

What's the Matter with Missouri?

Talk Radio and Conservative Culture in Rural Missouri

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Abstract

Over the last half-century, the Republican Party has won the hearts and minds of the rural midwest with its emphasis on social and cultural issues and working-class values. The movement known as the Great Backlash has been characterized by an emphasis on social issues, which it has tied to pro-business economic policies through elaborate association in mass media. This thesis takes an in-depth look at the process through which national ideology becomes hegemonic as it is disseminated to local communities, looking specifically at radio broadcasting in rural Missouri. Taking a Production of Culture perspective, this paper will show how the industry structures of broadcast radio have tied conservative talk radio to local news and country music stations in rural communities, and how these formats work together to subtly disseminate conservative ideology into the common sense of rural Missourians. Using content analysis and audience interviews, I shall examine the messages in radio broadcasts and how they are received by people in rural communities to find common themes at play in both music and talk formats. Overall, this paper shows one of the ways that hegemony is created in local communities through the elaborate and consistent penetration of conservative ideology into the lives of everyday people.

Introduction

In his book *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, journalist and historian Thomas Frank addresses the question: why do working-class people—specifically, working-class white Christians in middle America—vote for a political party that is actively working against their economic interests? His answer: the Great Backlash, a style of conservatism that arose “in response to the partying and protests of the late sixties,” and “mobilizes voters with explosive issues—which it then marries to pro-business economic policies” (2005: 5). The Backlash has thrived in the modern media environment dominated by wealthy business class interests and media characterized by outrage, division, and incivility. Frank describes how conservatives have reinvented the populist narrative to present red America as the “authentic” America of the people and emphasized “cultural wedge issues based on region, religion, and taste” (Frank, 2005; Peck, 2019). Frank writes:

“At the center of it all is a way of thinking about class that both encourages class hostility of the kind we see in Kansas and simultaneously denies the economic basis of the grievance. Class, conservatives insist, is not really about money or birth or even occupation. It is primarily a matter of authenticity, that most valuable cultural commodity.”

Backlash conservatism insists that the economic interests that each political party serves are irrelevant. Rather, it is the places that people live and their consumer tastes and preferences that are the unifying or dividing factors in politics. Reece Peck addresses this “culture-for-economics” thesis in his 2019 book, *Fox Populism*, where he argues that Frank’s approach “has helped perpetuate a false dichotomy whereby economic distinctions are treated as ‘real’ class factors and cultural distinctions are seen as ‘fake’ ones” (2019: 123), and advocates for an approach to class that appreciates “both the stylistic-performative dimension of populist social movements and the significant ways in which class identity is shaped by culture.” Peck

takes a more Bourdieusian approach that recognizes the way that social capital plays into the maintenance of economic class structures. The white American working class, he says, “refuse to see themselves as intellectually inferior to those who surpass them in ‘high’ cultural knowledge, education and credentials,” which has fostered hostility towards the social markers of the “elite” class. Peck’s analysis of Fox News gives scrutiny to “*how* the network represents its audience as a sociocultural group,” emphasizing the indirect ways in which the branding of news outlets creates political associations through social identifiers and taste-based appeal.

Both Peck and Frank analyze the strategically limited conception of class hierarchy dominant in conservative media that foregrounds cultural class inequalities in order to obscure or erase economic class inequalities. Just as the backlash imagines itself as “a foe of the elite, as the voice of the unfairly persecuted, as a righteous protest of the people on history’s receiving end” (Frank, 2005), Fox has earned the allegiance of “ordinary Americans” by “challenging the cultural elitism of the news industry as represented by liberal class preferences” (Peck, 2019). Frank and Peck both identify that within American media, class is represented as a sociocultural divide rather than a division around labor, ownership, and access to the means of economic production. An essential aspect of this description of cultural backlash politics is that conservatives believe they are the dominated social class and are justified in their reactions towards the hegemonic liberal elite. In their view, the conservative media challenges the cultural elitism of the mainstream liberal news media. Peck’s analysis highlights the way the business class within the Republican Party has tied their economic interests to the cultural interests of socially conservative working-class whites in middle America. I shall build upon this idea to

show how the business class of the Republican Party is dominant over the working class and has used conservative media to establish hegemony in rural middle America.

One of the most influential forms of conservative media has been talk radio. In his book *Talk Radio's America: How an Industry Took Over a Political Party that Took Over the United States*, Brian Rosenwald describes how talk radio would become an appendage of the Republican Party as it “hit a nerve with a segment of the public that was disgusted by what they perceived as the mainstream media’s liberal bias” (Rosenwald 2019). This is, in part, he says, because the mainstream news media is reported through a much more progressive lens than the one through which conservatives view the world, which stems from journalists’ common orientation and worldview informed by the selection and training processes that underlies their profession:

“Journalists came from elite four-year universities that shared a similar liberal cultural background and ideology. They socialized with likeminded people, who all had the same notions about guns, women’s roles in society, and other hot-button issues. Journalism schools taught reporters to put aside these views when working. But inevitably, the values bred by their homogeneous experiences and learning environments affected journalists’ story selection, assessments of newsworthiness, and the questions they posed while reporting” (2019:14).

Within this view, the mainstream news media operates within a liberal hegemonic apparatus. *Hegemony*, as described by theorist Raymond Williams, is the complex interlocking of political, social, and cultural forces that both includes and goes beyond an understanding of *culture* as a whole social process, and *ideology* as a representation of a particular class interest (Williams, 1977, 108; Peck, 2019). Hegemony theory accounts for the ways that dominant values and meanings of the culture at large constrain social actors and shows how discourses reinforce existing distributions of power and influence. Williams argues that a dominant class 'has' the

hegemonic ideology in relatively pure and simple forms and that a subordinate class has *nothing but this ideology* as its consciousness, or this ideology imposed on its otherwise different consciousness (1977: 109). I argue that in rural Missouri, and other similar communities across the country, conservative ideology has become hegemonic as it has been imposed on these communities. While the Republican business class ‘has’ or believes in the ideology of the Republican Party, the subordinate working class in rural communities believes in an ideology that might not be in their best interest, but is such a fundamental part of the way they understand the world that they continue to believe in and uphold the structures of power at its center.

Hegemony operates within the often-overlooked practices, routines, and assumptions of mass media institutions, and through mass media, hegemonic ideology seeps into the “common sense” of its audience (Gitlin, 2003). In his book *The Whole World is Watching*, Todd Gitlin uses hegemony as a framework to explain why the population accords legitimacy to the prevailing institutions (2003: 9). Summarizing Gramsci’s conceptualization of hegemony, Gitlin says:

“Hegemony is a ruling class's (or alliance's) domination of subordinate classes and groups through the elaboration and penetration of ideology (ideas and assumptions) into their common sense and everyday practice; it is the systematic (but not necessarily or even usually deliberate) engineering of mass consent to the established order.

Mass media, Gitlin says, has become a core system in the distribution of ideology:

“That is to say, every day, directly or indirectly, by statement, and omission in pictures, and words, in entertainment and news and advertisement, the mass media produce fields of definition and association, symbol and rhetoric, through which ideology becomes manifest and concrete.” (2003: 2)

Hegemonic messages are repeated and reproduced until the ideology of the dominant group is no longer seen as ideological, but just a matter of fact. Just as journalists share a

common view of the world informed by their education and training, conservative ideological media form a common view of the world shared by their audience. This ideology is reinforced in media, churches, schools, and other public spaces. Peck uses Hegemony theory as a framework to explain the relationship between Fox's style and political ideology (2019, 19). Fox News, he says, draws on the populist rhetorical tradition that the postwar conservative movement made compatible with free-market ideology and white working-class identity. Through ideological infrastructure, such as think tanks and media institutions, cultural populism became a part of the "common sense" of the modern conservative movement. Building on these ideas, I seek to show how through mass media, conservatism has become the hegemonic ideology in rural Missouri. I argue that the ideology of the modern conservative movement has penetrated into the local common sense in these communities as it has been spread and reproduced through mass media. Looking at talk radio as a site for the production of conservative hegemony, I will show how the institutions, practices, and assumptions at play in the radio industry as a whole have spread this ideology into the common sense of the region.

Radio, as a medium, makes an interesting site for examining hegemonic ideology as radio is embedded in daily routines and everyday practices. People use radios on their alarm clocks to wake them up every morning, and listen to local radio stations for news and weather updates on their commutes to and from work each day. Further, radio is perhaps the most widespread and accessible media form in rural communities, which continue to be underserved by broadband internet providers and undercovered by mass media institutions. Radio is broadcast freely to anyone with a receiver. The influence of talk radio on American politics has been well researched, and authors agree that talk radio has had a significant influence on the politics of the

Republican Party and electoral outcomes (see Jamieson and Cappella 2008, Bobbitt 2010, Berry and Sobieraj 2014, Hemmer 2016, Rosenwald 2019, and Matzko 2020).

I seek to go beyond this analysis of talk radio to explore how conservative ideology persists through the radio industry as a whole and into the common sense of Missouri's rural population. To do so, I will take an analysis that looks at three specific 'moments' in the transmission of messages via radio to understand the complex mechanisms at work in the creation of hegemony. I will first explore the production of broadcast radio in Missouri, and show that the structures and practices embedded in this industry foster conservative hegemony. I will show that the messages embedded in radio broadcasts pass through countless layers of encoding and decoding as stories are reported and reproduced from the level of national pundits to local commentators (Hall 2004). Next, I will analyze the content broadcast on the radio, including talk radio programs, local newscasts, and stations' cultural self-identifiers, to uncover the messages encoded within the content. I will show not only common themes shared between radio formats, but also the full scope of influence that national conservative thinkers exert over local communities when local broadcasters reproduce their messages. Finally, through interviews with radio listeners in rural Missouri, I will show how radio content is consumed and understood by average listeners. Looking at the point of reception allows us to understand not just the messages produced and distributed, but also the messages received, which are the messages that truly "have an effect" on the listener (Hall 2004). All together, this thesis will be a case study of one process through which national ideology disseminates into local communities to become hegemonic.

Chapter 1. Production

The following analysis uses Peterson and Anand's (2004) Production of Culture perspective, which "focuses on how the symbolic elements of culture are shaped by the systems within which they are created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved" (311). An analysis of talk radio through a production of culture perspective reveals that talk radio is embedded within an industry of multiple genres and formats, and shares rhetorical themes and economic interests within this system. This perspective situates talk radio within its systems of production and analyzes six facets of production: technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organizational structure, occupational careers, and market. This perspective reveals that radio industries are integrated across genres, and the radio formats most prominent in Missouri are those that reproduce conservative culture.

Furthermore, this analysis shows how messages are shaped by institutional factors at multiple stages of the production process. Stuart Hall's concept of encoding and decoding argues for a view of the communication process as one linked by distinct moments at which messages are shaped by institutional power relations. Throughout the production process, messages are encoded with meaning formed by the process. Hall writes the production process is framed by "knowledge-in-use about the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions." We will see that messages pass through multiple layers of encoding and decoding as they are reproduced and disseminated to local publics.

Methods

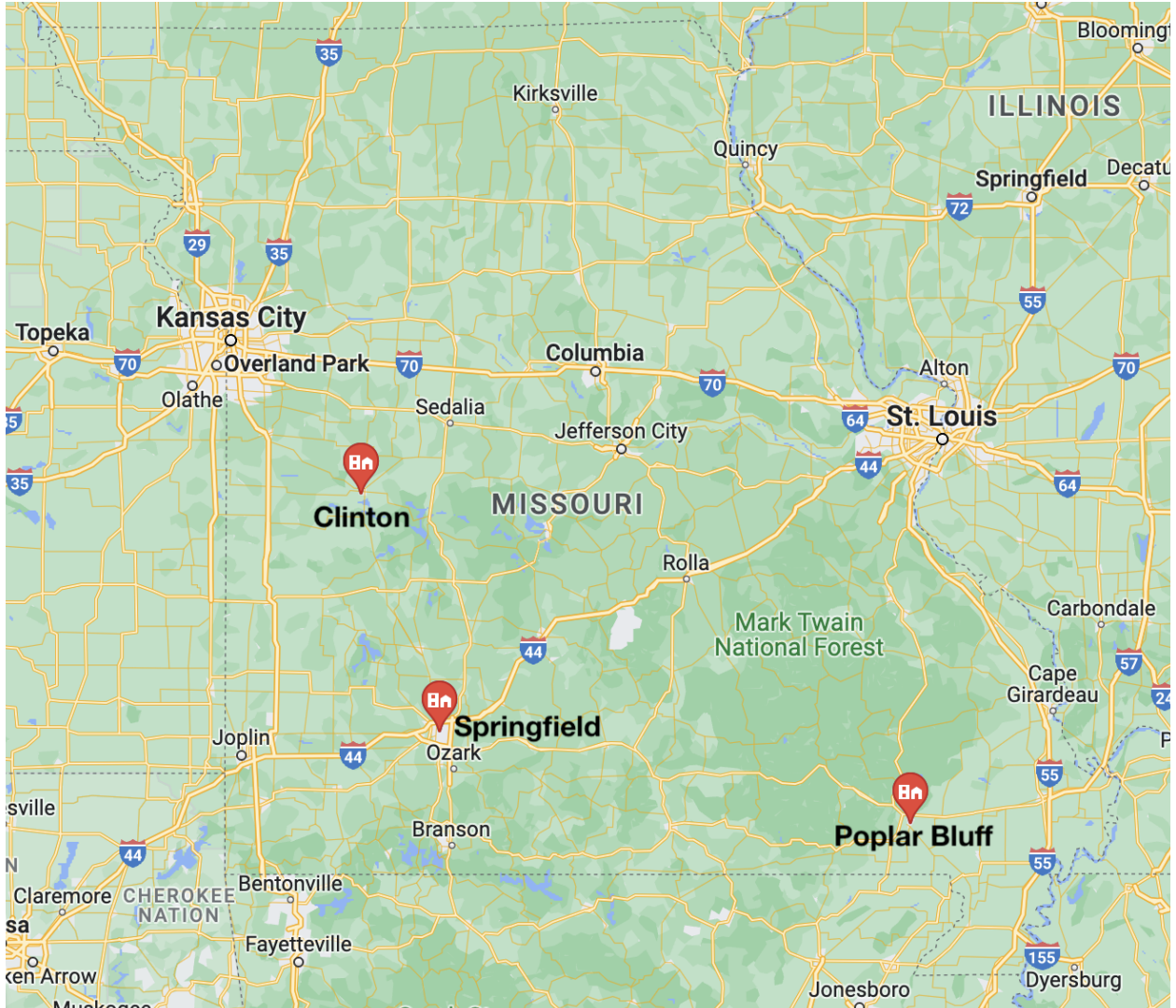
I began this analysis by creating a snapshot of the industry structure and market of Missouri's broadcasters. Using the search engine on Radio-Locator.com, I gathered a list of every radio station in Missouri, including the station's call sign, frequency, city of license, and format. Then, using Keyhole Markup Language (KML) files from the FCC Public Inspection Files for each station, I matched the geographic coverage areas of the coverage area to each of the 430 stations in Missouri. Next, I categorized the 36 radio formats into the following "simple genre" categories, and imported this data into Google's MyMaps program to create visualizations of the coverage and availability of each genre.¹ I created 10 categories, which were grouped by similar genres, with outlying categories with the fewest stations grouped as "other":

