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The Spirit of the Illini

The megaphone was invented in the year 1878 by Thomas Alva Edison. Edison developed this device with an aim of assisting the deaf and hard of hearing (Baldwin). However, sometime along the way, the megaphone began to be used for other purposes, such as, sports games and other events with large amounts of people. The megaphone I discovered is an old acoustic instrument that was possibly used at past Illini sporting events. This particular device is extremely fascinating and definitely has a story to tell.

This megaphone has many attributes that support the thesis. It was constructed by a man named Floyd Watson who was a professor of physics at the University of Illinois in the 1930's era (University of Illinois Archives). He made the megaphone out of rusty scrap metal. The megaphone had two metal flaps at both ends of the mouth hole to rest your cheeks as you shouted chants. He painted it with a shiny coat of orange and blue. He made the two bases a bright orange color and painted the two sides navy blue. Attached to one of the orange bases was a blue handle. This handle was meant for people to hold, because gripping the thick base of the megaphone would be an absolute struggle in a large crowd of people. On top of the orange paint lies the old logo of the university painted in blue (Watson). If you examine the megaphone, you can see that it is clearly worn out and beat up.

A warrant that the creator of the megaphone may have had was spirit. The bright orange and blue on this megaphone symbolizes school spirit and a passion for the athletics here at Illinois. Floyd Watson and other members of the Illini community who used this megaphone clearly had tons of enthusiasm for their school's teams and wanted to show it by projecting their cheers and chants among the roaring Illini fans. Being able to yell into the mouth hole of this device and be heard by other fans and possibly the team was a new and exciting experience for sports spectators around the globe.

A qualifier exists that may limit my thesis of the megaphone. Megaphones are usually used to enhance the sound of ones voice at sporting events. However, Watson may have been involved in a protest or rally on campus where he wanted his voice to be heard. Professors at the university may have been going on strike for higher pay or health benefits. Even though, Watson may have been fighting against the school does not mean he lost school spirit and could have still decided to paint the megaphone orange and blue.

In the 1930's, college sports were booming. Most schools were already put into conferences making certain match ups way more competitive. This increase in intensity made it a perfect time for Illinois to have a device like this at their games and events. However, Watson did not have much to celebrate because Illinois struggled a bit in the 1930's era. From 1930 to 1935 the football team finished below a 500 record with 25 wins and 26 losses (Sports Reference).

Just like the football team at the time, technology was a little behind. Technology was not nearly as advanced as it is today and with the megaphone being made out of scrap metal, the condition probably took its toll. It is clearly worn out showing many dents and scratches all over the top, bottom, and sides. Perhaps these scratches and dents show that it was very popular

among students and faculty. This megaphone was probably used at hundreds of Illini sporting events by a variety of spirited Illini fans. I can't even imagine the amount of times the school's fight song was proudly shouted through the mouth hole.

I analyzed some backing to strengthen the warrant of my artifact. Showing school spirit and being loud at sporting events is very important in creating a home atmosphere for your team. The term "home field advantage" is truly no lie. When athletes play on the road and have thousands of voices in their heads cheering against them, it has an effect. Players get an uneasy feeling causing them to sometimes perform worse and make more mistakes. That feeling of support that you get at home goes a long way and gives the players the confidence to play better. This megaphone not only showed school spirit but it may have had something to do with some of the team wins during this era.

A possible rebuttal to my artifact is that the megaphone may have had other purposes. Floyd Watson possibly could have used the device for teaching. Sound waves and discovering how sound travels is a crucial part of physics. Watson may have found that creating a megaphone for his students to experiment with would be a beneficial way of teaching them how sound travels and the way acoustics work. People also may argue that Watson had a love of art and decided one day to put his creative skills to work by making a colorful megaphone to represent his love of the school. These are both possibilities, but after a week or so of analyzing this artifact, I have come to believe that the main use was to cheer on the men and women of the Illini athletic teams.

Analyzing this megaphone taught me a lot. On a typical day, walking by an old megaphone would mean nothing to me. I would simply look at it and continue to walk. This assign-

ment forced me to dig deeper into something I wouldn't have otherwise. This megaphone and this assignment taught me that every thing has a story. Whether it is a tiny pebble or the Great Wall of China, analyzing something can teach you things you would never have learned before. This megaphone not only fascinated me historically but showed me that school spirit not only exists today at the university but has been a basis for this great institution for many years.

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