moral Panis on Music Labeling,” *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45(1), February 24, 2020, 2-24.

In 1991, the Film *Boyz N The Hood* became a critical and commercial success. The film, a gritty coming of age “hood drama,” was violent and rap music played a pivotal role in its storytelling.

Also in 1991, N-W-A’s record sales surpassed R.E.M.’s marking the first time that a rap group claimed the top spot on the Billboard 200.²⁵

Rolling Stone magazine had proclaimed R.E.M. as the “ultimate college band” of the 1980s.²⁶

2.2 Can I Please Get My Type of Music on the Air?

Riots broke out across the United States, including Atlanta, after the Rodney King verdict in April 1992. The following November, racial tension rocked the Georgia State campus. Protests by Black students, who comprised 18 percent of the student body, shutdown the campus. The sit-ins were apparently sparked by the N-word pointing to a trash can near a fraternity office. There was an intersection between these events and WRAS. During that moment of Black student activism, the radio station was being run by its first African American general manager, Cecily Walker. She said she took part in the protests along with a few other station members.

I was part of organizing that sit in. When it came to WRAS and how people would view me or treat me when I ascended to the role of general manager, it made people very uncomfortable and it would really make people uncomfortable about having a hip-hop show at Georgia State or having a hip-hop show on the air at Georgia State because it represented change, and they were very threatened by that change. And it was change that they, meaning the white people, would no longer be welcome. It was white flight but on the radio. And that’s what they were worried about. If they let Black music or urban music in, all the other white people would leave the station, Album 88 would become an urban station and therefore lose any standing or value that it had in the industry. (Walker, 03/14/21)

²⁵ Derek Thompson, “1991: The Most Important Year in Pop-Music History,” *The Atlantic*. May 8, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2015/05/1991-the-most-important-year-in-music/392642/>.

²⁶ Steven Pond, “R.E.M.: The Ultimate College Rock Band Graduates,” *Rolling Stone*, December 3, 1987, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/r-e-m-the-ultimate-college-rock-band-graduates-83798/>.

Walker (Figure 2.2) said she felt a tremendous amount of responsibility to make sure that the station stayed true to its legacy and that it would become more open and welcoming to different perspectives and personality types.

The so-called “trash can incident” may have targeted a mixed race WRAS staff member who joined a white fraternity, Bob Carter. He would later become the Album 88 staff liaison.

At the time there were tensions that were involved. There were racial tensions, not just in Album 88 but also at GSU, which I also experienced. And so being the staff liaison, a lot of times I had the opportunity to speak candidly with both management and the staff in ways that other people could not. And being mixed and being from a multi-cultural background I had a greater appreciation and a greater perspective on a lot of these things and so at different times I had to talk to people making sure we were all on the same page.

Interview Question: So, you were kind of mediating?

Answer: Definitely. I would mediate and make sure we all understood and maintained a good appreciation and respect for one another. (Carter, 05/20/21)

The “Rhythm and Vibes Weekend Wrecking Crew” was not an anomaly. The program was highly rated, not to be missed by fans, and designed by the hosts to “wreck your Monday morning,” hence the name of this group of DJs. The larger program spanned four hours and would include “Tha Bomb” and “The Drop.” The award-winning programs featured live mixing by DJs, some students, and other professionals.²⁷ These programs aired on weekend nights from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. Talib Shabazz was a WRAS host.

The “Rhythm and Vibes” show is basically what the name says – when the show first started with Hank Ernest, Hank was playing literally anything that wasn’t on major radio. You’d hear some R&B, you’d hear some rap, you’d hear some reggae, you’d hear some go-go, you might hear some house, the show was basically all over the place. It was a four hour show on a Sunday night with no holds barred. As the market started moving more toward the “no-rap” format on Black radio or urban radio, we started to pick up the slack and slowly but surely it

²⁷ Kwai Jones, “GSUs WRAS wins Gavin award,” *Georgia State Signal*, April 1, 1997, 6.

went from being that kind of everything goes show to primarily a rap show. The second show that we started was called “Tha Bomb” and it was basically the “Rhythm and Vibes” show in a two-hour format playing the music with DJs the way it was supposed to be. Hip-hop is really about the DJ lending his energy to the songs in terms of how he programs one song after another, to keep energy on the dance floor. (Shabazz, 04/08/21)

The “Weekend Wrecking Crew” group of DJs did include some white students. Randall Moore was one of them. He worked at the station for almost ten years and did help shepherd hip-hop and other Black music onto Album 88. He and his Black co-host, Talib Shabazz, were called “Salt and Pepper” (Figure 2.3) by fellow station members.

Culturally the bias was toward rock music. At times that was very exclusionary for people that wanted to do other things. No this is a rock station. That cut a lot of people out. When you say this is a rock station, but you don’t play Defunct, maybe Bad Brains aren’t getting played. Then it became OK this is a rock station but there’s some Black artists out there that are rock artists that are good that you’re not playing. All those kinds of things going on but questions like we have a reggae show but reggae is not in regular rotation. Because this was a student fees organized and paid for club basically and everyone’s wondering these are my fees too, can I please get my type of music on the air? It’s kind of like the station walks the line between how much are we a commercial entity, are we aspiring to be with this focused programming and how much is it a student station that should have a say into what goes into it. And who are you going to hire? Biases come into all of that and collectively that ends up being exclusionary. (Moore, 03/09/21)

Atlanta’s top-rated commercial FM station V-103 also relegated rap music to the weekend. It wasn’t until 1995 that the station switched its urban contemporary format to play rap 24/7. Michael Barnes hosted a blues show at WRAS in the mid-1990s, called “Crossroads.” He was aware of the aversion to rap by commercial broadcasters and the struggles within college radio.

That was something that they advertised. You know that they would never play any rap music. Now it seems like how stupid could you be? But even Black stations didn’t play hip-hop so trying to get college stations that are most well-known for breaking REM and the B-52s to have that kind of inclusivity, yeah that was a tough road for Randall and Talib. (Barnes, 05/11/21)

2.3 The Sound of the Station Changed Dramatically

Despite a staff liaison, Album 88 would be consumed in front page headlines. On September 1, 1998, a *Signal* headline ran: “WRAS Rocked by Sexism, Racism Complaints.” This disruptive point in the history of WRAS culminated in a general manager being suspended and resignation as well as staff diversity training. There was an attempt by music directors to program the Album 88 rotation with more Black music. A recently appointed urban music director would work with the regular rotation music director to adjust programming. The move for some type of parity caused confusion among the white DJs and the dayside WRAS audience. Michael Overstreet was an Album 88 program director.

There was a ripple through the radio station because it changed our format. We weren't just a college indie rock station; we were just indie. Be it hip-hop, be it rock and roll, be it anything. The sound of the station changed dramatically. So, you went from playing one hip-hop song every four hours, to playing two or three an hour. It caused some tension. It changed the sound of the radio station, a big change in the sound of the radio station. Just because when you turned on Album 88, you weren't expecting to hear hip-hop in the middle of the day. (Overstreet, 03/13/21)

As the *Signal* pointed out, the Black-white tension would come to a head in September 1998. The WRAS General Manager at the time, Brian Koser, decided to resign instead of being fired after the launch of a Georgia State Student Communications Committee investigation.

The incident that sparked, that really kicked things off, was a hiring incident where someone said something regarding a volunteer that you just wouldn't say. I'm not going to repeat it, but instead of firing that person immediately, it was hearsay, and I didn't hear it happen and I wanted to investigate. So, I suspended them so I could figure out what happened. The suspension was not enough for folks. What they said was darned inflammatory.

Interview question: It's written right here in plain English. Someone told a female volunteer she should be “sent back to Africa” that's the comment you are referring too?

Answer: Oh yeah. That's very incendiary. Who says that? (Koser, 04/20/21)

An example of a hostile work environment at WRAS involved a defaced poster of rapper Tupac Shakur, who was shot and killed two years earlier.

A bad example that's kind of shameful, there was a picture of Tupac, a poster of Tupac above the main console in the DJ booth, and someone wrote "shoot me" on it which is horrible and just left that there. Of course, that upset lots of people, as it should have, because that's just insensitive, tacky, and hurtful. I don't think there was a general awareness of how things like that can spiral out of control and just make an environment not conducive to anything. That creates a hostile environment right there because Tupac was shot and that was a recent event at the time. The implication of writing that on there is that if you see an African American male, you're supposed to shoot them, I guess. (Koser, 04/20/21)

Koser said these were not isolated incidents at the station and that they spoke to a broader problem.

There are numerous incidents of stuff on the air and off the air that would raise red flags. If you had to sit in front of a class of kids and say, identify the racism, it was all there. There was a problem, I'm not denying that. (Koser, 04/20/21)

Georgia State's Dean of Student Affairs, Dr. Kurt Keppler, strongly suggested student media members take part in what he called "sensitivity to diversity" training.²⁸ The GSU Office of Diversity Training sponsored those sessions. John Day was the diversity director.

I do recall the air was very thick. You could have cut it with a knife. People were kind of tight lipped and obviously in their own respective camps. I don't know how much change the training did other than to say let's put a pause here and let's have some facilitated dialogue around what the challenges are. I think the training probably helped certain people if they didn't have a perspective around what it means to be racist or choose to be racist, lets provide the forum for all voices to be heard with respect for each other. (Day, 04/29/21)

Interim Album 88 General Manager Mat Kehrlı implemented the diversity program amongst his staff, which he said was not an easy task.

Certainly, there were those flippant about it because the last thing a college student wants is to have another course or another class to take and you know they didn't understand it, didn't understand what that meant. It was kind of an impossible situation because managing creative people is hard unto itself. And

²⁸ Mary Ann Skipper, "GSU wants student media trained," *Georgia State Signal*, September 29, 1989, 1.

add in students who are in their late teens or early 20 who are super passionate about whatever their scene was musically, it's just tough. (Kehrli, 04/01/21)

Kehrli was appointed the GM and the station apparently corrected its course. The front page of the *GSU Signal* newspaper headlined: "WRAS Sends a New Signal: Radio Station Broadcasting a New, Clear Message of Diversity."²⁹ The photo (Figure 2.4) attached to the article said, "DJ Sara Light on the air at WRAS." With that message of diversity, the programming of Album 88 included rock, blues, ska, emo, techno, hip-hop, and rap. The station slogan: "We're Atlanta's Source of New Music." That new and diverse content would soon begin streaming on the web at WRAS.org opening another avenue for the audience.

2.4 This is Just Classic Jim Crow Type Stuff

With the new millennium came a new set of problems for WRAS. Policies implemented in 2002 regarding guests and station equipment frustrated many of the station's workers. GSU Student Media Adviser Farrah Miler told the *Signal* there was a problem with guest DJs using turntables, owned by the University, and eventually wearing them out.³⁰ The new policy also limited how frequently guests could appear to avoid the financial benefits from being on the air promoting concerts and their new music. Black Album 88 DJs said these new policies were specifically targeted toward them and called them racist. Marcel Daniels hosted "Rhythm and Vibes" and an experimental hip-hop program on weekend evenings.

