

Radio Broadcasting - Part 4: Radio Broadcasting and the Civil Rights Movement ^[1]

Radio Broadcasting

by Philip McFee and Wiley J. Williams, 2006


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Party IV: Radio Broadcasting and the Civil Rights Movement

While many working in radio were content to entertain in their designated time slots, Crutchfield and others became part of a bigger change largely made possible by the support of the airwaves. By the late 1950s a new ethnic diversity had arisen to complement the programming diversity made possible in the previous decade. Charlotte stations WBT and WGIV were starting to aim a majority of their programming at a black audience. In Winston-Salem, the first black-oriented AM station, WAAA, hooked listeners with its popular features like Oscar "Daddy-Oh" Alexander's hit program *Daddy-Oh on the Patio*. By this point, the opinionated Nathaniel Tross, under Crutchfield's guidance, was delivering blistering editorials calling for radical action against segregation. At WGIV disc jockeys such as Eugene "Genial Gene" Potts used a more family-oriented tack to advocate patience and tolerance, while drawing on their connections with the minority community to defuse tensions rather than to accentuate them.

But tensions did flare. Following the 1957 [desegregation](#) ^[8] of the schools, North Carolina's [Lumbee Indian](#) ^[9] and black populations launched a huge [campaign](#) ^[10] against the [Ku Klux Klan](#) ^[11]. Crutchfield, along with the powerful minority voice in the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, staged a number of events focusing on empowerment and education. Of these, the landmark race relations-themed "Project '60," broadcast on WBT in November 1959—an event attended by thousands that far exceeded its allotted time slot—arguably was the most crucial in establishing radio as a medium for a new and growing voice in southern social discourse.

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From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[17]

1 January 2006 | McFee, Philip

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