1. Adult Contemporary (Adult Contemporary, Classic Hits, Hot AC, Top-40, Adult Hits, and Variety)
2. Country (Classic Country, Country, and Americana)
3. Public Radio (Public Radio and Classical)
4. Religious (Christian Contemporary, Gospel, Religious, and Spanish Christian)
5. Rock (Classic Rock and Rock)
6. Sports
7. Talk (Business News, News, and News/Talk)
8. Urban (Hip-Hop, Jazz, Urban, and Urban Contemporary)
9. Farm

¹ Interactive map can be viewed at <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1F5zuffnPR7v1T-Vd6diPZ2DRNoNl4ys&usp=sharing>.

10. Other (College, Grade School, Adult Album Alternative, Alternative, Nostalgia, Oldies, Asian, and Regional Mexican)

Next, I selected three unique communities to investigate in more detail, looking for trends across markets and organizations. The communities— Springfield, Clinton, and Poplar Bluff—were selected based on variance in population, location, local market. Springfield is the state's third largest metropolitan area with an estimated population of 475,000 encompassing 3,021 sq. mi. and its demographics skew white, working class, Christian and conservative, making its robust market an ideal site for observation. Clinton is located at a highway intersection midway between Springfield and Kansas City with a population of 9,174 and geographic area of 9.29 sq. mi. and is located in a visible media desert at the edge of Kansas City's fringe coverage. Finally, Poplar Bluff is located in Southeast Missouri at the intersection of Highways 60 and 67 with a population of 16,225 and geographic area of 13.21 sq. mi. It is the home of many radio stations in the surrounding community and, while it is a small community, Poplar Bluff is the central commercial municipality in its area. I compiled a list of every radio station with moderate to strong coverage in each city, including the call sign, frequency, format, and licensee of each station. I also began listening to the stations and observing how the stations identified themselves culturally.



Additionally, I visited the recording studio for one of Springfield's media companies, Zimmer Midwest Communications, where I interviewed show hosts and producers to gain insight on the production process at a moderately sized organization. Zimmer is representative of the business model of many media organizations operating in the state: they have stations in multiple coverage areas in the state and regional offices from which multiple stations broadcast. They operate at a larger level than a single, independently owned station, but have local control and investment unlike the larger, national broadcasters such as iHeartRadio. I met with Don

Louzader, the Operations Manager/News Director of Zimmer's Springfield stations, and a co-host of the locally produced morning show on talk radio station KWTO. Additionally, I observed and interviewed Elijah Haahr, a former Missouri state representative and Speaker of the House, who hosts his own talk program on KWTO in the afternoon, along with his frequent guest host Joelle Cannon. Finally, I interviewed Steve Kraus, who serves as Assistant Operations Manager of Zimmer's music stations, *Real Country* and *The Dove*, and hosts the afternoon programming on *Real Country*. These interviews gave me insight to the processes and organization of this specific media environment, with insight into the motivations of the people producing the content heard on air. This insight goes beyond the day-to-day operations at one specific studio, as each of these subjects have had long careers in local radio at various stations and companies in the region over the last three decades.

1. Technology

Among the many preconditions necessary for the emergence of conservative talk radio were the technological changes in the industry at large. FM Radio, introduced in 1961, could carry a stereo signal which made it a preferable medium for music broadcasting (Rosenwald, 2019; Berry and Sobieraj, 2014, Klinenberg, 2007). FM technology differs from AM because it modulates the frequency, not the amplitude, of radio waves. While FM signals do not travel as far as AM signals, Klinenberg explains, they transmit a higher fidelity broadcast "because they could separate and layer sounds for stereophonic effect" (2007). Rosenwald writes, "as listeners migrated to FM, advertising dollars followed; AM's share of radio ad revenue dropped from 90 percent in 1970 to around half in 1985" (2019: 5). The economic consequence of this new radio format drove AM stations to the talk format in the 1980s and beyond. Unlike music, Rosenwald

says, talk “sounded fine” without a stereo medium and FM did not carry the news-talk format, allowing AM a niche to exploit” (2019: 5). Other technologies also contributed to the success of talk radio, such as the mechanism that allowed for a seven-second broadcast delay which allowed screeners to cut off callers before reaching the airwaves if their comments violated broadcasting regulations (Berry and Sobieraj, 2014).

Later, the introduction of cheap satellite technology made it financially feasible to syndicate a radio program nationally, giving financial incentive to national talk personalities and easing the burden on small stations having to produce their own content (Rosenwald, 2019). Voice tracking technology also allowed hosts and DJs to pre-record shows, station identifiers, and music line ups in order to operate small stations with more efficiency. A broadcaster could have one employee record more shows in an eight-hour day than they previously could in a full day’s work, and a station could operate with nobody in the studio (Klinenberg, 2007). These technologies gave big media companies a competitive advantage, as they cut costs for original content production, and in tandem with the changing regulatory landscape of radio, promoted the consolidation of media ownership. My interviews with local radio producers also confirmed that these technologies are present in the local market.

Today, talk is present on FM airwaves and is often simulcast on the FM and AM stations, and streamed online live or in the form of podcasts. In rural regions, AM broadcasting allows news/talk format stations to reach listeners that are geographically dispersed and lack access to other listening formats. When first introduced, radio gave residents of rural America connection to the rest of the country and the world in a way that they had never before experienced. As our society has continued to modernize and move online, rural Americans are often the last group to

gain access to digital advancements. Rural communities continue to lack access to broadband internet, which in turn limits access to information and media sources. Radio, in many places, is the most accessible source of information, and continues to be embedded in the structures of daily life. Radio receivers are built into vehicle audio systems and alarm clocks, and are used in the daily routines that accompany these devices, such as waking up in the morning and daily commutes. This embedded quality makes radio especially interesting in the examination of hegemonic ideological dissemination.

2. Law and Regulation

Since its inception, broadcasting has been subject to federal regulation under the Federal Radio Act of 1927 and the Communications Act of 1934, which created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Law and regulation create the ground rules on which cultural fields develop and shape what is able to be produced (Peterson and Anand, 2004). The story of the emergence of talk radio involves two main pieces of legislation: the Fairness Doctrine and the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Many authors credit the emergence of talk radio as a dominant conservative medium to the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987 (Sykes, 2017; Rosenwald, 2019). The doctrine had required broadcasters of opinionated programming on controversial issues to offer an array of viewpoints. So, if a station aired a conservative show, they had to dedicate the same amount of time to a show of an opposing political ideology. While in place, the doctrine did not necessarily keep conservative voices off the airwaves, but it did prevent entirely conservative stations like those on the air today. The repeal of the Fairness Doctrine allowed the economic and political interests of station owners to be more greatly reflected in the content they broadcast, and listeners became entrenched in ideological media

silos. In their study of political opinion media, Berry and Sobieraj argue the Fairness Doctrine's demise has been accompanied by a significant decrease in public affairs and news programming in traditional radio formats (2014: 80). Talk radio is credited with creating an overall emphasis on "media metacommentary", or news about news, in news media overall (Peck, 2019). Later in this chapter, we will see how the routines of news directors and news producers at talk radio stations do not tend to include original news reporting, but rather consist of repackaging stories from other sources, such as other local news outlets or press releases, and in Chapter 2 we will see that the majority of talk radio content consists of commentary and analysis on national news stories.

The second apex of radio legislation is the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which relaxed limits on ownership in local communities. Rosenwald credits the Telecommunications Act for increasing programming syndication and allowing personalities, like Rush Limbaugh, to take national prominence. According to Klinenberg, this re-regulation of the media industry allowed big media outlets to expand and consolidate ownership across outlets, which resulted in massive downsizing of the local reporters, editors, and DJs who produced original content in local markets (2007). In the two years that followed the act, media companies bought and sold more than 40 percent of the commercial radio stations in the market, and the number of individual owners declined by 14 percent (Klinenberg, 2007). Ownership caps historically fostered competition and diversity and, consequently, consolidation means fewer people made decisions on what music to air (Peterson and Anand, 2004). Peterson and Anand report that in 1989 the largest radio industry company owned 20 stations, whereas in 2002, the largest company owned 1225.

Going beyond public affairs and news content, critics and musicians argued that consolidation inflicted “cultural damage” by blocking the process through which new music percolates up from the local to the national scene (Klinenberg, 2007). By 2002, half as many songs were aired often enough to become popular, as indicated by the pop music charts (Peterson and Anand, 2004). Consolidation of media power hands unbalanced definitional, analytical, and interpretive authority to the dominant voices in the market, and no matter who controls them, and “consolidated media companies compromise the quality of democratic politics and cultural life when they grow out of touch with the communities in which they operate” (Klinenberg 2008; Freedman 2015). Public media outlets tend to provide less ideological news and analysis and provide a greater amount of public affairs coverage, whereas commercial talk/news stations are almost exclusively conservative. Their commercial status has economically tied conservative talk to other radio formats, including music format stations, the implications of which are further examined in the industry and organizational structures of broadcast radio. Therefore, talk radio ought to be examined within the context of other formats of commercial radio in order to understand the full scope of talk radio's influence on local broadcast radio and community media environments.

3. Industry structure

Radio's industry structure has been defined by the consolidation of ownership made possible by the regulatory and technological changes previously described. Industries merge around new technologies, evolving legal arrangements, and newly conceptualized markets, leading to institutionalization (Peterson and Anand, 2004). Missouri's radio market has various degrees of consolidated ownership in the commercial sector, with independent, locally owned

stations, as well as commercial players with a handful of stations in a few communities, and large, national corporations.

To examine the industry structure present in Missouri's radio ecosystem, I have compiled lists of the radio stations with their format and license owners in the three examined communities. The mid-sized market, Springfield, shows the most ownership concentration with multiple licensees owning diverse holdings in multiple formats within the community. This is seen on a smaller scale in Poplar Bluff, where two companies, Eagle Bluff Enterprises and MMR License, LLC each own three stations across multiple formats. The largest national player, iHeartMedia, formerly Clear Channel, holds licenses for four music stations in Springfield. Tables 1-3 show the stations that are broadcast in Springfield, Clinton, and Poplar Bluff, listing the call sign, frequency, format, and license owner of each station. Call signs followed by (LPFM) indicate low-power FM stations, which are non-commercial educational stations with limited service range that are not protected from frequency interference from other FM stations. Call signs followed by -AM indicate that the station is simulcast from an AM frequency of the same name.

Table 1. Springfield, MO Radio Stations			
Call Sign	Frequency	Format	Licensee
KGBX	105.9 FM	Adult Contemporary	IHM Licenses, LLC
KTXR	98.7 FM	Adult Contemporary	Zimmer Midwest Communications, Inc.
KRVI	106.7 FM	Adult Hits	Summit Media (SM-KRVI, LLC)
KBNN	750 AM	Business News	Alpha Media Licensee LLC
KWND	88.3 FM	Christian Contemporary	Radio Training Network, Inc.
KADI	99.5 FM	Christian Contemporary	Vision Communications, Inc.
KOMG	105.1 FM	Classic Country	MW SpringMO, Inc.
KRZK	106.3 FM	Classic Country	Ozark Mountain Media Group, LLC
KWTO	101.3 FM	Classic Country	Zimmer Midwest Communications, Inc.
KXUS	97.3 FM	Classic Rock	IHM Licenses, LLC
KKLH	104.7 FM	Classic Rock	MW SpringMO, Inc.
KDRU (LPFM)	98.1 FM	College	Drury University
KJEL	103.7 FM	Country	Alpha Media Licensee LLC
KSWF	100.5 FM	Country	IHM Licenses, LLC
KHBZ	102.9 FM	Country	Ozark Mountain Media Group, LLC
KTTS	94.7 FM	Country	Summit Media (SM-KTTS, LLC)
KWFC	89.1 FM	Gospel Music	Radio Training Network, Inc.
KTOZ	95.5 FM	Hot AC	IHM Licenses, LLC
KSGF	1260 AM	News/Talk	Summit Media (SM-KSGF-AM, LLC)
KSGF	104.1 FM	News/Talk	Summit Media (SM-KSGF-FM, LLC)
KWTO-AM	93.3 FM	News/Talk	Zimmer Midwest Communications, Inc.