They created a new rule, and I mean this is just classic Jim Crow type stuff, they created a rule that non WRAS staff could not touch WRAS equipment, so this was a rule instituted simply to stop our program from existing because we relied on DJs, which was very much a part of radio culture, so they were expecting our DJs to bring two turntables, a mixer, and all this equipment to a radio station,

²⁹ Tamiko Leverette and Karin Smoot, "WRAS sends a new signal," *Georgia State Signal*, January 19, 1999, 17.

³⁰ Steven Sloan, "WRAS faces challenges with new policies," *Georgia State Signal*, April 30, 2002, 1.

bringing sand to the beach. So of course, that hindered the quality of our show. (Daniels, 04/13/21)

Daniels said he broke the rule and allowed outside DJs to use station equipment during his program. He said he was suspended and eventually fired from WRAS. Millie De Chirico was the Album 88 General Manager in 2002.

So, we got these two problems. One the equipment is breaking or missing. Two, some of these people are booking guests and it's the same guest every week and their coming on and talking on the mic every week and playing their music and they don't even go to school here and what's the deal?

Interview Question: Was there tension in the air? Were battle lines drawn between whatever side the person would fall on?

Answer: To me, I sensed there was tension with the "Weekend Wrecking Crew" people because they were doing urban music programming. They were doing hip-hop, R&B, the reggae show, the jazz show. I was friends with them, so I obviously felt like I needed to hear them and understand where they were coming from. And it was hard because at the time I was young, and I just wanted to be liked and not hated as a GM and I didn't want to get in trouble with the University. I was in a tough position. I wanted to advocate for the students, but I was also in a position of power, so it was extremely complicated. (De Chirico, 03/25/21)

Michael Barnes, a 1990s WRAS alum, was working at KALX, the student run radio station at the University of California Berkeley in the 2000s. He said the station was dealing with the same issues as Album 88.

It was a similar kind of station, where it was mostly punk rock, alternative white kids' station is how it was identified. And then trying to bring in these hip-hop sounds and urban sounds, there was some push back connected to that. Some of it might be connected to just how things worked out in Atlanta at the time, some of it was just kind of like the country at the time. (Barnes, 05/11/21)

Rap and hip-hop would eventually surpass rock music as the most popular music genre in the U.S. in 2017, according to Nielsen's Year-end report on the music industry.³¹ Jibril Antar, a

³¹ "2017 U.S. Music Year-End Report," *Nielsen Newswire*, January 3, 2018, <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/report/2018/2017-music-us-year-end-report/>.

“Weekend Wrecking Crew” member in the mid to late 2000s, saw the station’s white staff begin to embrace the music.

There was a lot of support. I felt like people, some of my white colleagues, were familiar with even more so-called underground rap than I was. They would bring music to me that I hadn’t heard of. I was lucky to be part of an era where we didn’t focus on race, we focused on good music. Other white DJs would expose me to good music like Afrobeat and other Latin music and a fusion of genres. There wasn’t much division with an undertone of race being the reason. (Antar, 04/01/21)

In 2014, the Black student population of 36 percent at Georgia State surpassed white enrollment of 35 percent. There was also a rise in the number of Asian and Hispanic students, with 12 percent and 8 percent of GSU’s population, respectively. Recent Album 88 programs reflected this diversity. “Moshi Moshi” explored contemporary music from Japan with an emphasis on indie and underground artists. “La Cocina” served up different genres of Latin music. “The Message” delivered 1990s hip-hop. Jenny Nesvetailova was the urban music Director in 2014.

It was all about underground hip hop. I personally loved a lot of 90s hip-hop, like old school hip-hop and stuff that featured a lot of cool samples. It was stuff you really don’t get to hear on the radio anymore. I tried to keep it to the 90s aesthetic but as time went on, I opened it up to more current music. I had a lot of older listeners, and they would call and be really confused like ‘how did you know what this is?’ I feel it was a sense of nostalgia for a lot of people. (Nesvetailova, 04/12/21)

2.5 They Thought They Were Doing the Right Thing

In many ways, a college radio station speaks to the broader issues and tensions facing a university, a local community, and the nation. Genre battles at college radio stations reflected the tension between power and the marginalized: Punks versus New Wavers versus Progressive Rockers, Indie Alternative versus Hip-Hop, “privileged” white students versus minority Black

students. Who was going to speak for the local community, including the school? Again, Professor Jewell, who's writing a book about college radio and the culture wars.

They were operating in a way within that structure where they thought they were doing the right thing; I'm adding black artists to rotation. But at the same time, you had students writing into the college newspaper writing "of course this institution does not represent us – look at the radio station." This is a white institution that doesn't see me and doesn't see my culture and doesn't reflect my voice and the fact that I am here. And so, it becomes another institutional blockage to people feeling like they belong to these institutions. The radio station comes to reflect these broader questions about what institutions of higher education are, should be, who they serve, and how they serve them. (Jewell, 05/02/21)

These behind-the-scenes power struggles are important to note, and as the racial demographics of Georgia State and the Atlanta population changed, so did WRAS. As the most powerful student-run college radio station signal in the United States, Album 88 spoke to both the University community and the Atlanta metropolitan area, and via its music reporting to radio trade journals, a national audience as well. College stations across the U.S. did look at and consider WRAS playlists.

So too did the record industry. Label representatives would come to the station, pitch new releases, and keep track of those playlists. Therefore, the station workers who made those decisions were in a significant place of power. The economic factor may clash with the simple idea of just playing music, for your friends, colleagues, and a perceived audience. But there is power there to influence and steer popular culture. The power of media can clearly affect internal change. In the case of WRAS, media attention brought to the charges of racism, sexism, and a hostile work environment in 1998 led to sensitivity training and what was called "a new signal of diversity."³²

³²Tamiko Leverette and Karin Smoot, "WRAS sends a new signal," *Georgia State Signal*, January 19, 1999, 17.

The racial component of WRAS did factor into programming decisions, though at first only as a novelty. The “African Vibrations” program in 1972 was an experiment that lasted a few semesters. When those station members working on the show graduated from GSU, the program dissolved. Staff and program consistency usually only lasted a term of three to four years.

The increase of the African American student population at Georgia State led to milestones at the University and the radio station. The first Black music director appointed in 1978 and the first Black general manager in 1992 coincided with other “firsts” across campus. This push for diversity led to the longevity of WRAS radio programs. “Rhythm and Vibes” had a rocky start. As Hank Ernest said, there was pushback from the general manager, and he had to alert GSU administration. The students who produced the program in the initial years fought battles with management and the University. Dedicated student hosts, both Black and white, kept the show running and it would have a fixed slot on the WRAS schedule year after year. The “Rhythm and Vibes,” which started in 1989, lasted into the 2010s. It joined the “Georgia Music Show,” founded in 1974, as the longest consistently running program in WRAS history.

CHAPTER THREE: GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN COLLEGE RADIO

The events at WRAS paralleled general trends in the history of women's attempts to overcome workplace sexism, from initial efforts in the 1970s to more success in the 1990s. Gays and lesbians likewise found more acceptance during this period. There are two components of gender and sexuality in this study of WRAS history. The first obviously involves station staff, men, and women. Female staff members in the 1970s were considered pioneers in the radio industry. The social scene extended beyond the WRAS office confines. They would "hang out" at the radio offices, talking and arguing about music, life, and love. The group also spoke about attending concerts and social events together. Meanwhile, dating, marriage, and sexual relations were happening among this group. All the Album 88 alums talked about these important memory in their young lives, working and playing together. There are also examples of how songs were played on the radio that were part of the courting process for station staff and their listeners.

The second component involves programming for a target audience in Atlanta. The early years of WRAS featured music that was mostly programmed for males, aged 18-34. The sounds of album rock, though not only for male listeners, would dominate until the mid to late 1970s, when punk and new wave music came on to the college radio airwaves. As previously noted, in 1983, WRAS's general manager and his female program director, using data collected from Georgia State enrollment, determined that the average GSU student was a 27-year-old female. Therefore, programming would be targeted toward that assumed listener. There was a two-fold reason for this programming initiative that would continue through the 1980s and is still a factor today.

Gender programming also played a role in one of the most consistent crises faced by the station through the years. The successful effort to increase the WRAS FM signal to 100-thousand

watts, which started in 1983, ushered in attempts by outside forces to take over the station.

Album 88 managers say they wanted to prove to the University that the power increase was not only a service for the wide geographic dispersion of GSU students, but that programming would remain relevant for that average Georgia State student, the 27-year-old female. The formula was successful and made the station valuable. That target audience member, though a few years younger, would also make up a large portion of Album 88 management, culminating in the first female GM in 1991.

3.1 I Can Learn This, Play Music, and Sit on My Bottom

When WRAS came on the air in January 1971, it completely lacked female voices. Its inaugural broadcast featured Dean Kenneth England making the opening announcement, then General Manager Richard Belcher said a few words and passed the mic along to DJ Dale Bennett. The first song was “My Sweet Lord,” by George Harrison. There weren’t many female DJs until a few years later. GSU journalism student Connie Prichard (Figure 3.1) was one of the first, not only playing music but also working in the WRAS radio news department. She worked at the station from 1975-1978.

Women in radio were extremely rare in the commercial world. I think that on the FM radio, Alison Steele was the one woman in radio. There were no female disc jockeys in Atlanta at the time. There were female newscasters, but even they were not the norm. (Prichard, 01/31/21)

Alison Steele, known as *The Nightbird*, was one of the country’s first female disc jockeys. She worked the overnight shift at WNEW FM in New York from 1968-1979.

Prichard, who is from East Point, Georgia, said she did not take the traditional female route that many of her friends did. She said she was “weird” in that way. Her experience in joining the radio station staff challenged the larger trend of sexism in the workplace.

At the time I graduated from high school, which was 1974, I'd say 60 percent of the girls I was graduating with were getting married. That's what you did. If you were unfortunate enough not to be engaged, then I guess you go to college. But if you go to college, you're going to become a secretary, a nurse, or a teacher. Those were the options. If you did anything outside of that you were weird. I don't know, I think I was weird. I was just weird. As I was not sure what I wanted to do, I saw this instrumentation at the radio station and just thought that was so exciting to learn how to do, my mind said hmmm, I can learn how to do this, play music, sit on my bottom or I can go lift 400-pound patients and change bed pans. Hmm. Which way should I go? That was literally the deciding factor. (Prichard, 01/31/21)

Prichard credits a fellow student, Doug Jackson, the WRAS Production Director, for training her, Blacks, and gay-lesbian students at the station. She called the station a "melting pot." Her experience at WRAS led to a 22-year career in commercial radio.

Here was this eager-to-get-out-there-in-the-real-world girl who got into commercial radio from WRAS right when it started becoming acceptable and almost, you needed to have a woman, or someone was going to think you were discriminatory. So how is that for timing for me? I honestly did not have trouble getting a job, it was always in the evening (laughs). But I never had trouble getting a job right out of WRAS because of its reputation and because at the time women were first starting to dip their toe in the deep end. (Prichard, 01/31/21)

Susan Cheek Brown, a GSU English major, joined the WRAS staff as a DJ in 1973. She said she was not interested in "stereotypical female pursuits." Brown, whose father owned a motorcycle resort in North Georgia, said she had no problem relating to the men at WRAS. Brown said she was at the station because she loved the music and had a great voice.

