

Rock and roll



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“ America. betaking herself to formative action(as it is about time for more solid achievement, and less windy promise), must , for her purpose, cease to recognize a theory of character grown of feudal aristocracies, or form'd by merely literary standards, or from any ultramarine, full-dress formulas of culture. polish, caste, ; c., enough, and must sternly promulgate her new standard, yet old enough, and accepting the old, the perennial elements, and combining them into groups, unities, appropriate to the modern, the democratic, the west, and to the practical occasions and needs of our own cities, and of the agricultural regions.” 1 Walt Whitman wrote this poem back in 1855. A hundred years before rock and roll was invented, people like Walt Whitman could sense that a change needed to happen in America. In the 1880's, the Robber Barons had a dramatic impact on America. Some of them, such as Andrew Carnegie showed that people could rise from rags to riches. The 1920's were called the Roaring 20's, partly because people were carefree and willing to have fun. Jazz became the dominant form of music. Finally along comes the 1950's. America has gotten out of WW2 and is now ready for a new evolution. People are feeling how they did back in the 20's; carefree and willing to do anything for fun. On March 5, 1951, a rhythm-and-blues band, Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats, recorded “ Rocket 88”, a frenetic, toe-tapping tribute to a customized car. 2 This was the birth of Rock and Roll. The music didn't catch on until 1955 though, when Bill Haley produced “ Rock Around the Clock”. The song soared up the pop charts, and became the first rock and roll song to ever-hit number 1. From the music of Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly, to Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis, no other style of music has so greatly impacted the lifestyle of the American people. Elvis Presley was the most recognized and the most influential rock and roll

artist that ever lived. In 1956, Elvis made his way into the national spotlight with his single “ Heartbreak Hotel”. He set in stone the image and sound of rock and roll that would endure as long as the music lived. 3 With the swivel of his hips, the slur of his voice, and the curl of his lip, he evoked the force and feeling of youth and sex and the rebellion that would become the image of rock and roll. He also stamped rock in as both the sound of the emerging teen culture that became the dominant social force of his time and as an original American musical form. 4 During Elvis’s 21-year career, he became the biggest-selling recording artist in the history of music. He had 67 top 20 hits on single charts along with many more on the top 100. Also, he had 38 top 20 albums, with again many more on the top 100. Elvis, by the time he died, had sold millions and millions of records. Presley embodied the sense of reckless abandonment that would underlie the performances of most rockers who followed. Using and acoustic guitar more as a prop than as an instrument, he swung his hips violently, shouted his vocals, and shook his head from side to side. 5 Elvis’s style was one that had never been seen before. His antic created much controversy from the quiescent Eisenhower era. When Presley appeared on Ed Sullivan’s TV program in 1956, the show’s host ordered his cameraman to focus on Presley’s face to avoid displaying his gyrations to the national audience. 6 Elvis was an unstoppable force who served to reshape the pop mainstream, and who almost single-handedly redefined what it meant to be an American Visionary, and American artist, in a fierce new time. No other modern legend was to be so widely damned at first as a threat or joke, only to later be understood as one of our purest, most commonly acclaimed heroes. 7” While Elvis Presley will forever be the symbol of the rock idol, it is Chuck Berry who defined the music as a creative

form. Musically speaking, he is the Rock upon which rock and roll rests.” 8 Berry’s first attempt at recording for Chess Records was “ Maybellene,” a loud, jangling remake of Lloyd “ Cowboy” Copas’s country hit, “ Ida Red.” Within four weeks of its release, “ Maybellene” had reached the top of the rhythm-and-blues charts. The song became so widely accepted and popular that it crossed over to the Billboard pop single chart. Berry’s stage act was just as unusual as his songs were. He appeared comically attentive. His jet black hair was slicked back and immaculately groomed, his shirts were ruffled, and his tuxedo coats were brightly colored and often covered in sequins. 9 Onstage, his guitar at his hip, hopping about on one leg in what came to be known as his “ duckwalk,” Berry also changed the role of the rock guitarist from sideman to star. 10 In 1957, Berry released “ School Day.” He dared to say what every teenager in America had already known: high school was boring and oppressive, and it was at its best when it was three o’clock. Berry was in his late 20’s when “ School Day” was released, but more than any other composer of his time, he had found a voice for the desires and emotions of teenage listeners. 11 Killed in an air crash at the young age of 22, Buddy Holly remains one of the most influential artists of the 1950’s. “ Of the three rock’n’roll singers killed in a private plane crash on 3 February 1959- “ the day the music died” according to the Don McLean song- the loss of Buddy Holly was arguably the cruellest. 12 In May of 1957, Holly released “ That’ll Be The Day” and within four months it was number 1. Holly’s antics on stage were far different from the ones of other rock and roll stars. “ He was a musician, not a rock star, and with his popularity, he proved that sleek, sexy looks were not essential for rock success.” 13 The Beatles, among other rock sensations would later copy Holly’s style and use