Table 1. Springfield, MO Radio Stations			
KWTO	560 AM	News/Talk	Zimmer Midwest Communications, Inc.
KSMU	91.1 FM	Public Radio	Board Of Governors of Missouri State
KQOH	91.9 FM	Religious	Catholic Radio Network, Inc.
KSCV	90.1 FM	Religious	Community Broadcasting, Inc.
KOZO	93.7 FM	Religious	David Ingles Ministries Church Inc.
WJFM	91.5 FM	Religious	Family Worship Center Church, Inc.
KMRF	1510 AM	Religious	New Life Evangelistic Center, Inc
KQRA	102.1 FM	Rock	MW SpringMO, Inc.
KRZD-AM	107.5 FM	Rock	One Media, Inc.
KRZD	1550 AM	Rock	One Media, Inc.
KGMV	1400 AM	Sports	IHM Licenses, LLC
KBFL-AM	96.9 FM	Sports	Zimmer Midwest Communications, Inc.
KBFL	1060 AM	Sports	Zimmer Midwest Communications, Inc.
KSWM	940 AM	Talk	Falcon Broadcasting, Inc.
KICK-AM	92.3 FM	Talk	Vision Communications, Inc.
KICK	1340 AM	Talk	Vision Communications, Inc.
KOSP	92.9 FM	Top-40	MW SpringMO, Inc.
KSPW	96.5 FM	Top-40	Summit Media (SM-KSPW, LLC)
(Source: FCC Public Inspection Files)			

Table 2. Clinton, MO Radio Stations			
Call Sign	Frequency	Format	Licensee
KLRQ	96.1 FM	Christian Contemporary	Educational Media Foundation
KDKD	95.3 FM	Country	Radford Media Group, LLC
KWKJ	98.5 FM	Country	D & H Media, LLC
KXXK	105.7 FM	Country	Townsquare License, LLC
KYLF	88.9 FM	Religious	Community Broadcasting, Inc.
KCWJ	1030 AM	Spanish Christian	Radio Vida Kansas, Inc.
KCSP	610 AM	Sports	Audacy License, LLC
WHB	810 AM	Sports	Union Broadcasting, Inc.
KCMO	710 AM	Talk	CMP Houston-KC, LLC
KMBZ	980 AM	Talk	Audacy License, LLC
(Source: FCC Public Inspection Files)			

Table 3. Poplar Bluff, MO			
Call Sign	Frequency	Format	Licensee
KZMA	99.9 FM	Adult Contemporary	Daniel S. Stratemeyer
KAHR	96.7 FM	Adult Hits	Eagle Bluff Enterprises
KLUH	90.3 FM	Christian Contemporary	David Craig Ministries, Inc.
KJEZ	95.5 FM	Classic Rock	MRR License LLC (Max Media)
KCBW	104.5 FM	Classic Rock	Fox Radio Network, LLC
KPPL	92.5 FM	Country	George S. Flinn, Jr.
KOEA	94.1 FM	Country	Eagle Bluff Enterprises
KKLR	94.5 FM	Country	MRR License LLC (Max Media)
KOEA	97.5 FM	Country	Eagle Bluff Enterprises
KLUE	103.5 FM	Hot AC	Benjamin Stratemeyer
KWOC	93.3 FM	News/Talk	MRR License LLC (Max Media)
KWOC	930 AM	News/Talk	MRR License LLC (Max Media)
KLID	1340 AM	Oldies	Browning Skidmore Broadcasting, Inc
KDMC	88.7 FM	Public Radio	Southeast Missouri State University
KPBM	101.9 FM	Public Radio	Black River Public Radio
KOKS	89.5 FM	Religious	Calvary Educational Broadcasting Network
WYFQ	91.1 FM	Religious	Bible Broadcasting Network, Inc.
KPBR	91.7 FM	Religious	Community Broadcasting, Inc.
KYHO	106.9 FM	Religious	Vision Broadcasting of Poplar Bluff, Inc.
K252EE	98.3 FM	Unknown Format	Central Educational Radio
(Source: FCC Public Inspection Files)			

Tables 1, 2, and 3 show that commercial radio licensees tend to own multiple stations in the same region with different genre formats. In Springfield, for example, Zimmer Midwest Communications owns four different stations: Adult Contemporary station 98.7 *The Dove* (KTXR), classic country station 101.3 *Real Country* (KWTO), news/talk station KWTO, and sports station *The Jock* (KBFL). These stations' varying genres mean they are not in competition for listeners with each other, but with the other stations of their genre. They are then able to share resources such as recording studios, station managers, and news producers between their stations. This structure exists in other media organizations in multiple communities. In Springfield, Summit Media holds licenses for adult hits, country, news/talk, and top-40 stations; iHeartMedia holds licenses for adult contemporary, classic rock, country, and sports stations; and Midwest SpringMO, Inc. holds licenses for classic country, classic rock, rock and top-40 stations. In Poplar Bluff, Max Media (MMR) owns stations in the formats Classic Rock, Country, and News/Talk. Ownership is most consolidated in the largest broadcast area, Springfield, where there is also the most variety in the types of content available.

These local ownership concentrations, however, only are shared between commercial broadcasters. Public radio and religious broadcasting are classified as noncommercial stations, and are required by the FCC to serve an educational purpose. They are generally owned by universities, governments, or community educational, cultural, and civic groups. Forty-two percent of noncommercial radio stations broadcast in a primarily religious format (FCC, 2011). Religious broadcasting is concentrated in large national broadcasters that simulcast programming, allowing them to reach millions of listeners. These stations tend to be owned by large ministries with access to generous economic resources. The two dominant religious broadcasters in Missouri are the Bott Radio Network and K-Love. The Bott Radio Network,

under the license Community Broadcasting, Inc., owns 120 stations across the country with 51 stations in Missouri, and K-Love, under the license Educational Media Foundation, owns 552 stations across the country with seven in Missouri. According to the 2011 Information Needs of Communities report, 40% of Christian broadcast programs are categorized as “news and information,” although most religious broadcasters do not focus on news in the traditional sense, but rather offer public affairs programming tied to issues of concern for their audience (FCC). Religious broadcasters are therefore significant in the examination of the creation of cultural and political ideology.

Within the commercial talk radio industry, syndication has also had a significant impact on the makeup of broadcast content. As previously stated, satellite technology has made national syndication feasible and economically advantageous, which has resulted in national voices taking up the majority of the airwaves across the state. National talk personalities like Sean Hannity, Mark Levin, Glenn Beck, and Dave Ramsey can be found on the airwaves in every community in Missouri at some point during the day, regardless of the amount of competition in a given community. In the communities I observed, the talk radio stations only have 1-3 local programs, which are aired during the morning and afternoon drive-time hours. The rest of the broadcast time is dedicated to nationally syndicated programming, primarily from Fox News. In addition to the amount of time dedicated to national programs, the style and rhetoric of the national personalities influences that of local show hosts. The anger and outrage of personalities like the late Rush Limbaugh is the gold standard of talk radio, and local producers look to national programs for leadership on what subjects and style.

Table 4 shows the programming schedules for every talk radio station in the three analyzed communities (Springfield, Clinton, and Poplar Bluff). Program titles in shaded boxes

represent original programming from the station; all other programming is nationally syndicated, primarily from Fox News. As shown in Table 4, most stations host a local show during the morning and/or afternoon drive-time hours, between 5-10 a.m. and 3-5 p.m., and at least one locally produced show is available in every broadcast area. Every community, additionally, has broadcast access to the same content that is nationally syndicated from Sean Hannity, Mark Levin, Glenn Beck, and Coast to Coast AM.

Table 4. Talk Radio Program Schedule

Station		Hour																								
		0:00	1:00	2:00	3:00	4:00	5:00	6:00	7:00	8:00	9:00	10:00	11:00	12:00	13:00	14:00	15:00	16:00	17:00	18:00	19:00	20:00	21:00	22:00	23:00	
Springfield	KSWM	Coast To Coast Live	Armstrong & Getty	Red Eye Radio	Mornings With Nick Reed	Daybreak USA Live	Super Trading Post	America's Morning News Live	Ray Lucia Live	The Big Biz Show Live	Big Pitch Radio Show Live	Business Rock Stars Live	Coast To Coast	Best of the Frankie Boyer Radio Weekday Show	Best of Big Pitch Radio Ray Lucia											
																KSWM	Coast To Coast AM	America's First News with Gordon Deal	Wake Up Springfield with Tim Jones	The Gary Nolan Show	Clay Travis & Buck Sexton Show	The Dan Bongino Show	Elijah Haahr Show	The Dan Bongino Show	The Joe Pags Show	The Jim Bohannon Show
		KCMO	Red Eye Radio	First Light with Michael Toscano	Fox News Rundown	Pete Mundo	Chris Stigall	Chris Plante	Dave Ramsey Live	Ben Shapiro	Mark Levin	The Dan Bongino Show	The Michael Knowles Show													
														Clinton	KMBZ	Armstrong & Getty	Coast To Coast AM	Kansas City's Morning News	Glenn Beck	The Dana Show	Sean Hannity	The Joe Pags Show	Lars Larson	Armstrong & Getty		
																									Poplar Bluff	KWOC

When discussing the presence of syndicated content on talk radio stations, talk radio host Elijah Haahr told me that being local gives him a competitive edge against his competitor station, KSGF, who airs Sean Hannity in the same time slot as Haahr's show.

Haahr: "When [Zimmer] hired me last spring, they were like, your competition is KSGF and it's gonna be Sean Hannity in the afternoon. So, we want you to do... You gotta talk about the national stuff. That's the hits. But, talk about Missouri stuff, talk about local stuff. 'Cause that's the difference if you... 'Cause they can't get that on Hannity.. It's still conservative, but it's more locally based. And that's what... they were like, we want somebody who can talk about the local stuff too."

Sidney: So, what... Can you tell me more about that? What is it like? So, you're consciously competing with Sean Hannity, sort of?

Haahr: Yeah. So, like, in the morning show, KWTO's morning show plays against KSGF's morning show. They're both local. Whatever. The afternoon show, they play Hannity in the afternoon and Hannity... We even know what time they come out of commercial break. It's about, usually, 30 to 60 seconds later than we do. So our goal at the beginning is to try to give them some reason if they've started on us not to switch over and see what Hannity says. So whether it's a local story like the mayor's race, the governor's election, some local hook, they'll be like "well, I can't get this if I switch. I gotta stick around." And that's something we're super cognizant about, is giving people... 'Cause, it's a one-on-one competition. If they're gonna listen to sports, I don't have a chance, but if it's me against Hannity, the only way I get it is if I talk about local and Missouri stuff that I know Hannity can't talk about.

Haahr is in a "one-on-one competition" with Sean Hannity for talk radio listeners, a competition which Hannity likely is unaware of as a national broadcaster airing in thousands of communities across the country. While Haahr is cognizant of his role as the local content provider, he is also hyper aware of the programming style of his competitor's program structure and style. There is a one-way influence in place, where Haahr is influenced by the content, subject material, and story framing on Hannity's show, but Hannity is uninfluenced by and unaware of Haahr. Beyond the sheer amount of airtime dedicated to nationally syndicated

programming, national talk personalities have the power to influence the shows produced at local stations which local producers do not share.

To that end, while listeners generally have access to public affairs content in three different formats on the radio (religious, public, and conservative opinion), the position of each format within the overall industry structure influences the ideology, motivations, and content aired by each type of broadcaster. These differences will be further analyzed in chapters 2 and 3.

4. Organizational structure

In his study of the radio industry, Eric Klinenberg observed hundreds of DJs, news reporters, and talk show hosts who lost their programs when Clear Channel—now iHeartMedia—came to town and installed digital voice-tracking systems to replace local talent. In multiple communities he saw radio stations consolidate into central locations and downsize staff as ownership consolidated. I observed the same structure in my interviews with Zimmer Midwest Communications radio producers. Zimmer uses a very common organizational structure for commercial broadcasters, where multiple radio stations owned by the same licensee broadcast out of one shared studio. This allows staff to work across different stations and for stations to share content, particularly local news content. Zimmer stations also use digital voice tracking technology, which allows their producers to queue music, commercials, and station identifiers, dramatically reducing the amount of time it takes to produce a show.

I also observed how within this structure, the influence of talk radio seeps into stations of other formats. Zimmer's four Springfield stations share one news director who, in addition to other responsibilities, produces the newscasts aired on all four stations. Along with one other full-time staff member, Louzader says he is responsible for all the news coverage reported on all

four stations, almost all of which is aggregated from other local news stations. Most of Zimmer's stations air one 60-second newscast every hour, except for the morning show on KWTO which airs 120-second newscasts every 30 minutes. This organizational structure allows stations to air more news content at a lower cost, but it also means that the assumptions and interests of the talk radio format seep into the company's other stations and become associated with non-political cultural groups.

Furthermore, the effect of dominant voices in the national political sphere can be seen in the daily routines involved in subject selection. While observing the production of the KWTO morning show, I asked producer Cass Bowen how the team chooses the topics for their show each day:

- Sidney: So where do you guys get your...I don't know if, like, story ideas is the right word, but, like, your topics that you talk about each day?
- Cass: We decide in the morning. Each morning I come in at like 4:30 and scroll through what everybody's talking about.
- Sidney: And so where do you scroll?
- Cass: All the big... like I will, I'll look at CNN as much as I'll at Fox.
- Sidney: Mm-hmm. But, do you go directly to their websites? Do you do social media?
- Cass: I'll do a mix of Twitter and their websites and then different aggregators. So I rely a lot on aggregators to show me what is, like, consistently being talked about. And then of course we'll put our opinion on it. Because we're not... We're an opinion show.