I did not think of myself as a pioneer. I knew what I was doing was unusual, but I loved it. I freaking loved it. The perfect segue way, the discovery of new music. It wasn't for me about being a woman, it was about being in rock and roll and I confess it was about feeling good about a god given talent. My voice is something special. (Brown, 07/23/21)

Brown, who spent more than 20 years in professional radio, said she welcomed other women to the station.

At first it was a surprise, and I said, "who's coming on my turf." But some of them were good and deserved to be on the air. I enjoyed having other ladies

around. I don't know if it really changed the personality of the station. (Brown, 07/23/21)

The number of female students enrolled at GSU was rising in the early 1970s and women started making inroads to management at WRAS. Female enrollment at Georgia State in Fall 1975 was just over 50 percent. The 1979 enrollment report listed single females at 9,259 and 1,912 married females, their total more than 55 percent compared to both single and married male students.³³ Katie Wood, another journalism student, was a DJ at WRAS from 1975-1977. Her first college radio experience though wasn't at Georgia State, it was at an all-male college where she assisted a DJ.

At Washington and Lee University, I was a transfer student as a female student at a time when they were an all-male college. I had a friend who worked at WLUR, and he liked to do his free-form radio show under the influence of LSD, and he needed someone who was not drugged to help him cue up records while he was free associating things like the music. I was his sober person. That's how I got introduced to working in radio. (Wood, 02/07/21)

Wood held down three part-time jobs while working at the WRAS, one for which she was uniquely qualified.

I was able to become the first female record salesperson at Franklin Music because I was working at the radio station. It gave me sort of instant credibility in terms of my musical knowledge. (Wood, 02/07/21)

Wood said she had a knack for getting the job done in traditional male settings, like an Atlanta municipal court room with judges, lawyers, and the requisite female court reporter or stenographer.

So, I go over there with the station's tape recorder. I sit down next to the judge, and I plop my recorder microphone next to him and I turn my recorder on. In a little aside, he looks over to me and says, "are you a court reporter?" and I said "no, I'm a reporter from WRAS, the Georgia State radio station." And he says, "oh you're not allowed to tape record in here" and I said "oh, I didn't know. I'm

³³ Fall 1975 Semester Enrollment, "Research & Policy Analysis," University System of Georgia, https://www.usg.edu/research/assets/research/documents/enrollment_reports/qe_fall79.pdf.

sorry.” So, I took the tape, which had been running for a long time, back to the studio and asked, “what should I do with this?” and they said run it. They pitched a show, “Katie at Court.” (Wood, 02/07/21)

Wood would also go on to a career in commercial radio before becoming a First Amendment lawyer.

Cledra White is a first among a few firsts for women at WRAS. White, who came from a military family, is an African American. In 1978, she became the first female music director and first female African American in WRAS management.

I can’t play music, I sounded funny on the air. I didn’t have a great radio voice. So, I couldn’t really contribute that way but if I put something on the air that people remembered or had that feeling that they wanted to run out and get it, I was just a cog in that big thing that was going on by being the music director at WRAS. I’m picking records out that people really want to listen to. It’s kind of cool, it’s a cool thing. (White, 12/20/20)

Cledra White recently retired from a 30-year career in the record industry.

My dad was an officer in the Marine Corps, and they raised me and my sisters with everybody. I don’t say ‘I don’t see color’ I always very conscious of who I am. When I went to Virgin Records, I was the first black in the Northeast Region to do pop radio, because when I went to CBS, they put me in R&B, but I was like ‘I can do anything.’ Because music was diverse that was a big deal. (White, 12/20/20)

DJ Alison Stevens, who also came from a military family, said Cledra White was an inspiration for women at the station.

Cledra White was somebody I was in awe of. She was just making things happen. She was the kind of woman who was just going for it, and yes, a lot of the guys at the labels were men, you didn’t see many women working as label reps, and you didn’t see women in positions of power at the radio stations. It was a slow, it’s still a slow transition. I was just happy to be in it. Period. I don’t think I gave it a lot of thought at the time, as what I could or couldn’t do as a woman. (Stevens, 02/28/21)

Alison Stevens worked at Turner Broadcasting for almost 20 years. She now runs a non-profit providing surgeries for children from developing countries. The women in these early

years of WRAS all had successful careers in what were once male-dominated media and entertainment fields. Indeed, if AM had been the “old boys” radio band, FM was the new equal opportunity employer.³⁴

3.2 The Goddess of Punk Rock in Atlanta

In the mid and late-1970s, punk music and then new wave music exploded onto the college radio charts. Many campus stations embraced the new angry and political punk music, much of it from Britain. Two of the era’s most iconic groups, The Clash and the Sex Pistols were inspired by The Ramones, an American group. The Sex Pistols played in Atlanta during their one and only U.S. tour. Many female station staff members, including Cledra White, were at the show. Women at WRAS were drawn to the feminist punk artists of the 1970s as well, including Patti Smith, Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex, and Debbie Harry.

One WRAS station member, Karen Cook, said she embraced the punk fashion with red hair, leather pants, and black nail polish. WRAS started programs to highlight the music. One was called *Safety in Numbers*, hosted by Cook. Another was called *Rat Review* and one of the hosts was Anita Sarko. The other hosts, men, were King Rat and Subzero. Sarko was from Detroit, attending Georgia State’s commercial music program. Sarko talked about her first radio job during an interview, shortly before her death in 2015.

I went to the college radio station and asked if I could do promotions and they said, “we want you on the air.” They said, “you have a radio voice” and it seems like for females a radio voice is a low voice. For males, a radio voice is a very

³⁴ Christopher Sterling and Michael Keith, *Sounds of Change: A History of FM Broadcasting in America*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 145.

high-pitched voice. They discovered that low women's voices and high-pitched men's voices are the tones that sell the most products.³⁵

WRAS staff members described Sarko as a "different kind of woman in Atlanta." They say she was older, had money, and a large record collection. Sarko embraced the punk ethos of challenging authority and breaking the rules, something she admitted in the 2015 interview.

I got into a lot of trouble because I was at a progressive station and their idea of progressive was like playing Wings and I hated it. I would sneak in my own 45's which was the beginning of punk and new wave, and the program director would be driving along and wondering how come he didn't program whatever record I was playing.³⁶

Doug Jackson was the WRAS manager who eventually fired Sarko.

She started making comments on air about what I told her she could or could not play. I just could not abide by being denigrated on the air by an announcer. I spun the car around, went back, parked, went upstairs, and fired her on the spot. Not really for what she was playing, but she would not follow the format we discussed and started editorializing on air. She knew she was the goddess of punk rock in Atlanta, and she was going to do what the heck she wanted to do. (Jackson, 01/31/21)

Sarko claimed in a letter to the editors of the *Georgia State Signal* that she resigned, "because I was tired of fighting for the right to play progressive music. My job at WRAS is important but, what is more important, is that the people of Atlanta not be denied their vehicle for hearing the new and progressive in music."³⁷

Some women DJs at WRAS said Sarko mentored them, even giving them records to play.

Other women, like Susan Cheek Brown, thought Sarko just didn't fit in.

Sharp edged, stoic to the point of negativity, sarcastic, and self-important. Not the type of person folks wanted to be around. She, like a porcupine, kept people at a distance. (Brown, 07/23/21)

35 Aldighieri, Merrill. "Anita Sarko Farwell." YouTube, 3:15, October 24, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJ2-5e_N__U.

36 Aldighieri, "Anita Sarko Farewell." YouTube

³⁷ Anita Sarko. "Sarko Firing," *Georgia State Signal*. October 2, 1978. 7.

Professor Jewell said the Anita Sarko legacy at WRAS spoke to a larger tension happening in the late 1970s around the country involving genre battles, particular between album-oriented rock (AOR) programming and the new music.

She was tapped into something going on musically. I keep looking for these shows like hers, punk shows at night, and I found a bunch of them. That moment sort of encapsulates that tension that was happening at these different stations and signaling what was going to happen. You see the AOR/New Wave debates circulating through stations really through 1980. (Jewell, 05/02/21)

Jewell said in 1980, record companies were struggling and many discontinued services to college stations, until the boom in college radio, which included R.E.M.'s *Murmur* album in 1983, which debuted locally on WRAS.

Sarko moved to New York in 1979. She became the DJ at the Mudd Club and worked at The Danceteria, Studio 54, and the Palladium. Later she would write for magazines. Anita Sarko committed suicide at the age 68.

Sarko was not alone in challenging conventions at WRAS. Jeanne Potter was another female DJ at the station who took over *The Rat Review* after Sarko left. Potter was part of a student resistance movement that challenged an incoming General Manager who wanted to move away from punk and new wave music breaking through the playlists and return to what he called a more accessible format for GSU students.

Potter and her like-minded colleagues quit; others were fired from WRAS in 1979. The station shut down for a few days because there was no one left to run it. The incoming manager, Michael Garretson, clashed with Potter at a Georgia State Committee on Student

Communications (CSC) hearing on the issue. Garretson said that he needed to “clean house.”³⁸

Jeanne Potter said her group was the creative force of WRAS.

We were the undesirables. The people society looks at and says, “you need to go over there because you’re dangerous.” We were the majority at that time, not in the administration, we were the DJs. We had this incredible pool of creative talent and art and music, and we just started creating from there. John Cale, The Velvet Underground, Iggy Pop. Patti Smith, the Dead Boys. I remember Stiv Bators was in the station doing an interview and he’s got this riding crop and he’s beating it on his boot. (Potter, 12/27/20)

Potter said after the CSC hearing she was asked to leave campus. She volunteered at Georgia Tech and helped establish the punk music program, “Personality Crisis,” at WREK FM. Many women punks at WRAS were more interested in the ideology and social implications of the music, rather than conforming to the norms established by male managers with the power to hire, fire, and level charges before a university panel.

3.3 We Must Have Liked What We Saw

The sexual revolution of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s challenged traditional roles of sexuality and interpersonal relationships. The majority male members of WRAS oversaw the slow increase of women on the air and in management positions during the station’s first few decades. Staff members were dating and, in some cases, getting married. The staff’s access to free event tickets became a part of the courting process. Mike Blackburn hosted the “Georgia Music Show” and his now-wife Abby Epstein, the “Film Folio” program on WRAS.

After the show every day, he’d pick me up and we’d go looking for albums. We were at 688 every night or going to the Agora. Our weekends were music. Music and movies with Abby’s access to movie passes and our combined access to clubs, we had unlimited music and movies for two years. (Epstein/Blackburn, 02/13/21)

³⁸ Deborah Matthews, “Mass Firings Cause WRAS Shutdown.” *Georgia State Signal*, September 25, 1987, 1.

As the relationship between men and women became more casual at the station, WRAS men and women would participate in the streaking fad of the 1970s. Eddie Reece was a station program director in the mid-1970s. Reece said he and a female WRAS staff member ran naked across campus.

Kay and I went up to the bathrooms behind the cafeteria, undressed, we ran through the cafeteria, down the steps to the radio station. Kay had WRAS stickers pasted on her breasts and her buttocks, and I had some on my behind to promote the radio station. We got a standing ovation when we ran through.