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it for themselves. His music would prove to be the inspiration for a lot of the 60's British Invasion. Don McLean hit the top of the charts in 1971 with his "American Pie- Parts 1&2." It was a lengthy ballad inspired by Holly's death. In the ballad, McLean referred to Feb 3, 1959, as the day the music died. Over the next several decades, Holly's music would continue to be released over and over again on many other albums by various singers. In 1978, Gary Busey depicted the life of Holly in *The Buddy Holly Story*. In 1986, Buddy Holly was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. " Suffice it to say that as long as music aspires to a country sweetness and a rock bite, Holly's songs will have had some part in the process." 14" Jerry Lee Lewis was the proverbial cannon waiting to explode. Onstage and off, he pursued his music and life with a fury and intensity that bordered on the irrational." 15 He was a sign of the changing of the times. Jerry had much more dramatic antics on stage than did his fellow colleagues. He would kick out the piano stool from under him and would begin to pound on the keys of his piano like a madman. The fans loved it and so did various TV hosts that asked him to be on their shows. " Lewis was soon nicknamed the Killer, because of his harsh, violent performance style and his equally outrageous behavior off the stage." 16 Jerry would ultimately prove to destroy his career. " Things reached their lowest point in 1958 when Lewis, who had already been married twice before, decided to wed his 13-year-old third cousin, Myra Gale." 17 The public was not ready to deal with this kind of behavior. When Lewis made his tour in Europe, thousand of formally fans, strongly protested him. He was called a " cradle robber." " But that was all part of the legend that Lewis became, a legend that, like his, proved to be remarkably hard to snuff out. Lewis's story reads like a sprawling novel, one by Tolstoy perhaps, if that writer had grown

up eating chitlins.”¹⁸ The 1950’s were of time of change, but also advancement. People realized that what their parents had done when they were kids was outdated and old fashioned. The kids of the 50’s were full of energy and just wanted to have a good time: rock and roll gave them that chance. The style of the 50’s singers was that of which had never been seen before. At first, people, mostly the older generation, saw it as provocative and frankly, grouse. After time, people began to accept the new style and would eventually begin to realize what was happening in America.

Unbelievably, the music that was so much hated, feared, and protested by the older generation in the 50’s, is considered to be “ oldies” today. It is the pastime of America. The same thing is happening today: we (as in teenagers) listen to rap, sca, hip hop, etc., but our parents hate it. They are doing the same thing to us that their parents did to them in the 50’s. Even today, we are advancing. Dress styles that were banned 20 years ago are standard today. Music has influenced our lives from the very start. It is who we are. Rock and roll is a symbol of America. It is a national pastime. If it were not for Elvis Presely or Buddy Holly or Jerry Lee Lewis or any of the rock and roll artists of the 50’s, our grandparents and parents may not have realized the need for change and we would probably still be listening to jazz and opera all the time. A quote by Gilbert Ostrander tells how the younger generation of America always finds something new to latch onto. When they get bored with that, they move on to something else. “ The younger generation is at all times simultaneously appearing on the field and moving off the field and trying to stay on the field while turning into something else. No sooner have the rules of the game been officially explained by the younger generation, than another game is discovered to be in progress on <https://assignbuster.com/rock-and-roll/>

the same field under different rules by a somewhat different younger generation.” 19