Cass describes a process for subject selection that is affected by both human and technological outside forces. The priorities of the decision makers at national news networks, as

well as the algorithms in social media and news aggregation applications influence the content of the show.

5. Occupational careers

Culture is produced through sustained collective activity developed through career systems and the networks of working relationships (Peterson and Anand, 2004). Commercial radio hosts are not subject to the same industry standards as journalists, in radio or any other format. The occupational careers of talk radio hosts overlap more with other commercial radio hosts than they do other news hosts or journalists. As a result, journalistic industry standards for accuracy and objectivity are not a part of news reporting for commercial radio stations. Talk radio hosts are entertainers, and entertaining, more than informing or articulating the views of the audience, is talk radio's goal (Rosenwald 2019, 5). Rosenwald goes further to argue that "when hosts spotlight salacious, often unverified stories that made for great radio, they forced the mainstream media to address these same stories, thereby damaging journalists' capacity to serve as gatekeepers who determined newsworthiness" (2019, 6). Commercial media of all formats seeks to profit by entertaining and engaging listeners, and the entertainment aspect of the talk radio hosts' occupation affects the quality of public affairs content beyond their own programs.

I saw this reflected in the staff at talk station KWTO in Springfield. Don Louzader, the station's news director, worked for 25 years as a broadcast news anchor and reporter before making the switch to talk radio. However, being at a conservative station, Louzader says his beliefs have shifted further right.

Louzader: "It's fun. It's tricky. But, again, I'm a lot more comfortable in this role than I was when I started. When I first started, I was a little bit, 'Ew, how am I

gonna do this?’ you know, because, like, I’ll be honest with you, I, I considered myself kind of, probably middle of the road Republican. I mean, I leaned toward conservative values, but also, you know, there were... I mean, I never really thought a lot about where I stood. But I think I leaned more conservative, but not, like, far right. And so when I first started listening to this show, knowing that I was gonna be working on it, I’m like, oh, wow, yeah, you know, they’re questioning the results—this was like right after the election—they’re questioning the results of the election. You know? I don’t question the results of the election. And so it was really weird to be like, ‘Oh, what am I getting into.’

But, I’ll tell you, the more that I’ve been here and been on this station, my views have probably gone a little... shifted a little bit more to the right than they were before. They’re not all the way over. [...] But, uh, I think overall I have shifted a little further right in my thinking, just by being exposed to Tim Jones.”

Louzader’s position puts him between entertainment and news, and his career as a news reporter keeps him oriented towards some of those values. However, simply by being a part of a conservative station and being exposed to conservative ideology, he says his views have shifted.

6. Market

Mapping the contours of radio coverage by station format reveal the parts of the state whose communities lack diverse media options. No matter how globally connected the world is, most people live locally, and local media producers are uniquely capable of reporting on the issues that directly impact our communities, and of explaining how and why regional, national, and international events hit home (Klinenberg, 2007). National Public Radio, which provides more original news coverage and locally oriented shows than commercial news stations, is not available on the airwaves in most of rural Missouri. *Figure 1. Public Radio Coverage* shows the availability of NPR programming, locally operated public radio and public classical music stations. All of the state’s public radio stations are owned by colleges and universities, and

broadcast from their campuses. As a result, there is already an orientation towards high education populations and public radio availability. Talk radio, however, is available on the airwaves *everywhere* in Missouri, as seen in *Figure 2. Talk Radio Coverage*. In the most rural, isolated communities of the heartland, the national conservative voices can be heard, and most communities have competition between their talk radio stations. Today, many talk radio stations broadcast on AM and FM airwaves, allowing them to reach wider broadcast areas on AM.

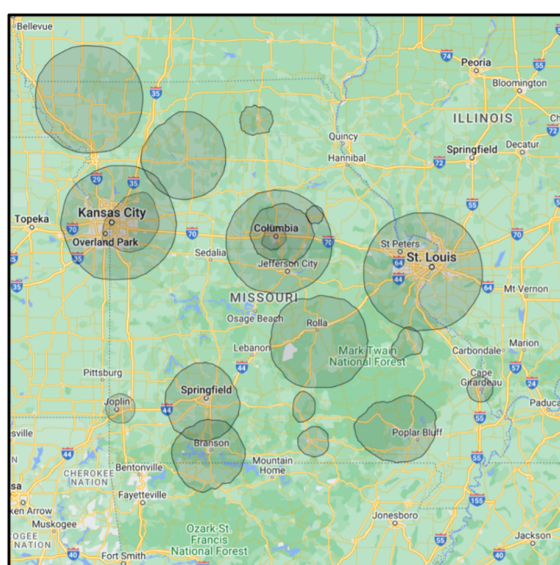


Figure 1. Public radio coverage. (Source: FCC Public Inspection Files)

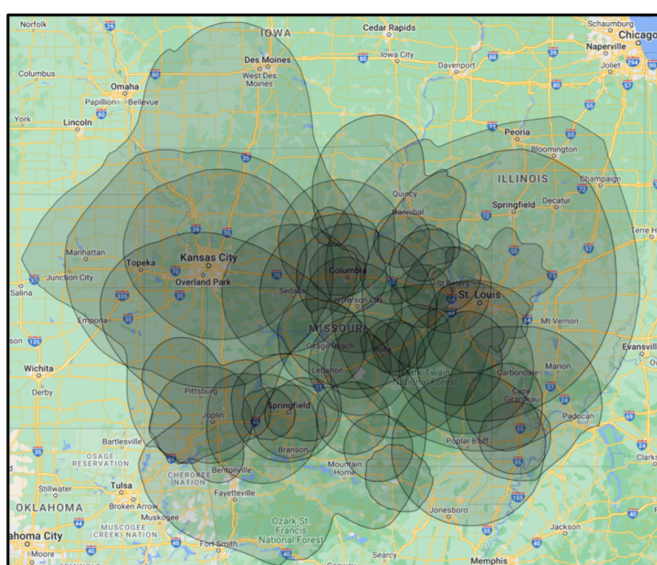


Figure 2. Talk radio coverage. (Source: FCC Public Inspection Files)

Coverage of music formats, similarly, is limited much of the state. Urban or Hip-Hop stations do not exist outside of the state's urban hubs. The most rural parts of the state lack even the Adult Contemporary and Rock formats, limiting the airwaves to country music which, like talk radio, can be found *everywhere* in Missouri. Country music shares many cultural similarities with conservative talk radio, such as an emphasis on authenticity and white working-class cultural values. Without the availability of diverse cultural options on broadcast music stations,

people living in rural areas lack exposure to different cultures which could promote acceptance of those from diverse backgrounds.

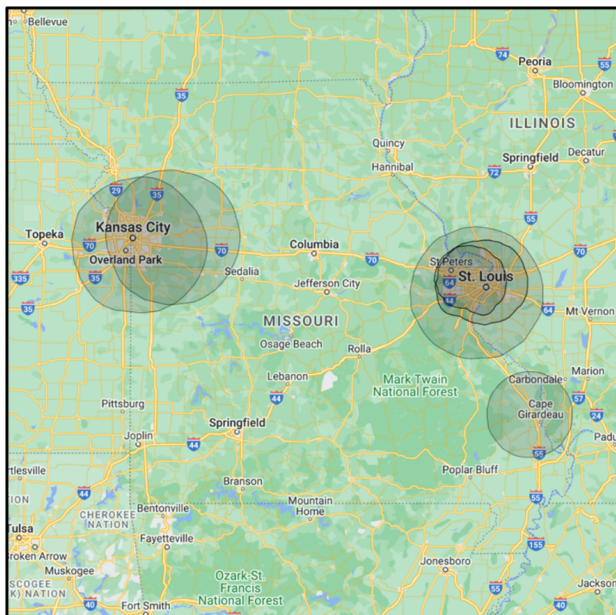


Figure 3. Urban radio coverage. (Source: FCC Public Inspection Files)

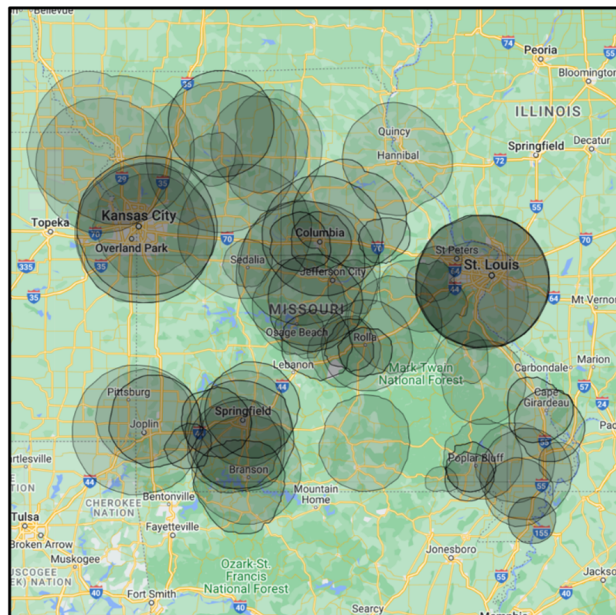


Figure 4. Adult Contemporary radio coverage. (Source: FCC Public Inspection Files)

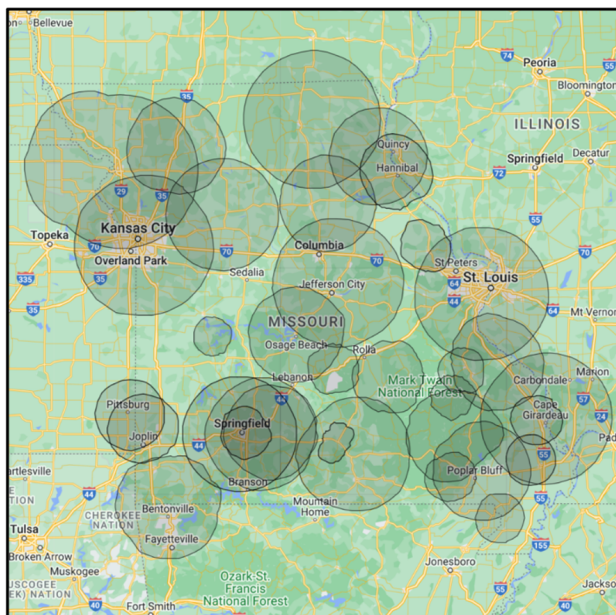


Figure 5. Rock radio coverage. (Source: FCC Public Inspection Files)

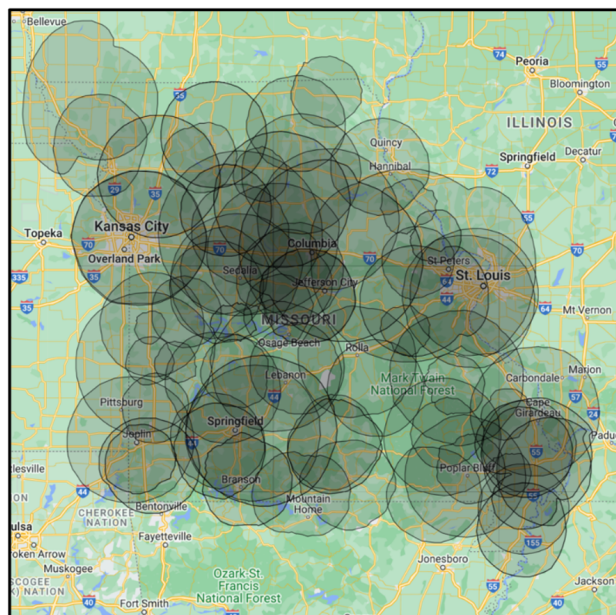


Figure 6. Country radio coverage. (Source: FCC Public Inspection Files)

Religious radio dominates Missouri's airwaves, making up one quarter of stations, as shown in Table 5. Station Count. As previously mentioned, a few national broadcasters make up the majority of religious broadcasters in Missouri, such as the Bott Radio Network with 51 stations. Not only is religious broadcasting dominated by Christian broadcasters, but those broadcasters are concentrated into a few national broadcasters that simulcast on hundreds of stations nationwide.

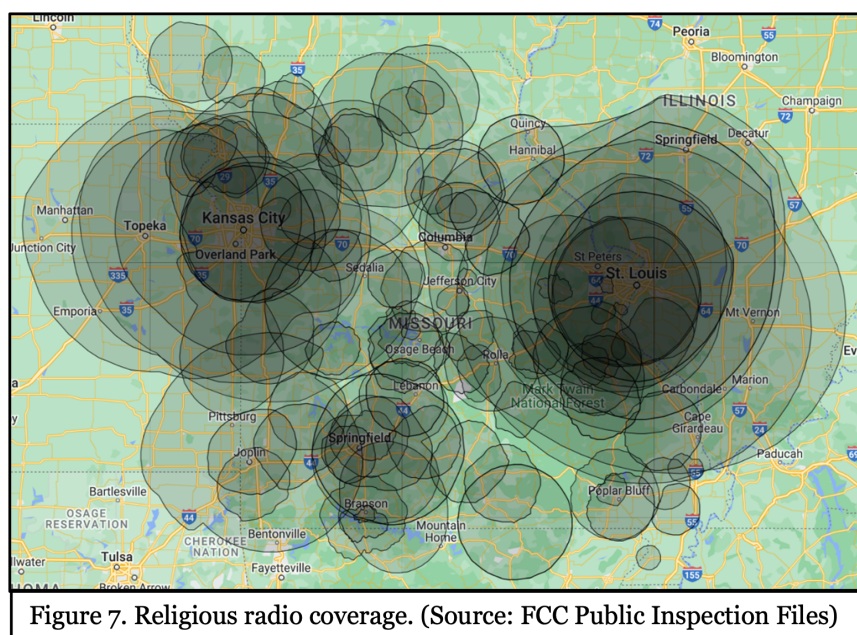


Table 5. Station Count	
Simple Genre	Count
Religious	98
Country	77
Adult	
Contemporary	65
Talk	43
Rock	34
Other	23
Sports	19
Public Radio	19
Farm	7
Urban	6
Grand Total	391

Looking back at Table 2. Clinton, we see a community that lacks diverse media options. In Clinton, the only formats available are talk, country music, religious, and sports (which is also widely and consistently available on AM radio across the state). Clinton does not even have popular formats such as classic rock or adult contemporary. When combined with the geographic isolation of the rural community, this lack of diverse media options prevents the people of Clinton from being exposed to new cultures and ideas that could connect the community with the rest of the world.