Interview Question: Well, you certainly had a bond.

Answer: Yes, we must have liked what we saw (laughs). (Reece, 12/27/20)

Another WRAS streaker was Thom West (Figure 3.2). He was one of the few African American DJs at the station.

I just did it because it was fun and I remember hearing a Black fraternity member say, “man these white people are crazy, I don’t know why they would want to run across campus naked.” One white student told me “I’ve never seen a Black guy naked before and it was wonderful.” (West, 05/02/21)

There may be some serendipity in streaking at Georgia State. The popular novelty song, “The Streak,” released in 1974 was written, produced, and sung by Ray Stevens. He was a music major at GSU in the late 1950s.

Oh, yes, they call him the Streak (Boogity, boogity)
Fastest thing on two feet (Boogity, boogity)
He's just as proud as he can be
Of his anatomy, He goin' give us a peek

Dolores French was one of the first female’s at WRAS to hold a management position. She was Public Relations Director in 1975. She interviewed Larry Flynt on the radio that year. Flynt was the publisher of the pornographic magazine, *Hustler*. DJ Katie Wood said because of that interview, the station was given a gift.

She (Dolores) did an interview with Larry Flynt when he was putting out *Hustler* magazine and for whatever reason, she and Larry Flynt really hit it off. They had a good interview and then he ended up giving WRAS a complimentary subscription to *Hustler* magazine and so we would get in the mail there at WRAS, *Hustler* magazine. It's one of the crudest men's magazine that ever was. I just remember sitting there and I'd see these *Hustler* magazines. I wasn't bothered, but it seemed like an inappropriate thing to be getting at the Georgia State radio station. (Wood, 02/07/21)

Sexuality was more open before the 1980s AIDS crisis. There is a WRAS promotional photograph that shows a male staff member holding the arms of a female staff member whose head is at his waistline. The sexually suggestive photo (Figure 3.3) shows both male dominance and female subjugation. It was apparently never used. There were some women at WRAS that moonlighted as escorts. Dolores French, who wrote a 1997 book titled "*Working: My Life as a Prostitute*," was appointed to the Atlanta Mayor's Task Force on Prostitution and was a consultant for the Centers for Disease Control's study on prostitution and AIDS.³⁹

3.4 As a Rule, Women Don't Listen to the Harsher Stuff

The influx of women into management roles at WRAS would continue in to the 1980s and beyond with the station's first female program director Alicia Culver, and by the early 1990s the first female general manager Lanie Barrett and the first African American female GM Cecily Walker. The inroads for women were not just happening behind the scenes at WRAS. Programming for women became a priority in the 1980s.

As discussed in a previous chapter, WRAS started its pursuit of a power increase to 100-thousand-watts in 1983. When the station filed the request to build a new broadcast tower, Georgia Public Broadcasting first expressed interest in taking over the station to build a statewide network. That GPB attempt was beaten back, at the time. WRAS Managers knew the

³⁹ "Charges Dropped Against Prostitute on Atlanta Task Force," *Associated Press*, January 7, 1986.

station would become a valuable piece of FM radio real estate with the power increase and that the station must remain relevant to its audience and follow FCC rules. The Album 88 slogan was adopted to differentiate itself from other radio stations crammed together on the 88-92 FM frequencies.

The station's general manager in 1983, Jeff Walker, said Georgia State enrollment data determined that the average GSU student was a 27-year-old female. Walker said his music directors adjusted the programming.

It just happened to be that Brit-pop, a new wave of music, fit right in. It was poppy. It was danceable, and women liked it. We were very lucky. I don't know what we would have done if we had the typical AOR music to play with, I don't know where the format would have gone. It just so happens this flood of music and the target demo matched up perfectly. (Walker, 05/06/21)

Data from Fall 1983 confirms that female students were almost 56 percent of GSU enrollment.⁴⁰ Walker said the average age data came from GSU reports at the time. The 27-year-old number closely aligns with the median (plus one year) between the ages of 18 and 34, a target group as determined by the media audience measurement service Birch Radio Ratings. The 27-year-old female was also a target demo for some commercial radio broadcasters. Jane Davis was a WRAS music director in 1987 and one of the first female program directors.

We were never going to be a rock station. We were never going to be a punk station because that's more male. It was always going to be more leaning in the regular format to an alt-pop, alt-dance, the new wave stuff. My favorites were always the bands that had the wonderful tunes and the scathing lyrics. Women hear music differently. As a rule, women don't listen to the harsher stuff over longer periods of time. (Davis, 01/23/21)

Those bands included Elvis Costello, The Eurythmics, 10,000 Maniacs, and Everything But The Girl. Harder edged music was relegated to specialty shows or evening shifts. There were

⁴⁰ 1983 Fall Semester Enrollment Report, "Research & Policy Analysis," University System of Georgia, https://www.usg.edu/research/assets/research/documents/enrollment_reports/qe_fall83.pdf.

no traditional free form block programming shifts, like those at neighboring WREK, the Georgia Tech station. The 27-year-old female formula seemed to be working. *The Birch Radio Monthly Trend Report* from December 1985 showed the weekly cumulative ratings were up amongst women ages 18-34.⁴¹

WRAS flipped the switch to 100-thousand-watts in March 1987. With its power increase, Album 88's signal was heard at least seventy-five miles from Downtown Atlanta. Calls even came in from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and North Florida.

By the end of the decade, WRAS music programming and female management was nationally recognized by the radio trade journal, *The Gavin Report*. Kim Saade (Figure 3.4) was presented the College Radio Music Director of the Year Award in 1990.

Gavin's a mix of college, commercial, and label folks. It was kind of gratifying to me that that mix of people thought I had done a good job making 'RAS sound like it sounded. So, it was really an honor. I was very excited and kind of surprised. A lot of other college stations didn't think highly of what we were doing and thought we were stifling a lot of creative expression. (Saade, 01/25/21)

Black women had never hosted a rap and hip-hop show until the mid-1990s. Shanik Mincie was the first to do that. Mincie, known as "Neek at Night" on the radio, said she knew the genre and approached the "Weekend Wrecking Crew" for a co-hosting slot. She got her opportunity and hosted the "Rhythm and Vibes" program from 1995-1997. The music was mostly dominated by male performers.

We all know there is a difference between men and women and sometimes when you are dealing with emotions, but I just think it's on the individual. Depending on the music, the artist or group we played touched people in different ways. That may be the difference. Not necessarily men versus women and how they listen to music. It just depends on how that artist crafted that song and how it might have touched you or the individual that's listening to it. (Mincie, 03/31/21)

⁴¹ "Daypart Quarter Hour Shares and Weekly Cume Ratings," *Birch Radio Incorporated*, October-December 1985, 145.

Diana Espero was another female host of “Rhythm and Vibes,” working at WRAS from 2001 to 2006. When Espero, known as “Miss D” on the radio, debuted Jay-z’s *The Black Album* in 2003. She said she and her male co-host heard different things in the music.

We played every single song on the air that night because it was such a huge deal. Talking between the songs about, “what do you think” or “what do you think he said there.” We had such different views on what caught our ear. So, I think that obviously everyone listens to music differently, but I do think men and women pull from it different. (Espero, 04/07/21)

Espero said female rappers and their songs were rare on the radio. It wasn’t until 2020 that four women occupied the two top spots on the Billboard Hot 100.⁴² Women managers at WRAS ushered in an era of ratings success for WRAS. They programmed music that they themselves liked, not much different than their target audience member.

3.5 It Was On A Need-To-Know Basis

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw an influx of gay and lesbian managers at WRAS. Tate South was appointed general manager in 1988. South, who is gay, had some radio experience during high school before attending Georgia State and joining Album 88. South’s executive staff consisted of two female music directors and a female program director. He wanted the station to be more inclusive and said being gay was not an issue.

For our time there, everybody just loved everybody and accepted everybody. We didn’t worry about it. There were several lesbians and a few gay guys. We didn’t separate ourselves into those groups, nor were we rejected from being part of the quote, unquote ‘mainstream’ of the station. We were all there because we loved what we did and where we did it and we had passion. (South, 02/18/21)

South, who is still working in radio, was inducted into the Nevada Broadcasters Hall of Fame in 2013.

⁴² “2020 Was the Year Female Rappers Dominated,” *Weekend Edition Sunday*, December 10, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/10/944625003/2020-was-the-year-female-rappers-dominated>.

Jill Lee Barber was a member of the Georgia State Gay Student Alliance from 1985-1988. She is now the Director of the Georgia State Student Health Center. Barber provides some perspective on the GSU culture and gay students.

At the time, we didn't tend to say and maybe that was self-protective or closeted. There were people who knew. It was on a need-to-know basis. You didn't go around just shouting it out. (Barber, 05/06/21)

Lanie Barrett said she felt welcomed immediately when she first applied to work at WRAS. Program Director Jane Davis gave her the application. A few years later, Barret became the first female General Manager in 1991.

I knew I was the first woman. I didn't walk around thinking about that. I was just so enamored that I got to be here, and I got to do this. I'm also a gay woman. It was important to me in that position to keep a trajectory of inclusiveness and kept that momentum going. (Barrett, 03/07/21)

Barrett said she did not know if anyone else at the station during her tenure was gay, except things got interesting when local drag queen RuPaul showed up for interviews.

We were all just hanging out. When RuPaul came into the station, it was the biggest gay party ever. (laughs) It's fantastic. (Barrett, 03/07/21)

There is always a bit of a façade between the radio DJ and the unknown listener. Lanie Barret said men just assumed she was a sexpot.

I had some people call up, some guy, and say, "hey baby you sound sexy." Yeah, it's not what you think. Not everyone on the radio is all that pretty. I'm just saying, "I'm gay" and that's not what they want to hear. (Barrett, 03/07/21)

Cecily Walker was the WRAS General Manager after Lanie Barrett. Walker, who is African American, is also gay. She said she had a crush on Barrett after seeing her in a GSU journalism class.

At the time I just thought she's cute. I could tell she's gay look at her hair, she had a mullet. I was out but not super out. I started talking to her because I had a crush on her. She came in one day wearing an Album 88 t-shirt. Lanie was always wearing cutoff denim shorts, baggy t-shirt, baseball cap turned backward, Ray-Bans, and either Chuck Taylors or Doc Martins. Right before the class started, I

said, “Hey you work at Album 88, I love that station. I’ve been trying to get on that station since I got here in 1986.” She said they needed journalists so that’s how I got in. I wouldn’t have done it if it hadn’t been for my crush on Lanie Barrett and that she wore a WRAS t-shirt to class. (Walker, 03/14/21)

Walker, the first African American GM in 1992, said her sexuality often caused tension with other Black Album 88 staff members, especially those programming rap and hip hop.

Some of the other Black members of the Weekend Wrecking Crew saw me as not being Black enough somehow because I was queer, and I liked indie rock. There was always that tension of people thinking I wasn’t Black enough because I didn’t hang out with them on weekends after their shows. I only came in whenever there was trouble. I was basically the law. I was the spook who sat by the door. (Walker, 03/14/21)

John Day, the current Georgia State Director of Diversity Education Planning, said Walker was in a double minority of being gay and Black.