Summary

When examined through a production of culture perspective, talk radio can be better contextualized in the context of broadcast media, rather than just the conservative media silo. A view of the radio market reveals that the most prominent genres, which are broadcast everywhere in the state, are those that are sympathetic to conservative ideology: talk, religious, and even country music. At each level of the production process, messages are encoded with meaning as they are reproduced, and decoded by the audience. In talk radio, national pundits take up the majority of the airwaves and the priorities and beliefs of national thinkers are then reproduced at the local level. In religious broadcasting, again, national programs dominate the airwaves as they are simulcast on hundreds of stations across the country. National dominance in radio broadcasting allows hegemonic ideology to disseminate through local stations as it is aired directly and reproduced in local programs. Chapters 2 and 3 will show how authenticity and working-class culture are represented and perceived in each of these formats through content analysis and ethnographic interviews with radio industry insiders and listeners. In these chapters, we will further explore how messages are decoded and listeners make meaning of the content on the air.

Chapter 2. Content Analysis

When used in conjunction with other methods, content analysis allows for descriptive qualitative analysis of subject material. This analysis shows examples of the radio broadcasts that are a part of the everyday life of their listeners, and discusses the themes and messages encoded in the content. This analysis is contextualized by interviews with radio industry producers and listeners to allow us to understand what content is on the air, and how the people creating and consuming the content understand it. With this method I am able to compare the themes found in the content analysis with themes found in audience interviews to see how the messages compare. This content analysis also allows us to see specific examples of the effects of production structures on broadcast content and reveal the implicit and explicit ways that conservative ideology is present across radio genres.

Chapter 1 showed that talk radio stations share economic interests and production resources with other commercial stations of various genres. The following content analysis will show that shared ownership has resulted in the news content on music stations often coming from talk radio producers. As a result, conservative ideology penetrates into local news broadcasts, which are an essential source of information in their communities. This persistent and unrecognized ideological penetration is how ideology becomes a part of hegemony.

Methods

Over the year I spent researching talk radio for this thesis, I spent countless hours listening to broadcast radio from and in different parts of the state of Missouri. To conduct a more specific content analysis, I recorded two-hour segments in the morning and afternoon drive-time hours (7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.) from talk and country stations in the three cities I examined: Clinton, Springfield, and Poplar Bluff. I made recordings of multiple

stations on the same day to show the scope and spread of national influence on local broadcasting, and attempted to record on days that would represent the average day. On country stations I looked for the station identifiers between songs, the commentary from DJ's, and local news reports to understand how these stations conceptualize the cultural identity of their listeners. On talk stations, I looked for local and national content to see what kinds of content was produced locally, and how it compares to the national programming. In stations that are owned by the same licensee, I looked for similarities in the news content on music and talk stations.

KWOC - Poplar Bluff

The following transcriptions come from a March 7 morning broadcast from KWOC, the talk radio station based in Poplar Bluff. KWOC airs a national broadcast from Fox News, followed by the national anthem, and a local newscast. The airing of the national anthem works to support the association between conservative politics and patriotism, just one of the subliminal ways radio stations make cultural associations. The local newscast covers the weather report, and a statewide tornado drill that will be happening later that day. The host, Frankie Castile, spends his 15-minute newscast covering upcoming weather trends and local high school basketball. He previews upcoming news headlines about a person rescued from a partially submerged vehicle and three men who were arrested on felony drug charges.² While the segment from Fox compacts multiple news stories into a short broadcast, Castile lingers on weather and sports for 15 minutes, likely because these are events happening in the community that listeners are interested in. At 7:20 a.m. the station airs a segment from Sean Hannity, followed by local content.

² See appendix for transcript.

Voiceover: KWOC, still bringing you the country's best talk, but now we're doing it on FM too. Today's talk, KWOC 930 AM and 93.3 FM.

Castile: 26 minutes now after seven o'clock. Glad to have you alongside us this Tuesday morning. Coming up, we've got your morning headlines. Also, 41 degrees, currently, outside. On our way to the mid-fifties for the afternoon high.

By the way, don't forget today, this morning at 10:00 AM the city of Poplar Bluff and Butler County will be participating in the Missouri statewide tornado drill by activating the outdoor warning sirens this morning at 10:00 AM. So if you do hear tornado sirens going on, just keep in mind it is just a test. It is the Missouri statewide tornado drill, and it's all gonna begin this morning, beginning at 10:00 AM.

All right, let's continue now with your morning headlines on this Tuesday morning, or... yeah, Tuesday morning. Almost said Monday again. Don't want to go backwards. Your news time now. It is 7:26. Our morning headlines are all being brought to you by Countryside Chevrolet in Donovan.

One person was rescued from a partially submerged vehicle in Poplar Bluff last week. According to the Poplar Bluff fire department, crews responded to a vehicle accident Friday morning on G Street. The vehicle had run into a ditch while trying to turn around, and the occupant was still in the vehicle when crews arrived. The person was not injured and a firefighter was able to get them out of the vehicle.

Three Wappapello residents were taken into custody Sunday evening in Dunklin County on felony drug charges. According to the Missouri State Highway Patrol, 38 year old Jesse Baxter, 18 year old Mackenzie Mims and 33 year old Adam Huff were each arrested on felony charges of possession of a controlled substance for methamphetamine, and a misdemeanor charge of possession of drug paraphernalia. Baxter is also facing additional felony charges of unlawful use of a weapon and unlawful possession of a firearm.

Crews have closed a Poplar Bluff Street for an improvement project, according to the Poplar Bluff Street Department. For the next few weeks, the 700-block of Cynthia Street will be closed except for local traffic. The closure is to... is so construction crews can make improvements to the storm water system currently in that block.

Still to come this morning during our morning headlines, City Water System upgrades are going on today over in the Donovan area. Also, open enrollment scheduled for this week in Poplar Bluff. We'll let you know what that's about coming up as we continue right here on the KWOC Morning Edition.

The news headlines reported on KWOC's morning show, like many local stations, cover the information that most directly impacts people in their listening area. Street closures, water system upgrades, and tornado drills immediately and directly impact the listeners in their daily lives. Radio is embedded in daily routines, such as driving to work, and listeners come to rely on local radio for this type of information. Radio has become an essential service for weather and traffic information, which needs to be shared with the community immediately as people go about their daily lives.

Most of the community announcements and news stories broadcast on KWOC, however, are reported directly from press releases, as is common in smaller communities where radio stations lack resources for dedicated news reporters. Headlines are attributed to the subject of the story, such as the Poplar Bluff fire department, street department, and Missouri State Highway Patrol. For many stories, this style of newsgathering can be inconsequential. Reliance on press releases allows local authorities to influence the framing and agenda-setting of local news coverage, and eliminates the process of verification and questioning from local media. Consolidation of radio station ownership also means that the process of news reporting is consolidated between multiple stations. The owners of KWOC, Max Media, also own a country station and classic rock station in the area, and all three stations report news from the same 24-hour news center, so listeners cannot simply tune into another station to hear a different news source. The talk station's ideology is able to creep into the content aired on music format stations, and this ideological creep is what creates hegemony.

KCMO - Clinton

While Clinton is not a part of the Kansas City Metro area, it is close enough to Kansas City to have access to their AM stations' broadcasts. Clinton has access to two talk radio stations available in, KCMO and KMBZ, which are broadcast from Kansas City. While Clinton may have access to content from these two stations, neither station is based or invested in its community. There is one station broadcast from Clinton, country station KDKD, which broadcasts news content which tends to be more locally focused.

The following segments from the talk station KCMO were recorded and transcribed from the morning broadcast on Tuesday, March 7, 2023 between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m.

Dave Anthony: "It is time to target Mexican drug cartels. I'm Dave Anthony Fox News."

Mike Waltz: "They control our border. They are killing tens of thousands of American citizens."

Anthony: "So Republican Congressman Mike Waltz tells Fox the military should even be involved."

Mike Waltz: "To dismantle them, to disrupt them, uh, and to take them out."

Anthony: "This in, four Americans kidnapped Friday in Mexico still have not been heard from, taken by armed gunmen in Matamoros, the city the US tells us is not safe to go to."

Female voiceover: "Family members tell the Associated Press that the close friends had traveled from South Carolina accompanying one member who had planned a visit to Mexico for a tummy tuck. The sister of Zindel Brown told the AP that her younger brother was initially hesitant about making the trip. Quote, 'This is like a bad dream you wish you could wake up from. You see a member of your family thrown in the back of a truck and dragged. It is just unbelievable'."

Anthony: "Fox's Alexandria Hoff. The FBI has a \$50,000 reward for arrests and they're safe turn. The FBI is also searching for two accused Capitol Rioters from January 6th, 2021. Fox's Gurnal Scott reports they've gone AWOL."

- Scott: “Olivia Pollock, who was set to stand trial Monday and Joseph Hutchinson II, whose court date is in August, both have been accused of crimes including assaulting police officers at the Capitol. The two following initial appearances before a judge were ordered to wear ankle monitors.”
- Anthony: “And they apparently cut those off. After a wave of violent weekend protest in Atlanta at a police training center construction site, 23 people have been charged with domestic terrorism. All but two are from out of state. Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr tells the Fox News Rundown podcast.”
- Carr: “We are not Seattle, we are not Portland, we are not Some of these places where folks look the other way and, and don't hold people accountable.”
- Anthony: “As President Biden readies a 2024 budget plan he'll give to Congress. Thursday, we're learning one proposal to keep Medicare solvent through 2050 would be a tax increase on Americans earning \$400,000 a year or more. America's listening to Fox News.”
- Voiceover: “Thanks for listening. You found Kansas City's home for stimulating talk. KCMO Kansas City 101 FM KCFX HD2 Harrisonville, a Cumulus media station.”
- John Anthony: “From the KCMO newsroom, I'm John Anthony. A woman has been charged in connection with the incident in which three Kansas City, Missouri police officers were shot in a raid-turned-standoff last week near East 23rd Street in Blue Ridge Boulevard. 34-year-old Ashley R. Davis is being charged with possession with intent to distribute Fentanyl. Jimmy R. Lewis, previously charged for a separate incident, has also been charged with possession with intent to distribute Fentanyl in connection with last week's incident. Your next news in 30 minutes, traffic and weather.”

This national newscast from Fox News is a sample of the broadcasts played every day on stations everywhere. The national newscast consists of four stories. The first, about four Americans kidnapped in Mexico; the second, about two accused Capitol rioters evading trial; the third, about violent protests in Atlanta; and the fourth about Biden’s Medicare proposal. The local newscast, additionally, includes a report about two people charged with crimes related to a drug raid and police shooting. All but one news event covered on air involves violent crime. The

disproportionate coverage of crime events in newscasts gives the impression that these are the only newsworthy events, or the most important events, taking place. The newscaster establishes an “us vs. them” mentality with the clip from Republican Mike Waltz that refers to the Mexican drug cartels as “they” and “them”. This mentality is furthered with the segment from Georgia Attorney General Carr in which he says “we are not Seattle, we are not Portland,” referencing the geographic division of the coastal—and liberal—elite backlash conservatives push back against.

The non-crime related news is covered with little context. Discussion of the medicare proposal focuses on a proposed tax increase, giving the impression that this tax increase is the most important part of the proposal. As seen in the transcript above, radio newscasts are limited by time and must choose between the number of headlines covered and the depth of coverage of each story. As a result, each story is covered in only a few sentences, limiting the depth of reporting and analysis.

The national newscast from Fox is broadcast across the country to all of its affiliate stations. On the same day, I recorded broadcasts from KSFG in Springfield and KWOC in Poplar Bluff, and both stations aired this exact broadcast. While this is not an anomaly in radio—NPR also airs national newscasts through their affiliate stations—it does allow Fox to have a massive influence on listeners and broadcasters across the country. Local hosts broadcast Fox News content during their segments and look to Fox to know what are the most important political subjects at the national level. KDKD, the local country music station in Clinton, even airs Fox News broadcasts with their local news segments. When I visited the KWTO studio in Springfield, the hosts had TV in the studio tuned into Fox News all day, which allows Fox News influence in agenda setting in the local community. The scope of Fox News’ influence on local community ideology is twofold. First, Fox has a direct line of influence through the increased

exposure of their content through affiliate stations. Second, the content that is produced in local communities is influenced by Fox's identity and agenda as their messages are decoded and reproduced at the local level.

On the KCMO broadcast, the morning show picks back up after commercials and a local traffic and weather report.

Voiceover: "Bringing you the facts that the rest of the Kansas City media won't. Mundo on KCMO."