Certainly, in the ‘90s, even today in some extent, to be gay or lesbian or trans and be Black is still a challenge for the Black community and that is usually around religion, the conflict between sexual identity and religion is a very big issue in the Black community still. (Day, 04/29/21)

Day led diversity training sessions for WRAS staff in 1998.

There were a few Album 88 programs that appealed to a gay audience. The “Disco Sucks” mentality of the late 1970s punk movement gave way to house and dance music scene that started in the mid-1980s. A “12-inch Show” that featured dance and extended remixes became quite popular. Labels released remixes to hold and tantalize the audience. Really, just the words “dance remix” denote a later form of disco, reinvented, and made to be cool in the alternative music world. A DJ named Disco Joe-Joe hosted a popular dance music program in the early 1990s. The House Fairy was another Album 88 character who had a shift on the weekend, Saturday nights from midnight to 2 a.m. “The House Fairy Show” was the first consistent “electronic dance music” program in the Atlanta market. DJ Eve Payor, who considered the House Fairy her mentor, said he was part of the Atlanta gay club scene.

He is a very mysterious person and he never really talked about his past, everything was really in the moment. I do know that he spent a lot of time at Backstreet, and I think he used to work the lights. Especially in the 80s, being in the scene in Atlanta when RuPaul was coming to his own and lots of wonderful things were happening in the gay scene and it was really enlightening overall, and I have a feeling that affected him quite a bit. (Payor, 03/26/21)

The *Signal* newspaper featured a column by the House Fairy called, “The House Fairy’s Corner.”

In one 1992 article, the House Fairy provided a Top 10 list of music and wrote:

For far too long, the enlightened in Atlanta have had to suffer white boys in four-piece rock and roll bands emulating dinosaur and punk rock from the ‘70s and ‘80s. Let me give you some tips, boys: Guitars are over. It’s the new age, technology rules, and frankly, we’d rather dance.⁴³

At the height of the rave scene in 1995, Payor took over the House Fairy’s time slot and started “Planet 8,” a program featuring electronic music and the first to debut the genres of jungle and drum and bass music. Payor said gay culture was a vital part of the dance music scene.

It was fundamental to the scene. You go to a place where you feel accepted no matter what you are wearing or what you look like, and you just get on that dance floor and do your thing. You share that mentality of peace, love, unity, and respect. That’s a common thread in the gay and queer community. (Payor, 03/26/21)

“Subterranean” and “Houseworks” were two other WRAS programs that carried electronic music in to the 2000s. Former WRAS staff members acknowledged that there were gay and lesbian colleagues at the station. Staff members who identified themselves as gay or lesbian may not have disclosed their sexual identities; they say it was assumed and that the station was a safe space for them.

⁴³ “The House Fairy’s Corner,” *Georgia State Signal Tuesday Magazine*, May 5, 1992, 7.

3.6 The Sexiest Voice in the World

Women started programs that featured a particular feel. *Hush Hush* was a program founded by Aisha Hardiman that featured instrumental hip hop. The program *Mighty Aphrodite* played the best in female vocalists. Hannah Frank said she “birthed” the indie-pop program “Glitter Frequency.”

The purpose of “Glitter Frequency” was to make you feel good. Every show I aimed to create this positive, bubbly, sparkly atmosphere for people. People would call in and say I would make their night better with the music I was playing. (Frank, 04/27/21)

By the 2010s, women had held every management position at WRAS, most recently the general manager role. Women managers would face a moment in the history of WRAS that would forever change its course as a student-run radio station.

GSU and Georgia Public Broadcasting made in agreement in 2014, effectively giving more than half the station’s FM broadcasting time to GPB. Women managers at WRAS met with the CEO and President of Georgia Public Broadcasting, Teya Ryan, a few days after the announcement. Ryan, who is a seasoned television executive, is known as a female groundbreaker in the media industry. Instead of showing compassion for the young women of WRAS, Jenny Nesvetailova said Ryan showed no compassion at all.

I remember she called us kids. She was very dismissive and wouldn’t make eye contact or speak to us directly. It was a horrible experience. She just felt very cold and did not care at all. That was the hard part. We were all just poring our hearts out, trying to explain why the station was so important and how it changed our lives and how we wanted other people to experience it the way we did, and nobody seemed to care. (Nesvetailova, 04/12/21)

Hannah Frank was also at that meeting with Teya Ryan at GPB Headquarters. The group also met with Georgia State President Mark Becker. The entire ordeal is still a bitter memory for her.

I still feel scared to speak openly. I still feel that weight from Becker and Teya Ryan. You know Teya Ryan called us kids in one meeting, and I think out of everything that happened that probably defines it for me. There's just no respect at all and I feel like I can't speak or not allowed to speak because of how manipulative, abusive, and toxic that whole situation was. (Frank, 04/27/21)

Here is a respected female media executive leading the effort to take most of the radio station from the students and the Album 88 women managers.

WRAS mirrored the rise of women in the workplace, which happened slowly in the 1970s and then picked up in the 1980s and finally in 1990s, women were running the station as general managers. Women did take advantage of their minority role at the station, seeking opportunity when it came. Connie Prichard covered the Jimmy Carter Presidential Victory in 1976. Cledra White, the station's first African American music director in the late 1970s, said she just wanted to get the job done. Susan Brown said she was not interested in "stereotypical female pursuits." Katie Wood used her status as a WRAS staff member to cover Atlanta Municipal Court proceedings with a tape recorder and then feigning ignorance when admonished by the Judge for using the banned device.

Question: What was it like coming in and working with the guys?

Answer: It was fine. I liked it. I was one of seven in an all-male university. I saw it as an opportunity. (laughs) On the one hand you're like groundbreaking but on the other hand maybe I could have been more assertive, and I should have had a stronger sense of career projection or entitlement. I was never an envelope pusher. I was just happy to be able to break in and do those things. (Wood, 02/07/21)

The social scene around the station consisted of students "hanging out" at the WRAS studios. There were sofas and comfortable chairs. Staff members often talked about how working at Album 88 and the culture around the station provided some of their best memories as a young adult. Many of the staff members dated, some got married, and some took advantage of the situation by playing the field. Jeff Clark was a music director in the late 1980s.

When I first started working at WRAS, I think I had sex with two women in my life at that point. By the time I left, that number had grown exponentially. So, there was a lot of getting laid.

Question: So, people were hooking up?

Answer: Oh, hell yeah. Are you kidding me? I was hooking up with female DJs, I was hooking up with some of the label people, I was hooking up with some listeners. (Clark, 02/21/21)

DJ Katie Wood said she liked to believe her overnight shift set the mood for WRAS listeners.

I liked to imagine what people were doing. I started off playing kind of upbeat music and I'd imagine that people were sort of drifting off and going to bed and having romantic liaisons. And I could be creative. I would just imagine. There's a song by Captain Beefheart *Observatory Crest*, I just love that song. (Wood, 02/07/21)

The overnight shift at WRAS was a 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. slot. DJs would get strange calls.

One caught the attention of Bo Ketchin, who was asked to play a particular song not on the playlist.

This woman calls up who has the sexiest voice in the world, she requested *High Tides and Green Grass* by the Outlaws and kind of got a little flirtatious. And she was so effusive in her gratitude when I played it. (Ketchin, 01/30/21)

The host of a WRAS lounge music program called *Martinis Con Queso* said she cemented her relationship with a fellow Georgia State student while doing an on-air shift.

Victoria Rey was working early morning and her future husband would set his alarm to listen.

One call got her attention.

I was covered in glitter and dressed to the nines and just went kaput because I had gone to a party and gone out. He called and was super groggy and I said, "hello," and he said, "it's Brian," and I said, "OK cool," and that's kind of what punted us from friends who should date, to people who are dating. (Rey, 04/29/21)

Gender and sexuality at WRAS are an integral part of the station culture. Within the private sphere, personal relationships were fostered between staff members. In the public sphere, concrete programming initiatives captured a specific gendered audience. The rise of women in

the workplace, the key target of young women, and acceptance of gays and lesbians mirrored broader cultural changes at Georgia State. College radio existed as one of the few spaces where females and/ or gender nonconforming individuals could safely express their views and foster a community.⁴⁴

These vital parts of the Album 88 organism had direct impact on lives, knowingly by participation and via signals sent with a powerful 100-thousand-watt delivery. A broadcast tower of power. The audience may not have known this.

⁴⁴ Sydney Catherine, "Women in College Radio," *The Panoptic*, September 25, 2017, <https://thepanoptic.co.uk/2017/09/25/women-american-college-radio/>.

CONCLUSION

In a letter addressed to the president of Georgia Tech, dated June 5, 1970, Bert Hatch, the Executive Secretary of the Georgia Association of Broadcasters, Inc, wrote, “I am turning to you...to help me head off an unpleasant wrangle.”⁴⁵ Hatch explained that commercial broadcasters in Atlanta were becoming “concerned that WREK is making a serious bid for the rock music audience while enjoying the non-commercial, tax-supported status of an educational station.” Hatch recommended, “the station should either become educational in format or that its power should be cut back drastically.” Tech’s President Arthur Hansen replied, “WREK has never intentionally made a bid for the general Atlanta rock audience. Our intended audience is now, and it has always been, the Georgia Tech student body. The station is attractive to many others. However, this we cannot control.”⁴⁶ Other attempts to take over or control Tech’s signal occurred over the decades. Founded in March 1968, WREK was Atlanta’s only Top 40 FM station.

WPLO’s decision to leave the Georgia State campus to pursue commercial opportunities brought another college FM radio station to Atlanta, WRAS. It also faced industry pressure and takeover attempts. Before its first broadcast in 1971, call letters had to be finalized. According to documents in the WRAS Radio Archives, only the “fifth choice of call letters – WRAS – was available for use by Georgia State.”⁴⁷ The other call letter requests were WGSU, WGFM, WRGA, WRGS. On April 20, 1970, the call letters WRAS, Radio at State, were assigned by the FCC.

⁴⁵ Correspondence from Bert Hatch to Dr. Arthur Hansen, June 5, 1970, WRAS Radio Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴⁶ Correspondence from Dr. Arthur Hansen to Bert Hatch, June 12, 1970. WRSS Radio Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴⁷ Correspondence from John R. Wilner, lawyer, to King Buttermore, GSU Director of Broadcasting, April 20, 1970, WRAS Radio Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

Finally on January 18, 1971, at 11:00 a.m., WRAS, 88.5 on the dial and broadcasting at 19,500 Megahertz, officially went on the air. The goals of WRAS were clearly stated during that inaugural broadcast. The station would serve as the voice of the Georgia State student, providing diverse programming to the campus community and the City of Atlanta. The station's constitution stated, "WRAS will not discriminate based on race, creed, sex, religion, or national origin. Every applicant will be judged solely on their merits."⁴⁸

In 1983, the proposed WRAS increase to 100-thousands watts was embraced by commercial competitor WKLS FM, 96 Rock. Program Director Alan Sneed wrote to the Georgia State Chancellor Vernon Crawford, "I consider WRAS to be far beyond a normal college station...concentrating heavily on 'modern music,' as they serve a definite purpose in the Atlanta market. WRAS is valuable to their audience and to the students that run the station."⁴⁹ WKLS was a competitor in the 1970s but had come to respect the music and the staff of WRAS. Despite takeover attempts by Georgia Public Broadcasting, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia approved the tower build and the increase to 100-thousand watts on November 3, 1983. Station management celebrated the decision by informing staff in a memo that "we can finally relax a bit on the playing of songs that would offend your grandmother, but the rules on playing PIL (Public Image Ltd.) before night still hold. Rocky Horror is OK again, for example."⁵⁰

The 100-thousand-watt switch was flipped in March 1987. WRAS/Album 88 became the most powerful student-run radio station in the United States. Its power was felt by the listening

⁴⁸ WRAS Constitution, 1969-1971, WRAS Radio Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴⁹ Correspondence from Alan Sneed to Chancellor Vernon Crawford, October 1, 1983, WRAS Radio Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁵⁰ Staff memo from WRAS General Manager Jeff Walker, November 9, 1983, WRAS Radio Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

audience, it was measured by other stations that programmed their playlists by what WRAS was playing, and in the City of Atlanta, it became a key source of cultural production.