The language of this station identifier makes listeners doubt the reporting of other news outlets in the area and, if the station already confirms the beliefs of its listeners, framing their content as "facts" further solidifies that confirmation bias and puts them at odds with other voices. This tactic further reinforces the "us vs. them" narrative that is essential to backlash politics.

Mundo: "QAnon Shaman, the horn man. You know, the guy that painted his face red, white, and blue, and, uh, wore the horns on January 6th. I mean, he is really becoming, in many ways, the face of that day. Now, it's not obvious that he committed a lot of violence that day, but he was the most bizarrely dressed person that day, and he became, in many ways, the face of January 6th, 2021.

So the QAnon Shaman, we learned a little bit more about what this guy was actually doing on January 6th, besides the fact that he looked like he was, you know, outta some Marvel movie. Um, he was roaming the halls of the Capitol building on January 6th. If you haven't seen by now, the reason we're talking about this is because Tucker Carlson, um, had been given the January 6th tapes by Kevin McCarthy, the Speaker of the House, and for the first time last night, uh, Tucker Carlson showed some of the never before seen footage.

[...] So the QAnon Shaman is a guy who's become the face of the day, but nobody really knows what he was doing that day, right?

I mean, he's got his horns on his head and he looks like a clown. But what was he actually doing? The guy's been sentenced to prison for 41 months.

I mean, you know, we've got violent criminals here in Kansas City who don't spend 41 months in prison. So you gotta believe that this guy was doing something really, really bad.

Mundo's primary rhetorical tool used above is casting doubt on oppositional beliefs.

Since he can't say outright that Chansley did nothing wrong, he instead asks "what was he actually doing?" and emphasizes that nobody *really* knows what he was doing that day. Mundo shifts the focus from Chansley's actions to his ridiculous outfit to distract listeners and overwhelm the conversation with alternative points. He points to the "violent criminals here in Kansas City" with shorter jail sentences to deflect attention away from the subject at hand.

Mundo: Well, there's a lot of evidence to suggest that he was not necessarily the menace inside the halls of the Capitol that you were led to believe. Here's part of Tucker Carlson's show last night on this very issue in QAnon Shaman."

Carlson: "To this day, there is dispute over how Chansley got into the Capitol building, but according to our review of the internal surveillance video, it is very clear what happened once he got in. Virtually every moment of his time inside the Capitol was caught on tape. The tapes show that Capitol Police never stopped Jacob Chansley. They helped him. [...]

Contrast the reality of what Jacob Chansley did in the Capitol building on January 6th. The indisputable facts recorded on video, some of which has never before been seen with a depiction of Jacob Chansley that you've seen in the media for more than two years. He's a terrorist, they said, he should be killed."

Unidentified Voice: "Shoot him. Yeah, shoot him. Like if you burst into the United States. Hey, if he was dressed like Bin Laden would you've shot him?"

Carlson: "Shoot him. Shoot him. It makes you wonder who are the violent extremists here? Not Jacob Chansley. And the video proves, but we would never have known from the media coverage."

Mundo: "That is from Tucker Carlson's show last night, talking about Jacob Chansley, aka, the QAnon Shaman, a helmet-wearing, horn-wearing bizarro guy from January 6th who became the face of that day. Now, I'm

not bringing this up to re-litigate January 6th. It was a bad day all around. I've talked about this dozens and dozens and dozens of times.

Trump made mistake after mistake leading up to it. While he did not advocate in any way for violence on that day. In fact, Donald Trump talked about peacefully marching into the capitol that day. He certainly hurt himself in the days and weeks leading up to January 6th. I've said that many times over. The people who committed act... acts of violence, the people who vandalized the Capitol building, should absolutely be held accountable. There's no excusing what they did. [...] And the reality is, if you watch the video from last night, this guy was rolling around like a tourist. [...]

That doesn't excuse those who were violent and broke the law. Not for a second, it doesn't excuse any of them. But having a little more context is important to any story if you actually care about facts. And that's, to me, what a lot of last night was when it came to Tucker Carlson's coverage and getting some more footage of January 6th, beyond what the January 6th committee, which was just overtly partisan, wanted you to see, and as a result, their friends in the media wanted you to see.

And now you're having a lot of people on, uh, different media outlets. I mean, I've been flipping around this morning and they're having to cover it. They're having to cover what Tucker put out there last night. So they're doing things that they should have been doing for the last two years, but had no interest in doing because they didn't want to.

The narrative that they saw was best for them, their side and their political movement going forward. This is at least pushing back on that and giving us some balance and some conversation to that day, to that moment in time and to that historical event for better or for worse. And that's what it really should all be about in the end. Getting to the bottom of who these people are, the truth of what happened, and not excusing anybody for the millionth time who broke the law that day.”

Mundo spends the majority of his airtime on media metacommentary about the story Tucker Carlson has made the day's top headline. This is a prime example of how messages are reproduced through media routines: Mundo saw an interesting story covered by Tucker Carlson, and was able to play the clip on his show—directly exposing his audience to the content—and

analyze the clip himself—adding his own perception of the story. Mundo even points to this fact in his broadcast, when he says “I’ve been flipping around this morning and they’re having to cover it. They’re having to cover what Tucker put out last night.” Mundo has given Carlson additional air time by playing the clip from Carlson’s show, increasing the direct exposure of his listeners to Fox News content. Mundo must decode the message, then repackages it with his own analysis, encoding it with his own beliefs. The listener then decodes the message themselves, and makes meaning of what Carlson and Mundo have said. This routine continues as the listener, perhaps, relays this message to a person in their life, adding their own codes for the next recipient to make meaning of.

Mundo also uses language to shift blame of any wrongdoing away from Republicans, such as saying that media outlets—likely, the liberal mainstream media—are finally covering January 6 with context “the way they should have been for the last two years”. It does not matter that conservative media outlets are also just now bringing out these videos, because the liberal media has been pushing their agenda in the coverage of this story. He reinforces his own legitimacy, showing that he has been right on this subject the whole time, by using language like “I’ve talked about this dozens and dozens of times” and “I’ve said that many times over”. He does admit that Trump made some mistakes early on, but emphasizes that Trump advocated for peaceful protests—which he has said many times over. He says—for the millionth time—that we cannot excuse those people who broke the law, but we need to get to the bottom of who *really* broke the law that day.

The show goes to a commercial break, followed by another Fox News segment from Bill O’Reilly. To give the appearance that they have a connection to the local station, national hosts will voice a preview for his segment using the station’s callsign, such as, “Bill O’Reilly here, my

morning update coming up in four minutes here on KCMO.” O’Reilly just has to record this once, then the station airs the clip before the O’Reilly update every day. After four minutes of local advertisements, O’Reilly comes back on air and uses the same language as he did in the earlier clip. This helps listeners to associate the clip where the station was named directly with the nationally broadcast segment from that day, creating a false sense of local connection to the host.

O’Riley: Bill O'Reilly here and I'm warming up. Standby for the O'Reilly Update, Morning Edition. But first, no question there is a concerted effort to intimidate and silence conservative thinkers and replace our God-given individual liberty with big government controls. AMAC, the Association of Mature American Citizens is the leading Conservative advocacy and benefits organization in America. AMAC gives you access to exclusive benefits and all kinds of great content. Please stand with AMAC at amac.us. That's amac.us.

And this Tuesday, Saul Alinsky is the Che Guevara of the USA. Before he died in 1972, Alinsky provided battle plans to the far left in the form of written rules for radicals. It is said Hillary Clinton wrote a paper about that, but I have not been able to confirm it. Now, Saul laid out 11 strategies to destroy political opposition to the left. Rule number five is this: Ridicule is man's most potent weapon. It is hard to counter attack, ridicule, and it infuriates the opposition, which then reacts to your advantage.

As one who has been on the receiving end of Alinsky's war machine for more than 25 years, I well understand the ridicule factor, so to speak, and it's never been used more than it is today. Fox News, the latest example of non-stop ridicule, thanks to the Dominion voting machine lawsuit. Story's weeks old, yet every day the corporate media finds another way to highlight that story and it will never end. Sometimes the president simply regurgitates the Dominion story with no new information. USAA, a liberal enterprise, did that a few days ago just in case somebody didn't hear the first 3000 reports. At this point, there's little FNC can do, but hope it wins in court. However, Linsky would be disappointed if he were still around. The network will keep its core audience of older, conservative viewers. They will stand by their men and women having nowhere else to go.

Better call Saul. Bad News for the dearly departed, worse news for the leftist media.

Now this: If you are a timeshare owner, you're probably upset that your yearly dues continue to increase. Lone Star transfer guarantees the release of all liability to your timeshare in writing and done in a specific timeframe. They're the only company you can trust, having helped more than 18,000 owners legally and permanently get out. So please call Lone Star Transfer (855) 551-7066 or visit lonestartransfer.com.

Mundo: That is the morning O'Reilly Update. More analysis later on.

The O'Reilly Update bookends a section of political commentary with two advertisements. O'Reilly does not explicitly label the advertisements as such, but does separate the advertisements from his other commentary with the signaling phrases "but first" and "now this", seamlessly blending the endorsements into his other news and analysis. From his very first sentence, O'Reilly fosters backlash when he says there is "no question there is a concerted effort to intimidate and silence conservative thinkers and replace our God-given individual liberty with big government controls." He sets up his listeners to expect that anything in opposition to conservatism is a direct, intentional, malicious attack on everyday Americans, going against God himself. Conservatism and Christianity are part and parcel, lending to the absolutism of both systems of belief.

O'Reilly sets his own agenda by covering an ongoing event, rather than a trending news topic, which he has the power to do as a national pundit. In the commentary, O'Reilly tactically frames himself and Fox news as victims of ridicule, which is ironically a primary rhetorical tool used by conservative commentators. He points out that Hillary Clinton is said to have written a paper about Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* in a way that associates a modern political figure widely hated by Republicans with "radical" far left political figures. This reinforces the characterization of democrats as radical communists who the republicans are warranted in

retaliating against. Without explaining the Dominion voting machine lawsuit, O'Reilly discredits any source that continues to cover this story and accuses these sources of ridiculing Fox News.

In the next local segment on KCMO, Mundo previews an upcoming segment called "Tirade Tuesday", a segment demonstrative of the tone and emotion of talk radio.

Voiceover: Stream Mundo in the Morning on KCMOtalkradio.com, powered by Onder Law injury lawyers, getjim.com.

Mundo: Sweet. How about Bill O'Reilly with the better call Saul reference on a Tuesday, tirade Tuesday's coming up next hour. Don't miss that. Uh, we've got, uh, Dave Traer, Kansas Policy Institute bottom of this hour. Brad is in Kansas City. What's up Brad? Good morning.

Brad (Listener): Good morning, Pete. I hope your little one gets to feeling better.

Mundo: Thanks, Brad.

Brad: Um, I was gonna save this for Tirade Tuesday, but I'm not in a tirade mood. It's just, um, my own observation. The January 6th, uh, issue was from, I don't know, like January 7th, for people like me and people I'm around, a nothing issue. Um, like the goofy guy with the hat on, he confused me. Uh, is he a Minnesota Vikings fan? Is he a Buffalo Bills fan? What's going on with this guy? I didn't think he was a huge threat to the union. It's like, alright, he's nothing. Tucker's videos or the videos show, he's nothing. No big threat. You can always imagine somebody's gonna be doing something stupid somewhere in this country.

And then the amount of people who were up to no good on Jan... no good on January 6th. I've seen longer lines at an opening of a Whataburger. Yeah, there's some people doing some bad things, like very few, but it's a nothing story. What it, what the video shows is people like, uh, uh, Liz Cheney and anybody on MSNBC or the rest of 'em are just downright liars. Period. End of sentence. We're stupid. It's a nothing story. January 6th, there's nothing. To the rest or to... The story is how much they lie to all of us, not that there was some threat to the... Yeah, we all knew it was B.S. from the get-go.

The caller, Brad, says he is “not in a tirade mood” before launching into tirade criticizing the continued coverage of the January 6 insurrection. He uses the language “people like me” to establish an oppositional position against any outsider, and repeats many of the same points Mundo made in his earlier segment. He deflects the attention away from Chansley’s actions by emphasizing his appearance, and relates the scope of the event to something local—in this case, long lines at an opening of a Whataburger. He points to the liberal media, calling anybody on MSNBC a liar, and downplays the significance of the event entirely.

Listener callers are a unique feature of radio broadcasting that makes listeners feel connected to their station. When listeners can speak directly to the host of a show or get to voice their own opinions on air, they feel a sense of agency and connection to the station. This connection creates a greater sense of the localness of the station.

KDKD - Clinton

The previous transcriptions came from a talk radio station which can be received in Clinton, but is broadcast 80 miles away in Kansas City. While there is not a dedicated news format station in Clinton, local stations such as the country music station KDKD broadcast news content. KDKD is owned by the Radford Media group, a local media company that owns two broadcast stations in Clinton. In addition to owning these radio stations, the company also produces podcasts that are streamed online. In the segments I recorded, KDKD aired national news broadcasts from Fox News every hour, and a local newscast that is branded as “community news from Radford Media group.” These newscasts are broadcast on both of Radford’s radio stations and streamed online in a podcast format. Even though KDKD is not explicitly a conservative station, their national newscasts all come from Fox News.

Between songs, the station plays identifiers with the station name and taglines. The identifiers are fairly neutral, generally advertising the station as playing today's top country. Additionally, the station airs sermons and talk shows from local churches, an example of how religion and conservative politics are embedded within cultural industries and work together to shape ideology.

101.3 *Real Country* - Springfield

The country music station 101.3 *Real Country* is owned by Zimmer Communications, the same company that owns the talk station KWTO. I conducted phone interviews with two of the station's producers and visited Zimmer's Springfield studio in January 2023. As the name suggests, *Real Country* has a strong connection to authenticity, emphasizing that they play "real" country music. As such, some of their station identifiers hone in on this idea of authenticity and their commitment to the traditional values of country culture.