WRAS broke songs, won awards, and earned national recognition. The station even made an international impact with the inspiration for one of the most popular new wave songs, “I Don’t Like Mondays,” by the Boomtown Rats. During a 1979 interview at WRAS, the station’s teletype machine ticked off a news report about a mass shooting. Singer Bob Geldof and the group’s piano player John Peter Moylett incorporated the moment in the song with the lyrics, “The Telex machine is kept so clean, and it types to a waiting world.” When the shooter was asked why she opened fire she said, “I don’t like Mondays.” A few years ago, former WRAS Music Director Cledra White was contacted by Moylett for assistance to prove that he was there when the song was inspired. Geldof took sole credit for writing the song. Lawyers were able to prove Moylett was also at the station based on a WRAS photograph (Figure 4.1). He now shares songwriting credits with Bob Geldof. Moylett, after almost forty years, gets a royalty check for the song. The Boomtown Rats story immortalized WRAS in rock history, something few other college radio stations have achieved.

The fifty-year history shows how WRAS staff would adjust during difficult times. Racial tension, sexual discrimination, and programming appropriation are well documented in the research for this project. Punk rock and new wave music opened new spaces for women. Urban music did the same for the African American students at Georgia State. Commercial broadcasters came to respect college radio even though some say the secret sauce of underground music was stolen by corporate interests. There’s no doubt with a slogan like, “If you heard a song before on WRAS, then we are not doing our job,” that the station may have programmed itself into

obscurity. That path into esoteric music programming may be one all college radio stations have taken, threatening relevancy in their community.

Larger trends in the United States concerning race, gender, and music industry played out in college radio stations. This case study of WRAS shows just how those trends developed is the most important facet of this study. Women at WRAS did struggle to be recognized in the workplace and then gained equality with management positions. African Americans pushed their music and voices onto the station airwaves, just as they were doing across media in the decades of civil rights. Album 88 did break artists that now seem quaint in progressive, new wave, punk, and alternative genres.

Station alums wanted to talk about the good times and the so-called “fraternity of music lovers.” The 1970s alums, especially the men, were skeptical with talking about diversity. In one call when I asked about women and African Americans at the station, former 1974 WRAS Music Director Jim Morrison opined that I was trying to find “an angle.” The alums from the 1980s onward were more open to discussing challenging times at the station. I think that may speak to the generational divides at a place that’s seen hundreds, if not thousands, of student volunteers pass through. Consistency is hard to sustain at a four-year university, as is media in general: staff comes and goes, audiences change, music changes, and technology marches taking over from the humans. Algorithms often determine what is now heard on radio stations.

The changing demographics at Georgia State involving women and minorities paralleled the growing pains at WRAS. Conditions throughout its half-century both reflected and constructed social norms and even hierarchies of race and gender. The history was being rewritten seemingly every four years, with a new group of students. Those students brought with them their priorities that aligned with their social groups. The radio station airwaves became a

battleground of sorts in the culture wars as those groups clashed, in most cases mild collisions, in others, acts that bordered on the criminal with allegations of racism, sexism, and a hostile work environment.

There is more work to be done in documenting college radio stations and their struggles. Stations must preserve their archives and gather as many audio elements as possible. That may be easy in the digital age, but not so much when DJs recorded their programs on cassette tape. Vinyl record archives are gathering dust, as most DJs now plug their smartphones into the mixing board to play out a digital playlist. The vinyl archives at WRAS inspired me to take on this project. I was holding an ancient artifact while reading the program notes and DJ scribble on the record jackets. These records not only contained music, but the record covers also talked about their time and those who played them in the past. There are cases where comments were scratched off and written over, erasing one thought with another.

Another area of study on college radio focuses on the rise of National Public Radio during the same years, in this case, of WRAS. Three separate university administrations in 2011 sold their campus radio stations to become NPR affiliates, programming news, classical, and jazz music. Georgia Public Broadcasting, an NPR affiliate in Atlanta, took over most of the WRAS FM signal in 2014. A case study of this trend would be important. I do think programming jazz and classical music is a nod to an audience that is shrinking, the over 55-year-old demographic. It would be interesting to see an NPR affiliate take the bold move and dump the standard “upper crust” programming and give the 35-54 demographic diverse music including the genre known as college radio. The 35-54 demographic is growing and let’s face it, the older one is dying out.

The story of WRAS is about the rise and fall of college radio and in turn public access to radio airwaves. The success of WRAS made it vulnerable to powerful entities that would

ultimately undo it. As radio programming becomes more generic, the need for these unique voices must be preserved and protected. In keeping the music alive and well, we all benefit from that college radio station DJ cueing up and playing a song that we can all share simultaneously. There's often magic in the human curation of music. As the saying goes, just bear through the weird stuff and you might hear a song that will change your life.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Figures



Figure 1.1. Psychedelic Music Radio advertisement. *Great Speckled Bird*. May 10, 1968. Accessed through GSU Special Collections.



Figure 1.2. Richard Belcher (right), general manager; Bill Skutt (left), public affairs director, and Jim Bryan, news director, WRAS-FM, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, January 19, 1971. - *Atlanta Constitution*. Accessed through GSU Special Collections.

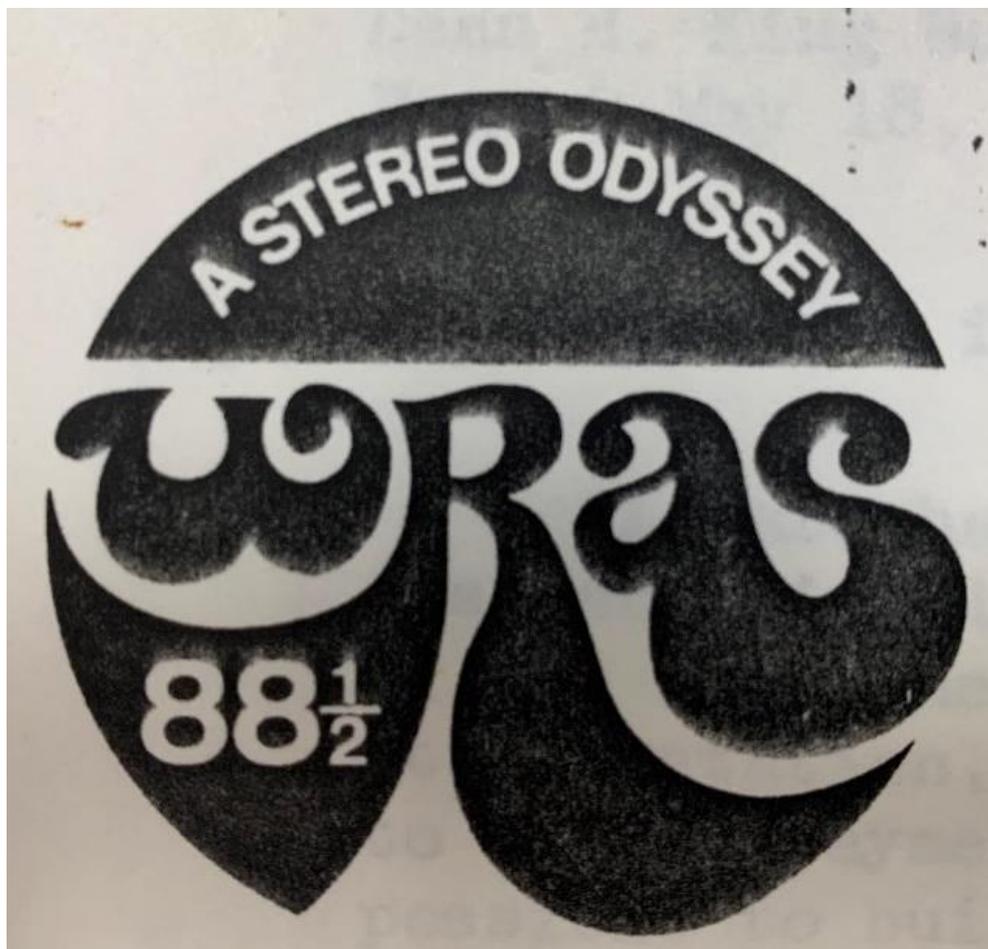


Figure 1.3. Early WRAS: A Stereo Odyssey logo. Accessed through GSU Special Collections. WRAS Radio Archives.



Figure 1.4. WRAS General Manger Michael Garretson holds the Devo album *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!* which contains the song “Mongoloid.” September 1979. Accessed through GSU Special Collections. WRAS Radio Archives.

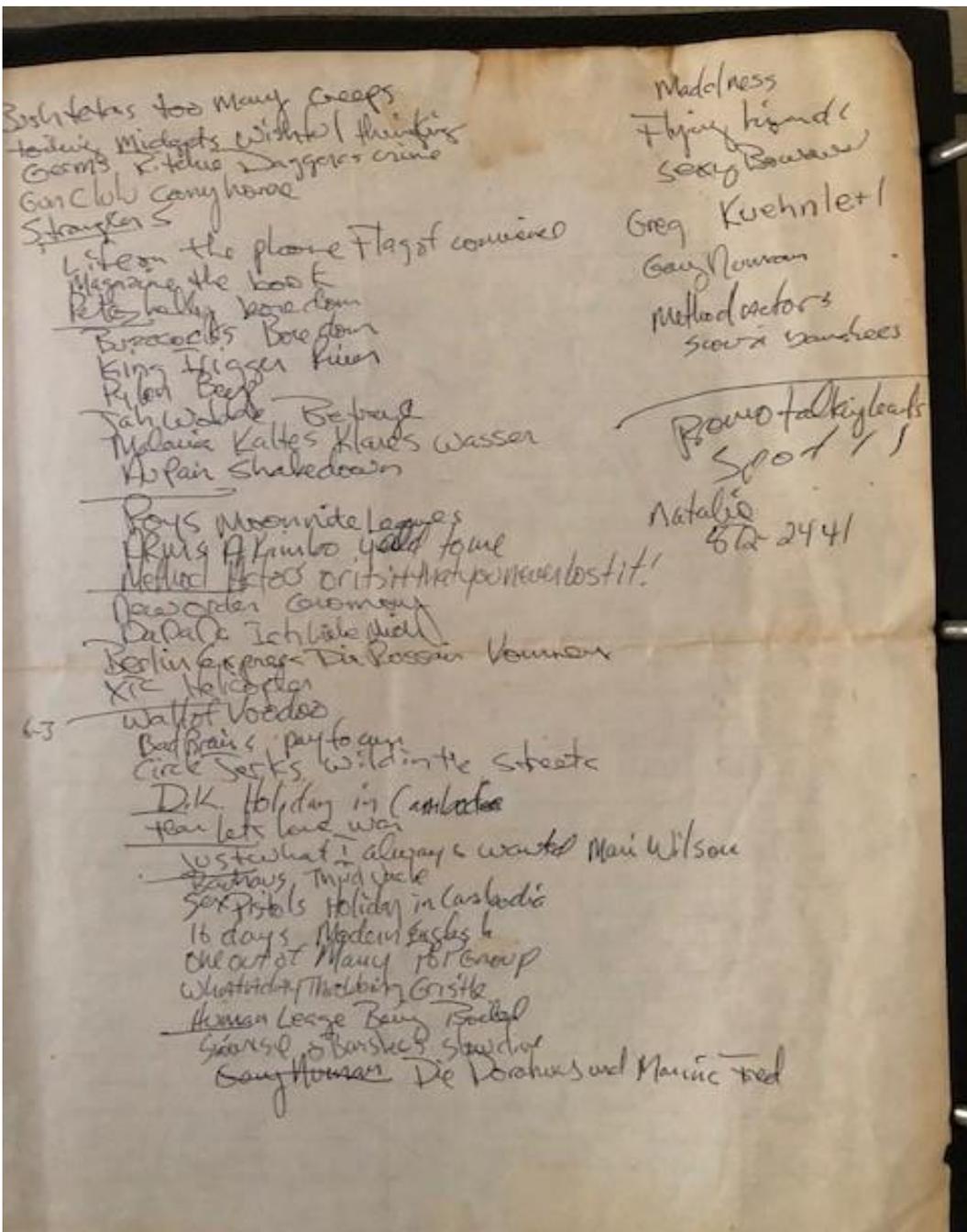


Figure 1.5. "Pure Mania" playlist. 1981. Courtesy Mark Williams.

Sale prices end August 31

AS HEARD ON ALBUM 88

6.99 cass **12.99** CD



THE WEATHER PROPHETS
JUDGES, JURIES & HORSEMEN
 As *Sounds* said, "They are like a bucket of water on an icy morning. They are traditional but fresh, structurally reminiscent of '60s Stones with the temperature and pace of the Velvet's quieter moments."

AS HEARD ON ALBUM 88

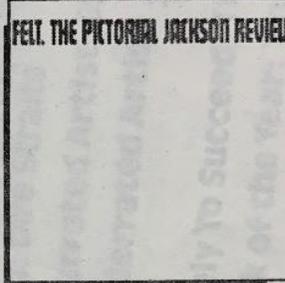
6.99 cassette only



BIFF BANG POW!
LOVE IS FOREVER
 Biff Bang Pow! Such a violent name to a band known for sweet, peaceful, pop melodies. A diverse collection of intriguing songs.

AS HEARD ON ALBUM 88

6.99 cassette only



FELT
THE PICTORIAL JACKSON REVIEW
 Felt's album, divided into two canvases, shows the varied styles of the band's songwriters. Side 1 is reminiscent of Dylan & The Velvet Underground. Side 2 is the esoteric side of Felt; mysterious, irresistible piano solos.

Sale prices end August 31.





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MUSIC, MOVIES, & MORE!

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Figure 1.6. Turtles Records store advertisement. *Creative Loafing*. 1988. Accessed through GSU Special Collections.



Figure 1.7. Musician Elvis Costello (with hat and sunglasses) and WRAS staff. 1983. Accessed through GSU Special Collections. WRAS Radio Archives.

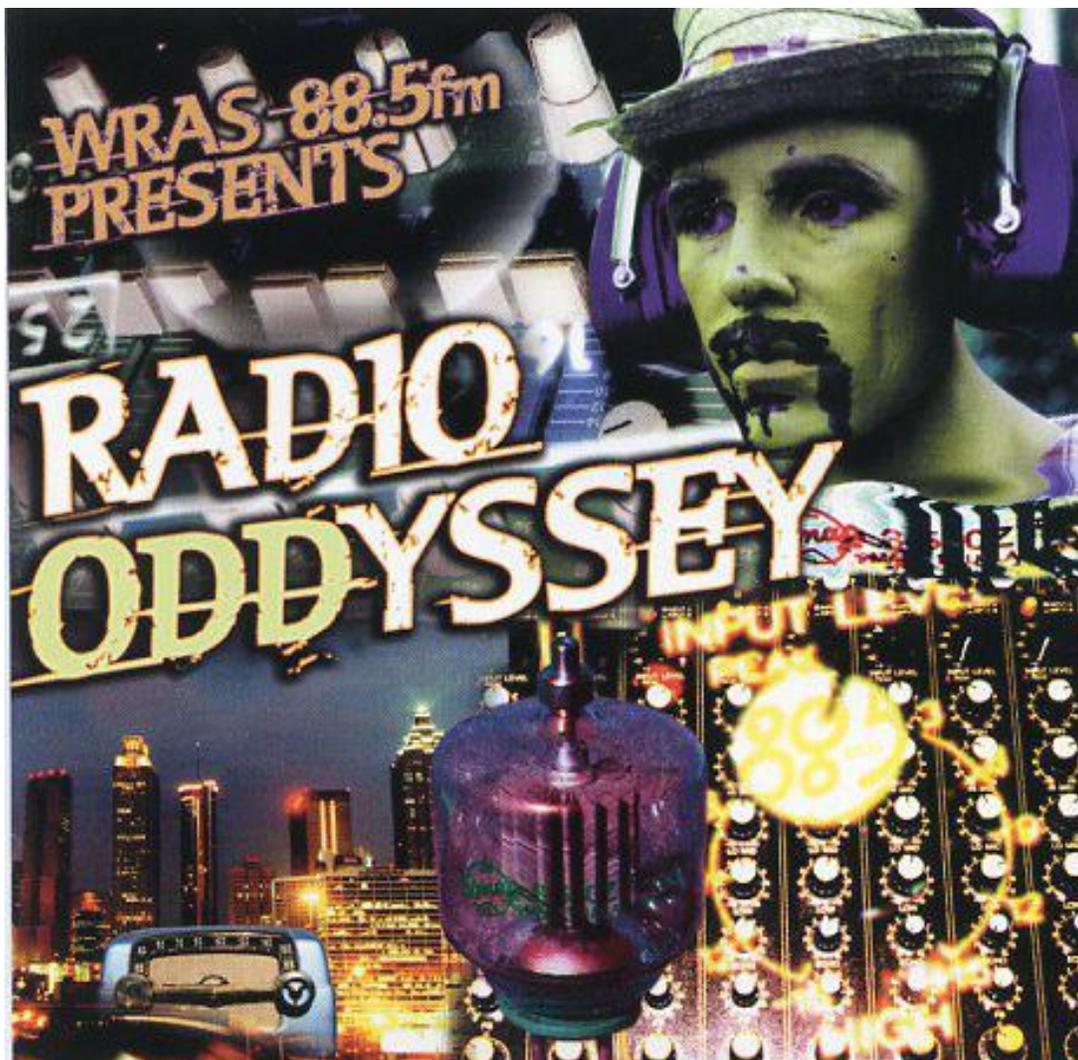


Figure 1.8. CD cover. *WRAS 88.5fm Presents Radio Oddysey*, 1996. Accessed through Discogs.



Figure 2.1. DJ Carl Heyward at WRAS, 1974. *Georgia State Signal*. Accessed through GSU Special Collections.



Figure 2.2. Cecily Walker (third from right) with WRAS staff members. 1991. Photo courtesy Cecily Walker via Facebook.

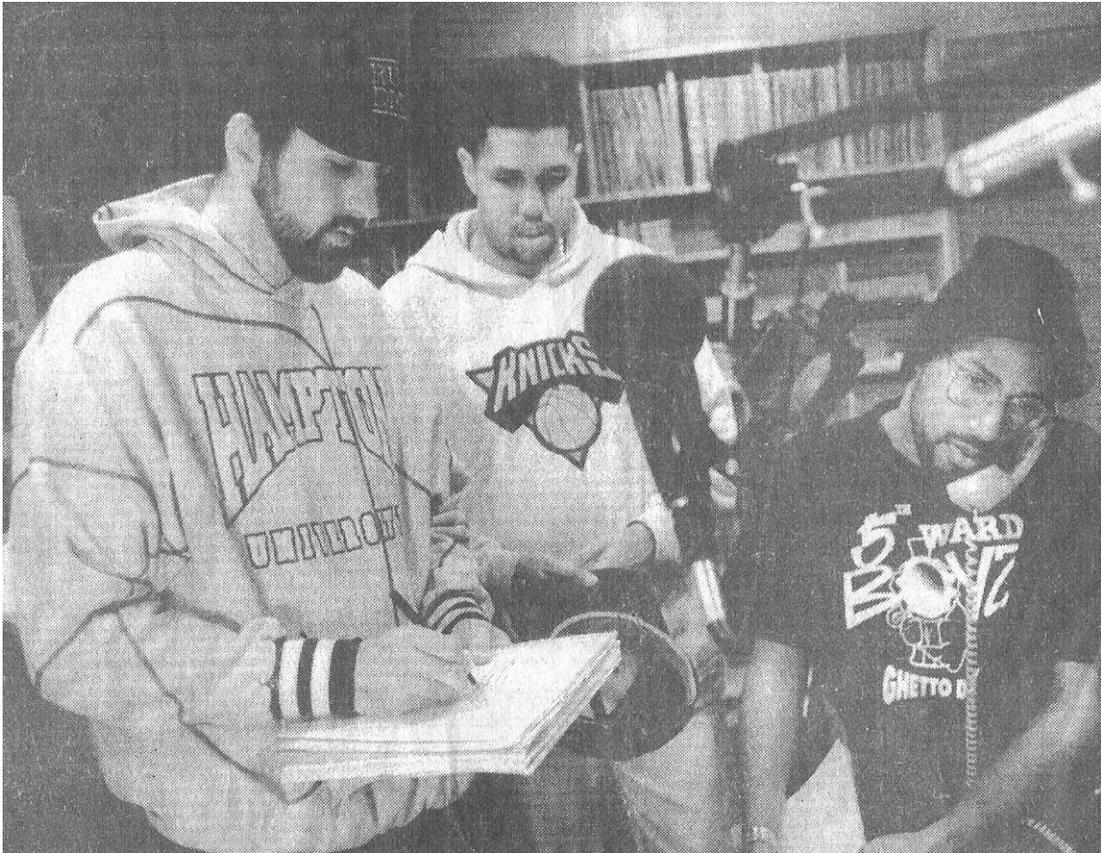


Figure 2.3. "Tha Bomb" rap DJs of WRAS. Randall Moore (left), Darryl "G-Wiz" Felker (middle), Talib Shabazz (right). *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. 1994. Accessed through GSU Special Collections.