This is done subliminally, by making insider references, such as, "Sorry rowdy friends for that chicken fried dust on the bottle. Welcome to Real. The New 101.3 Real Country" to help listeners feel connected to the station when they understand the reference being made. Another one of *Real Country's* station identifiers uses backlash rhetorical tactics by targeting their opponents and emphasizing the value of authenticity: "It's a good feeling when you know your country won't be invaded by those pop artists. Nothing but the genuine stuff here. The new 101.3 Real Country." This message brings up the same "us vs. them" mentality seen in conservative talk radio. These identifiers reinforce the station's culture and the values of the music they play. In general, Country music represents patriotism, authenticity, and the value of hard work, and its songs celebrate the artist's local culture and community.

In an interview with Steve Krause, the Assistant Operations Manager of *Real Country*, he described to me how he imagines his audience.

Sidney: “Do you have a way that you imagine your audience? Like what kind of people are in your audience?”

Krause: “Oh sure. Yeah, yeah. We’ve got... our target audience is 35-54 year olds. Both male and female, but we probably lean a little heavy on the male side of that, but not very much. They’re working hard, you know, they’re 9-to-5-ers. Working hard, and faith, family, and country is really, really important to them.”

In all media institutions, creators have a concept of the people in their audience, who they are and what they desire. This imagined audience influences the content of broadcasts, as well as the frames and codes through which material is presented. As Krause plainly states, the audience of country music listeners holds working class values, and values faith, family, and country. These values are intertwined within country music, conservative rhetoric, and American religious ideology. The structures of cultural, political, and religious institutions constantly reinforce each other as they emphasize their shared values.

Summary

This content analysis has shown examples of the way that ideology is embedded within structures of cultural production. The rhetorical style of talk radio has been a subject of much research, and this analysis has shown examples of this rhetoric from national and local personalities. Furthermore, it has shown how broadcast structures allow conservative ideology to be reproduced in country music stations by combining the cultural identity of country music with news broadcasts. Radio stations play a vital role in the spread of local news, especially news that directly and immediately affects listeners. When multiple stations share ownership, however, this local news content is often recorded from one source and broadcast across stations of various formats. Throughout the samples in this chapter, we saw examples of working class values,

authenticity, and backlash conservatism in both talk and country music formats. Chapter 3 will look at the reception of radio and help understand how listeners interpret the messages they hear on air.

Chapter 3. Audience

The following chapter seeks to show how an average resident of rural Missouri thinks about broadcast radio in their area. In his essay on encoding and decoding, Stuart Hall explains that before a message can ‘have an effect’ it must first be received and decoded. It is the decoded meaning which has an effect on the listener (2004: 119). These effects, he says, are themselves framed by structures of understanding and social relations. The messages that listeners decode from radio broadcasts are framed by their connections to the station and its hosts, and their individual understanding of the world around them. This chapter will help uncover what messages listeners are decoding from radio broadcasts, and more generally how they perceive broadcast radio in their region. Throughout the following chapter, we will see shared themes in the motivations and desires of listeners across genres and formats.

Before conducting these interviews, I had been primarily focused on talk and news radio, but I quickly learned that when people are asked what they listen to on the radio, they think of music stations and local radio personalities. Still, I also found that listeners of talk radio share the same themes and motivations as music formats. So, while these interviews are not primarily about talk radio, they reveal how conservative hegemonic messaging is at the center of the social fabric of the region. Conservative ideology may be more obvious on talk radio, but as seen in the previous chapter, similar values are present on music stations and conservative messaging is embedded within local news content. This is exactly how ideology becomes hegemonic. These interviews helped to reveal the subtle ways that ideology is subconsciously embedded in the social fabric of a community as it becomes hegemonic.

Methods

In July and August of 2022, I attended three county and state fairs in rural Missouri: the Webster County Fair, the Ozark Empire Fair in Springfield, and the Missouri State Fair in Sedalia. I chose public events where I believed I would be able to find a random sample of people living in rural communities.

At the fairs, I found high traffic pathways and approached adults who made eye contact with me as they passed, avoiding families with children or larger groups of people. When I approached, I said something like, “Excuse me [sir, ma’am, folks], I don’t mean to interrupt, but can I steal a few minutes of your time?” If the person, or people, allowed me to continue, I said, “I am a student doing research on how people in rural areas listen to the radio. Could I ask you a few questions about what you listen to on the radio? It will only take a few minutes of your time.” I emphasized that I was a student with the hope that this would make potential interview subjects more willing to speak with me, and that the interview would be short and anonymous. Additionally, I consciously increased my use of honorifics—*sir, ma’am*—and regional dialect—words like *y’all* or *folks*, and the twang in my voice to signal that I was local in order to build trust with potential interview subjects. I willingly disclosed that I was a student but withheld where I went to school and what I was studying unless asked. If asked, I led with the fact that I was from the area, adding the specific locality when close enough for it to be familiar, and that I was getting my master’s at New York University and graduated from the University of Missouri. It was important to emphasize that I was an insider so subjects would be willing to speak freely with me.

After a subject agreed to be interviewed, I would turn on my audio recorder. Before beginning my interview questions, I showed each subject my research consent form and

explained that the interview was for academic purposes; that it would be recorded on audio; that the participant could refuse any questions they were not comfortable with; and that I would not ask for any identifying information. I asked that the subject verbally confirm they agreed to participate. Only one potential subject declined to be interviewed at this point. At the end of the interview, I asked the subject for their approximate age, occupation, and locality.

Interview Subjects

I completed interviews with 19 people from 15 counties across Missouri. The majority of interviews (79%) were with female subjects, likely due to a personal bias that made me more comfortable approaching women in this setting, or because women were more willing to agree to be interviewed than men. In a few cases when I approached a male and female couple, the woman, the wife, completed the interview, and the man, her husband, did not. Subjects ranged from ages 29-81, with an average age of 55³ and represented a variety of working-class occupations.

Motivations/Themes

The following interview with Rebecca, a 52-year-old teacher from Saline County, exemplifies many of the themes that came up in the interviews I completed.

Interviewer: Then, what kind of things do you typically listen to on the radio?

Rebecca⁴: Well, K-Love

I: K-Love, what is that?

R: That's Christian music.

I: Okay, is that like a local station?

R: No, it's across the country, but there's local places in different states.

I: Mm-hmm.

R: Then your local radio station for the news and weather and stuff like that. And that's pretty much it.

³ For subjects that reported an approximate age (i50s, 60s, etc.) the median age (55, 65, etc.) was used to calculate the average. The median age of the interview subjects was also 55.

⁴ All names are randomly assigned pseudonyms.

I: Are there any specific programs or stations you can think of? You said K-Love. Do you just listen to that on a local station?

R: Yeah. I mean, it's just on the radio. You just have to plug into it. And I think I've done some talk radio and stuff before, too.

I: Mm-hmm, do you know what talk radio programs you might have listened to? Do you remember the names or stations?

R: Um, Sean Hannity, Rush Limbaugh, um, NPR stuff.

I: And then can you tell me, why do you decide to listen to those certain things? Start with the, maybe the K-Love. What makes you listen to that?

R: Because it makes me feel good.

I: Can you tell me more about what you mean by that?

R: Um, it makes me... the words and the music make me feel calm and good, and it keeps me in a good place. If I listen to any other kind of music, it's a lot of negativities, a lot of stuff I don't want to listen to. And the talk radio stuff might be just for information staying up to date on things that are going on in the world right now, just seeing what they have to say.

I: Is there anything that would make you choose one program over another one for talk radio?

R: No. It's whatever might be playing in the car at the time.

Rebecca highlights each of the themes that listeners mentioned when discussing their tastes and preferences. First, we see a *nostalgia* theme that presents itself most obviously when listeners state a preference towards genres that were popular in their adolescence. However, as with Rebecca, the nostalgia theme is also present when people choose what to listen to based on what is available, or what they are used to hearing. Next, Rebecca names the *positivity and comfort* theme, which is especially prevalent among those who listened to religious stations. Many people said they listened to music or news that puts them at ease or boosts their spirit. Finally, Rebecca listens to three formats for *news and current events*: local stations, conservative talk (Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh), and public radio (NPR). In rural communities, such as Saline County, where Rebecca lives, local stations of non-news formats, like country and oldies stations, serve as the only place to get community news on the airwaves. Throughout these

interviews, we will see how listeners think about news and current events from local non-news format stations, talk/news, and public radio, as well as religious radio stations.

Nostalgia

It was common for interviewees to have an affinity towards certain genres or eras of music that elicited feelings of nostalgia. Many subjects reported they listened to certain genres because it was what they grew up with, or because they “didn’t know any better.” The nostalgia theme came up multiple times with subjects of all ages, such as Helen, a retiree in her 60s from Springfield, MO, who said she likes listening to oldies stations, “because when I think about where I grew up, I mostly listen to that kind of music.”

Nancy, who is employed by Farm Bureau of Missouri and lives in Cross Timbers, also commented on how her upbringing influences her music preferences.

Interviewer: What kinds of things do you listen to?

Nancy: Christian radio, country music, old country stations, classic country.

I: Are there any specific programs or stations that you listen to?

N: The Bott Radio Network, 101.3 or 97.1 out of Warsaw.

I: And why do you listen to those kinds of content?

N: It's probably what I grew up with more than anything.

At the end of the interview, Nancy added, “I’m probably close to 50, so I grew up in the 80s with all kinds of music, so I listened to everything from heavy metal to classic country to Christian, bluegrass, everything.” Nancy’s description of “everything” is still limited to music that resonates with white working class culture. So while she might enjoy a variety of musical styles, the genres she list do not include a variety of cultural styles.

Diane, a 46-year-old police officer from Buffalo, had a similar observation. She told me, “I listen to contemporary Christian because we're pastors at a church, and I was a teenager in high school in the nineties, so I really enjoyed nineties pop and rock.” Later in the interview, she alluded to the nostalgia theme again when discussing the effects certain music has on her mood:

I: And have the things that you listen to or things you hear on the radio ever changed how you think, feel, or act?

D: Sure, absolutely. We're creatures of habit. And I know a little bit about music, so I know when beats go up your, uh, level of enthusiasm, if you will, it it'll wake you up or it can also bring you down. Different songs obviously bring us back to a different point of our life. Different situations that may have been happening then, so it can affect my mood all the time. Like whenever I'm running at school, I run to an upbeat, obviously, song, when I'm getting ready to go home and go to bed, slow it down a little bit.

In addition to a conscious preference towards genres from their youth, some participants, like Rebecca, said they listened to certain genres because they are what is available, or what they are used to hearing. Jessica, a 33-year-old hairdresser, and Kim, a 39-year-old paralegal, both from Rogersville, said they typically listen to country music or 90s rock.

Interviewer: Are there any specific programs or stations that you listen to around here?

Jessica: Yeah, 100.5 The Wolf is what's normally radio.

Kim: Or, like, there's what, 105.1?

J: Yeah, but then there's 106.7. 106.7 has a really good mixture of... its adult hits is what it's called.

I: So, why do you listen to that? Why do you listen to what you listen to?

J: I like it. I really don't know any better.

The idea that listeners “don't know any better” speaks to the isolation of rural communities. In rural communities where people live far from each other and from public spaces, people are less likely to be exposed to new ideas. As people become comfortable with what they know they can become hostile that which they do not, leading to homogenous rural communities.

Positivity and Comfort

Listeners often spoke about how what they listen to on the radio affected their mood, mentioning how the beat of the music, style, and language affected them. Most often, interview subjects said they liked music and news that was *positive*, *comforting*, or “good news.” The comfort theme was especially prevalent among people who listened to religious music. The

station Rebecca previously named, K-Love, is a nationally syndicated contemporary Christian station with 520 stations across the nation, including seven stations in Missouri.⁵ The station markets itself as “positive and encouraging”, which resonates with how Rebecca described other types of music as filled with “negativity”, and the contemporary Christian music she listens to makes her feel “good and calm.”. This theme was common among other subjects who reported listening to Christian radio stations, such as Diane.

Interviewer: Could I ask you a few more questions about the Christian stations you listen to?

Diane: Sure.

I: So, are those mostly music or do they have some talk programs as well?

D: It's mostly music, contemporary Christian, yeah.

I: Mm-hmm. And what kind of things, like, what kind of message do you get from that?

D: It is uplifting and very comforting and just gives me peace when traffic is... not.

For many listeners, comfort and nostalgia seemed to go hand-in-hand. As Diane previously said, “different songs obviously bring us back to a different point of our life,” and music that takes a person back to a positive time, especially from their youth, can be quite comforting. Robert, a 79-year-old retiree, said he listens to gospel music in his home on Sundays because that is his day of worship. The “traditional” gospel style music Robert brings him comfort certainly elicits feelings of nostalgia.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit more about... what do you like about gospel music?

Robert: It's just comforting.

I: Mm-hmm, in what way?

R: Well, it speaks of my religion. It speaks of the Lord, and it speaks of the comfort I have in the Lord and stuff like that.

I: How does gospel compare to other content on the radio that's like that style?

R: Well, there are different styles of gospel easily. When I think of gospel, I think of, like, Southern gospel rather than, like, contemporary Christian. Well, I'm almost 80, so I like the more traditional gospel music.

⁵ <https://www.klove.com/music/station-finder/stations>

Listeners shared the desire for positive messaging and calming feelings in other music genres, like Sarah, a 29-year-old school bus driver from Conway. She said she mostly listened to Disney music and country radio with her kids while in the car or their show barn.