Figure 2.4. DJ Sara Light on the air at WRAS. *Georgia State Signal*. 1999. Accessed through GSU Special Collections.



Figure 3.1. WRAS journalist Connie Prichard (right) at Jimmy Carter Presidential Campaign Headquarters, 1976. *Georgia State Signal*. Accessed through GSU Special Collections.

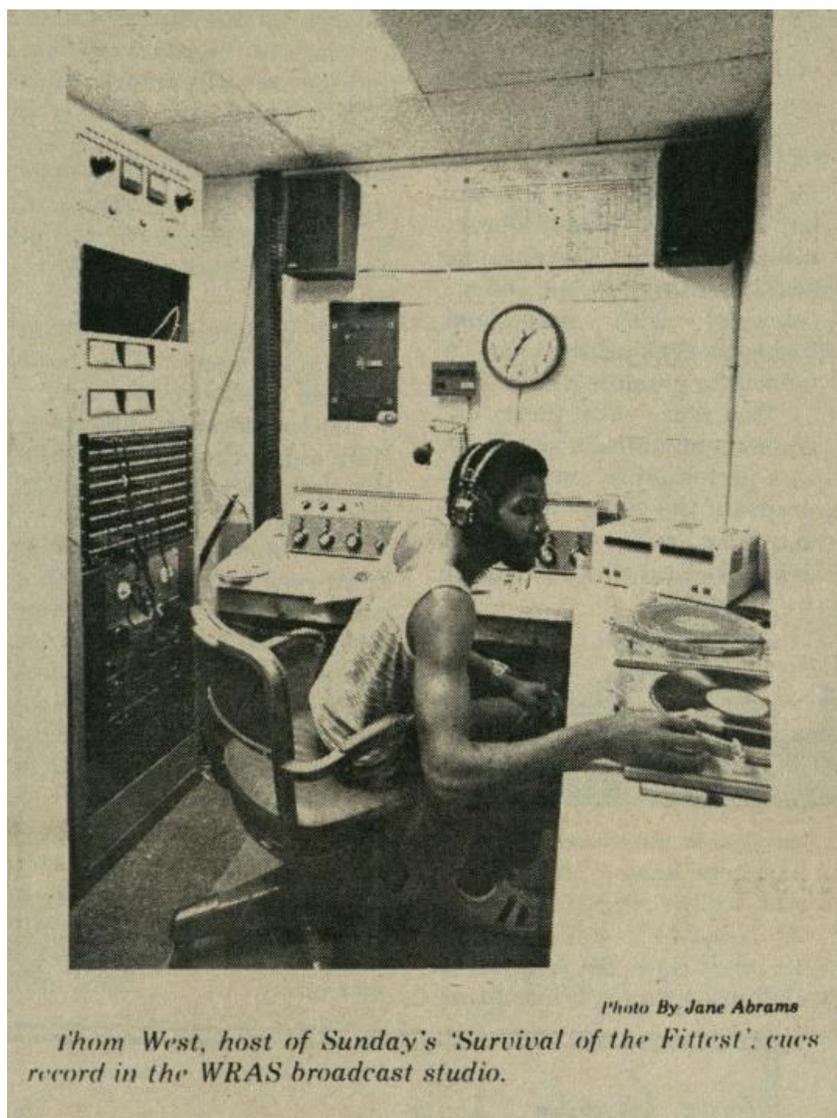


Figure 3.2. Photo of WRAS DJ Thom West. *Georgia State Signal*, June 23, 1975. Accessed through GSU Special Collections.



Figure 3.3. Danny Maughon and Susan Sherman. WRAS promotional photo shoot (never used publicly). Photo from Gail Harris via WRAS/Album 88 Alumni and Friends Facebook page.



Figure 3.4. Director Kim Saade with musician John Wesley Harding, 1989. Photo from Kim Saade.



Figure 4.1. From left: WRAS Music Director Cledra White, DJ Ken Berg, with The Boomtown Rats members John Peter Moylett and Bob Geldof. 1979.

88.50: MUSIC AND HISTORY PROGRAMS

“88.50: Music and History” radio programs that aired on WRAS-FM/Album 88. These programs featured topics and audio clips from WRAS alumni interviews. All programs replayed on the WRAS HD 3 signal.

WRAS 88.50 The FM Dial in Atlanta, January 27, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 Gender and Radio, February 3, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 Less Talk More Music, February 5. (several other versions of this theme)

WRAS 88.50 1980s: The Jeff Walker Show, February 10, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 College Radio Industry, February 24, 2021.

WRSS 88.50 Eclectic and Compelling, March 6, 2021. (based on GSU Pres. Mark Becker statement on the fifty-year anniversary of WRAS)

WRAS 88.50 1979 Disruption and Tension, March 14, 2021. (based on 1979 GM Garretson program changes)

WRAS 88.50 100 Watts of Radio Power, March 24, 2021. (based on the anniversary of the WRAS power increase on March 26, 1987)

WRAS 88.50 The Kim Saade Show, April 4, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 Politics, War, and Terror, April 12, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 Keeping the Audience, April 16, 2021. (featured WRAS promotional spots)

WRAS 88.50 The Mail Bin Show, April 27, 2021. (based on the ubiquitous storage devices)

WRAS 88.50 The 2014 Agreement, May 5, 2021. (based on the GPB-GSU agreement)

WRAS 88.50 The Tod Elmore Show. June 2, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 The Lanie Barrett Show, June 16, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 WRAS Productions, June 23, 2021. (featured WRAS audio productions)

WRAS 88.50 The Joel Nash Show, June 30, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 Music and Memory, July 7, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 The Copycats, July 14, 2021. (based on how radio stations copy formats)

WRAS 88.50 The Jim Morrison Show, July 21, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 The Gail Harris Show, July 28, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 Race and Radio. August 4, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 The Eddie Reece Show, August 11, 2021.

WRAS 88.50 The Miss D (Diana Espero) Show, August 18, 2021.

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The Georgia State Signal, Georgia State University newspaper, 1970-2021.

<https://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/digital/collection/signal>

The Great Speckled Bird, 1968-1976

<https://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/digital/collection/GSB>

Eighty8: The Magazine of WRAS

Creative Loafing

New York Times

The Gavin Report

Radio and Records

Billboard Magazine

College Music Journal: New Music Report

Audio Recordings

88.50 WRAS Oral History Project, 2020-2021, conducted by Andreas Preuss

Phone interviews:

Richard Belcher, first General Manager (GM) of WRAS, 1969-1971. March 7, 2020.

James Tarbox, WRAS GM, 1978-1979. September 12, 2020.

Joel Ackerman, WRAS GM, 1974-1975. December 5, 2020.

Jim Morrison, WRAS Music Director (MD), 1975. December 5, 2020.

Willard Arbour, WRAS GM, 1976-1977. December 6, 2020.

Dale Bennett, first WRAS Disc Jockey (DJ) 1971. December 6, 2020.

Carl Heyward, WRAS DJ 1971-1975, “African Vibrations” host. December 13, 2020.

Fiona Bloom, WRAS DJ, 1989-1992. December 17, 2020.

Drew Murray, WRAS DJ, WKLS Program Director (PD), 1975. December 19, 2020.

Cledra White, WRAS MD, 1977-1979. December 20, 2020.

Carl Jackson, WRAS GM, 1977-1978. December 27, 2020.

Eddie Reece, WRAS PD, 1975. December 27, 2020.

Jeanne Potter, WRAS DJ, “Rat Review” host, 1977-1979. December 27, 2020.

Michael Garretson, WRAS GM, 1979-1981. January 2, 2021.

Aubrey Walton, WRAS DJ, “Georgia Music Show” co-founder, 1974. January 3, 2021.

Mark Williams, WRAS DJ, “Pure Mania” host, 1979-1981. January 4, 2021.

Tod Elmore, WRAS Promotions Director, 1985-1988. January 4, 2021.

Don Daniel, WRAS GM, 1975-1976. January 10, 2021.

Jane Davis, WRAS 1982-1988 Program Director, Music Director. January 23, 2021.

Manfred Jones, WRAS/WUOG 1984-1986. January 24, 2021.

Jill Melancon, WRAS 1985-1988. January 24, 2021.

Karen Cook Bagwell, WRAS DJ 1978-1982, “Safety in Numbers” host. January 24, 2021.

Kim Saade, WRAS 1982-1990, Music Director. January 25, 2021.

Lucius Gantt, WRAS 1970-1973, “African Vibrations” host. January 30, 2021.

Ralph Merck, WPLO/WRAS 1967-1971. January 30, 2021.

Bo Ketchin, WRAS 1986 GM. January 30, 2021.

Connie Prichard, WRAS 1975-1978. January 31, 2021.

Doug Jackson, WRAS 1974-1978. January 31, 2021.

Steve Brodsky, WRAS 1974-1976, “Rat Review” host. February 6, 2021.

Katie Wood, WRAS 1975-1977. February 7, 2021.

Michael Blackburn, WRAS DJ, “Georgia Music Show” host, 1980-1982. February 13, 2021.

Abby Epstein, WRAS 1978-1981, “Dear Abby,” and “Film Folio” host. February 13, 2021.

Tate South, WRAS GM 1988-1989. February 18, 2021.

George Watts, WRAS GM 1986. February 20, 2021.

Jeff Clark, WRAS 1986-1992, Music Director. February 21, 2021.

Joel Nash, WRAS GM 1987. February 28, 2021.

Cliff Smith, WRAS 1980-1983, “Infinite Vibes” host. February 28, 2021.

Dave Cohen, WRAS 1982-1988, “Voice of the Panthers.” February 28, 2021.

Val Pittman, WRAS 1985-1990, Music Director. March 7, 2021.

Hank Ernest, WRAS 1987-1990, “Rhythm and Vibes” founder. March 25, 2021.

Lanie Barrett, WRAS 1988-1993, first female GM. March 7, 2021.

Randall More, WAS 1989-1999. “Rhythm and Vibes” host. March 9, 2021.

Michael Overstreet, WRAS 1996-2001, website founder. March 13, 2021.

Cecily Walker, WRAS 1991-1995, first Black GM. March 14, 2021.

Josh Klinger, WRAS 1989-1994. March 15, 2021.

Adam Devore, WRAS 2003-2011, “Soul Kitchen” host. March 24, 2021.

Millie De Chirico, WRAS 2002 GM. March 25, 2021.

Delia Rae Saldiver, WRAS 1989-1992. March 26, 2021.

Eve Payor, WRAS 1993-1998, “Planet 8” host. March 26, 2021.

Marc Crifasi, WRAS 1999-2005, Music and Program Director. March 26, 2021.

Alan Moore, WRAS 1993-1998, Production Director. March 27, 2021.

Dave Hill, WRAS 1992-1994. March 28, 2021.

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Matt Kehrli, WRAS 1999 GM. April 1, 2021.

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Diana Espero, WRAS 2001-2006, “Rhythm and Vibes” host. April 7, 2021.

Alayna Fabricius, WRAS GM 2015. April 8, 2021.

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