Interviewer: Why do you listen to the kind of things you listen to?

Sarah: I just really like Disney. My kids are younger and they like Disney and it helps keep them calm when we're in the show barn.

I: And then what about country music? Why is that? Why do you prefer that kind of station?

S: It's more positive for my children. It doesn't have the curse words and some of the language that the other stations have that I don't agree with.

Sarah expressed a desire for music that aligned with her family value of using appropriate language. Beyond a desire for positivity and comfort, multiple listeners spoke about how the beat or tone of music affects their mood. As Diane said before, when she is running, she listens to more upbeat music, and when she goes home in the evening, she “slows it down a bit”.

Benjamin, a 47-year-old manager from Ozark, spoke about how the beat or tone of music affects how he feels: “It changes my attitude. I mean, I can tell you that certain music in the morning will wake me up. And other times I'll be driving down the road and I'll be like, ‘oh my gosh, I wish I'd be playing this music so I would wake up!’”

Helen, the mid-60s retiree, also talked about her mood when saying she preferred public radio to other stations for news content.

Helen: I love NPR. There is a bluegrass show, like, on Saturday nights on NPR. I listen to that a lot and then I listen to All Things Considered and I like their news. The way that they do their news is so good. And other stations, I don't know, it's like hit or miss.

Interviewer: I guess we'll start with NPR. What do you like about their news content?

H: It's not the big flash and it's, like, factual and they present both sides, usually, to everything. And it's... I don't know... It just is calming, whereas some of the others are just, like, so sensationalized. I just wanna shut 'em off.

I: Mm-hmm, and then, what about the music, what do you like about that?

H: I love bluegrass music. It just is... I don't know it... There's... it can be peppy, or it can be slow, but either way I like it all.

She also expressed a positive connotation towards NPR because they played music she liked, which elicited a nostalgic feeling for her. She described the mood of the music as peppy (positive) or slow (calming). While Helen said she believes NPR is factual and presents both sides, she also said she is more left-leaning, and that the news she hears on NPR helps her make better decisions. Helen's complaints about other news content have to do with sensationalization and the tone of the newscasts, rather than partisan spin or truth vs lies. She seems to be aware of partisan bias in news, but her emphasis is on how the newscasts make her feel. When talking about the music she listens to, she also emphasizes how it makes her feel, rather than any other preferences, and she associates the news station she prefers with the type of music she likes.

News and Current Events

In addition to interviewees who said they listened to news-format stations, like talk radio or public radio, many people said they listened to their local station for news. Anne, a 45-year-old teacher from Lincoln County, said she listens to morning talk shows on her local country station, KFAV, to hear about local activities and things going on in her community. Janet, who is in her 60s and lives in Booneville, said she listens to the morning show on the talk station KFRU out of Columbia. Describing the show she said, "they have guests from the area around, and activities that are going on."

The people who said they listened to news on formats with an explicit ideology, such as conservative talk radio, religious radio, and even public radio, tended to listen to content that aligned with their personal beliefs. Just as Sarah said she listens to music that uses language she agrees with, such as Nancy, said they listen to stations that align with their beliefs.

Interviewer: Can I ask a little... a few specific questions about the Christian radio stations you listen to?

Nancy: Sure.

I: What kind of things do you hear on that?

N: Sermons, and there's stuff about the news and current events and how those ties in religiously with my beliefs and that type of thing.

I: So, would you say that they typically align with what you believe.

N: Pretty much. Yeah.

I: Has what you listen to on any radio station or those Christian radio stations, has that ever changed how you think, feel, or what you do?

N: Somewhat, yes. On certain topics. Maybe.

I: Could you tell me more about that? Is there anything that comes to mind?

N: I can't think of anything right off the top of my head that... yes, there's some things that make you think a little bit about your beliefs and how things tie into that. It's like adding to what you already know or what you were raised with.

I: Can you say anything more about that? What kind of topics do you hear them talk about, maybe?

N: A lot about how God created everything, and how that ties in with how people act today compared to what they acted like back in biblical times and how there's a lot of comparisons.

I: What kind of comparisons?

N: Like the sinning that went on and not following God and just, you can see that that's kind of happening again now, basically.

I: Okay, and are you generally able to find the kind of things you want to listen to on the radio around here?

N: Usually not. That's why I listen to the Christian radio station, probably more than anything. It's more informative to me. The music stations, some of them, I like all kinds of music, but some of them play music I just am not interested in. So, I just scan until I hit something. And finally, I'll just give up and listen to the Christian Station.

The strongest ideological preferences, however, were from the people who listened to conservative talk radio. One case is Bill, a 62-year-old farmer from Paris, MO. When asked what he listened to on the radio, Bill responded that he listened to rock and roll music and AgriTalk, a farm program. However, when asked if what he listened to ever affected how he thought, felt, or acted, he brought up talk radio and was aware of the effect talk radio had on his beliefs.

Interviewer: Has what you listened to ever changed what you think, feel, or do.

Bill: Yes.

I: Can you tell me more about that?

B: Well, before, I used to listen to Rush Limbaugh, before he passed away, and it got me to where I'll never vote for another Democrat, as long as I live.

I: Can you tell me more about that?

B: Uh, because I guess I was blind to what some of the Democrats were doing.

I: So, what kind of things did he say that made you feel that way?

B: Well, I guess he just told me what, I assume, was the truth about some of the things that they were doing and why they'd done it. And the consequences of what they were doing.

I: Is there an example you can think of?

B: Um, probably not now. Cause he's been gone, what, six months? A year?

I: Yeah, something like that... Um, I'm trying to think of if there's any other way... can you tell me more about that? Because that sounds like a very, um, stark change in the way you think.

B: Well, I used to vote for the candidate. Now I won't even consider it. It's all Republican from now on because, and the main reason why is the way the Democrats treated Kavanaugh in the, when he was trying to be judge. That's what put the icing on the cake.

In the content analysis presented in chapter 2, we saw how talk radio hosts frame their analysis as uncovering the wrongdoings of democratic politicians. Just the same, Bill says that before listening to talk radio he was “blind to what some of the Democrats were doing.” With this framing, rather than presenting conservative beliefs as ideological, they are presented as uncovering a previously unknown truth, which helps the ideology become a part of the common sense of listeners. Bill even says that talk radio stations say “what he assumes is the truth”, because conservatism has become so deeply ingrained in his worldview that, even though he recognizes that it could be false, he believes what they are saying is true.

Another talk radio listener, Frank, approached me after seeing me interview another subject. The 81-year-old handyman from Kansas City asked what I was doing, and I told him I was conducting interviews about the radio and asked if he would like to participate. As you will see, Frank took the interview in a bit of his own direction.

Interviewer: Do you typically listen to broadcast radio at all?

Frank: Oh, talk radio all the time.

I: Really? Can you tell me more about that?

F: Sure. I only listen to the conservative stations and when they start lying, I turn 'em off and go to another conservative station. And lately I've gone to Newsy. Yeah, so I've been weaning off Fox News.

I: Why is that?

F: They're changing their methods.

I: In what way?

F: They're sucking up to the wokes, and I'm not a woke.

I: Can you tell me what you mean by that? What are the wokes?

F: What is a woke? How old are you?

I: 24.

F: And you're in college?

I: Yeah.

F: And you've not heard the woke expression?

I: I have, I just want to know what you mean by it.

F: What it is, is a social experiment with a communist background trying to change our society from a republic democratic society to a woke communist socialistic society.

How's that for an answer?

I: So, you used the word woke again. What does the word woke mean to you then?

Without using it in the definition?

F: Changing society.

I: Changing society? Okay. So, are there any specific talk radio programs that you listen to that you could tell me about, the names of?

F: Um, no, not really. I flip, you know. I get bored with one. I go to another. But I don't listen to the liberals. You want me to define that?

I: I think I got that one.

F: You got that one?

I: Yeah.

F: How's your school? Is it woke?

At this point, as you see, the interview got a bit off track, and I had to refocus the conversation to avoid conflict or influencing Frank's responses.

I: Can I ask the rest of my questions and then I'll let you ask whatever you want? Okay. Can you tell me about why you listen to the things you do on the radio?

F: Cause I'm bored.

I: And so why do you choose those programs over other content?

F: Well, I like to stay abreast of what's current in our society, who's telling the truth and who's lying. Uh, how much of an influence are they trying to, you know, invoke their so-called... views? I could go into a whole list of things. Anyway, that'll shorten it.

I: And then are you typically able to find the kind of programs you want to listen to on the radio around here?

F: No.

I: Really?

F: No. I just... There are only three good stations in Kansas City that are talk stations. The other two are sports. So, I listen to sports when I go to bed, put it under my pillow and then time it for 30 minutes and I'm asleep before the radio goes off. So, you know there is nothing really... I tried to... I cannot stand FM anymore. Because it's all rock and roll. All rocky. And I'm 81. I come from the old age. So, I can't stand contemporary music. It drives me up a wall. And see, what you come... what you will learn later in life is that what you did when you were young, that affected you and changed your life, you don't want to have it anymore because the bad stuff is not good anymore.

I: So, if you could choose the programming that was on the radio, what would it be?

F: I'd put a soft religious music.

I: That's not what you said you listen to yourself, why would you put that on the radio, then?

F: Because I'm a man of faith and I love the old hymns and the old gospel music. But even that's been trash today. I mean, you know, there's so much rocking in Christian music. I cannot imagine God sitting on his throne listening to some of this music that's played.

There are a few common threads in Bill and Franks interviews. First, when asked what they listen to or what they would ideally listen to on the radio, they responded with a format other than talk radio. Frank stated that he would play a “soft religious music”, which aligns with the comfort theme identified by many other interview subjects. Furthermore, they were both consciously aware of their absolute conservative bias, saying “I'll never vote for another Democrat, as long as I live” and “I only listen to the conservative stations. They both also brought up the idea of “truth”. Bill said that when he listened to Rush Limbaugh, that Limbaugh “told me what, *I assume*, was the truth about some of the things that [Democrats] were doing and why they'd done it.” Frank, similarly, said, “I only listen to the conservative stations and when they start lying, I turn 'em off and go to another conservative station.” While both men seem to believe that the stations they listen to are telling them the truth, there is also a hint of doubt in the phrases “I assume” and “when they start lying”.

Summary

Listeners of various formats and genres identified common desires for their decisions about what to listen to on the radio. When asked about their motivations and preferences, listeners generally cite how a certain genre makes them feel. They were drawn to content that made them feel nostalgia, positivity, and comfort. Their emotional connotation with a certain music or news format seems to have the greatest effect on their choices. So, while a few people said they listen to talk radio, the majority of listeners desired formats that make them feel at ease, rather than outraged. Comfort and nostalgia are used to appeal to listeners' emotional reasoning in the process of ideological dissemination. As listeners are reminded of times in their lives that were, perhaps, better or easier, they become more sympathetic to ideology they associate with those feelings, and in the process, this ideology becomes a part of their common sense.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown the way that many factors work together and build upon each other in the production of hegemony in local communities. Hegemony can only work if it is embedded into everyday life, and this thesis has shown how the structures and daily practices of local radio production help normalize and embed conservative ideology into rural communities. Radio is, of course, not the only source of conservative ideology, but when the messaging present on radio is reinforced in schools, churches, and social relationships, this ideology becomes concrete.

An analysis of radio with a production of culture perspective shows how the practices and structures of the broadcast radio industry allow conservative ideology to transfer from talk radio to other genres. Maps of radio broadcast contours show the prevalence and availability of talk, religious, and country music radio throughout Missouri, and that other formats, such as public radio, hip-hop, and alternative music, are only available in metropolitan areas. Talk, religious, and country music formats share common themes that spread and reinforce conservative hegemonic ideology. Furthermore, examination of the organizational and industry structures of broadcast radio revealed shared ownership between stations of different formats in local communities. Local stations under the same ownership share resources such as their physical studios and the newscasts they broadcast, which allows the ideology of talk radio stations to seep into other stations' messaging. Nationally syndicated talk radio programs give increased influence to a select number of powerful national voices through direct exposure and influence on local programming. The assumptions and logics at play within these

production structures influence the content that is broadcast, and inevitably how it is interpreted by listeners.

Samples of broadcasts from three communities across the state show the direct influence that Fox News has over talk radio, with the network's national newscasts being played on both talk and music format stations. Local newscasts are an essential source of information for communities: they provide immediate updates on traffic and weather to drivers, and share community news that directly impacts listeners. As local radio producers and their audiences are exposed to national conservative ideology, this ideology is reproduced until it becomes a part of the local common sense. This ideology is spread both explicitly, as seen on KCMO's *Mundo in the Morning*, and implicitly, as seen in *Real Country's* station identifiers. Common themes including patriotism, authenticity, and christian values are present on both country music and talk radio stations. This is an example of how ideological messages are embedded in mass media and become a part of the social fabric of the local community.

Audience interviews give insight to how radio listeners decode and make meaning of the messages they hear on the air. These interviews show that listeners tend to be motivated by the emotional appeal of a certain station or genre, desiring radio that makes them feel positivity, comfort, and nostalgia. Especially in rural communities, which tend to be culturally homogeneous, people desire content that aligns with their current worldview, and they are able to find that in religious, talk, and country music radio.

Future research should take a more in-depth look at the public affairs content of religious broadcasting to see if and how conservative ideology is embedded in these stations' messaging as well. Similar studies could be replicated in any local community to

examine the unique qualities of their local broadcast ecosystem, and compare how broadcast ecosystems differ nationwide. This thesis has shined a light on the hidden and unnoticed practices and logics of the broadcast radio industry and shown one process through which conservative ideology is disseminated to local communities in the process of creating hegemony.

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