

# Elvis presley research paper examples

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Elvis Presley was one of the greatest musicians in rock 'n roll history - he revolutionized the way in which people enjoyed pop music, and became an all-American icon with untold wealth throughout the 60s and 70s. He was one of the catalysts that brought rock 'n' roll, primarily thought to be a black musical style, to wider acceptance by whites, and pushed boundaries of raciness and eroticism in American live musical performance. Elvis Presley was the ultimate Memphis Rockabilly artist as he combined white sensibilities and good looks with urban jazz and blues music styles. Because of this ability to cross racial lines and ingrain himself so deeply in pop culture, Elvis Presley is one of the most enduring and important figures in popular music (Bertrand, 2000).

Born in Tupelo, Mississippi in 1935, Elvis Aaron Presley moved to Memphis with his family at the age of 13 (Ponce de Leon, 2007). In 1954, he began his music career with Sam Philips of Sun Records, popularizing the genre of rockabilly – a strange mix of R&B and country music that was extremely energetic and lively. This occurred after Presley himself stopped by the Sun Records office with two of his friends, seeking to record a couple Ink Spots songs for his mother's birthday. After hearing Presley, Philips knew that he had the right white rhythm & blues artist to take to the airwaves. Taking him on, they recorded covers of famous blues songs and Memphis rockabilly tunes, slowly gaining prominence in local white Southern youngsters.

Elvis Presley's good looks were a huge component of his success, due to his smoldering James Dean-like look, and his sexy, defiant nature. This was combined with his physical movements, which included gyrations and obscene leg movements combined with a convincing country voice. RCA and

Chet Atkins changed a number of things to make Presley more marketable. They made his sound smoother and more glamorous, improving the sophistication of his musical arrangements. They implemented the same techniques they used to create the Nashville 'smoothies' and Jim Reeves' sound. In January of 1956, he released his first single with RCA Records, "Heartbreak Hotel" – this turned out to be a massive hit in the United States, quickly rising through the ranks to become one of the most popular figures in rock and roll at the time. Other hits songs of his during the 50s included "Hound Dog" and "Blue Suede Shoes," increasing his versatility and patenting his typical gyrating hip movements during his live performances. In his appearances on The Milton Berle Show, he used his exaggerated, energized body movements in his rendition of "Hound Dog"; this stage presence alarmed conservative and Southern families in the 50s, while it thrilled more outgoing teenagers looking for a way to rebel (Robertson, 2004). This excitable stage presence further linked bombastic black performance with a white veneer to make it more palatable for white audiences, offering further evidence for Elvis' influence as a musical pioneer. Further appearances on The Steve Allen Show and Ed Sullivan Show, and their competing push for ratings, elevated Presley even further into the spotlight.

Figures like Elvis Presley helped to create the image of the 'rock star' as a cultural icon in American culture; throughout the 50s, 60s and 70s, singers and musicians became superstars due to the increasingly wider distribution of music and the post-WWII economic boom, which led to much more free time and disposable income for American families. Add to that the

enticement that sexually provocative and rebellious rock stars provided to baby boomers, allowing them to forge their own, more liberated identities outside of the cultural norms presented to them in the 50s, and colorful figures like Elvis Presley would become incredibly influential figures to an entire generation of Americans. Music was moving from lounge singing to pop music, and Elvis was at the forefront (Ponce de Leon, 2007).

In 1957, even more of Elvis Presley's singles made it to number one on the music charts – “ Too Much, “ All Shook Up” and “ Teddy Bear” (Robertson, 2004). During this time, his music started to go international, and people all over the world were starting to hear him. Even Elvis' Christmas Album, which featured holiday recordings by the artist, became the biggest-selling Christmas album ever written (Grein, 2008). In less than two years since “ Heartbreak Hotel,” Elvis had become one of the most popular musicians of all time, and his career would find itself taking many interesting trajectories from then on.

In 1958, Elvis was drafted into the Army as a private in an army base near Fort Smith, Arkansas. He famously refused special treatment, despite the media presence that surrounded his stint in the Army. Later that year, his mother died, an event that would dramatically affect Elvis. For the next two years, he would pour himself into both his Army service and his musical career, releasing several singles and meeting his future wife Priscilla (Ponce de Leon, 2007). By the time he returned in 1960, he came back in a big way with the album *Elvis is Back!* (Robertson, 2004). Given Elvis' increasing popularity, he began to exercise other aspirations, like acting. Elvis signed a seven picture deal with Paramount Pictures before his military stint, and

started to focus more on his film career during the 60s. He made films like *G. I. Blues*, *Flaming Star*, *Wild in the Country*, and approximately two dozen others; while many of them were energetic beach party movies where he played the romantic lead, a few others had him in dramatic roles. The films were never critically successful, as critics were not kind to Elvis' acting ability and the general silliness of the stories (Connolly, 2008).

In 1968, given his failed movie career, Elvis attempted to come back with a TV Comeback Special, in which he came back on with a signature black leather outfit that indicated he was truly back. As the 70s started, Elvis went back on tour, and even scheduled a meeting with then-President Richard Nixon to ask for a badge to become an honorary narcotics agent. Elvis took a stance against drug use and the hippie culture in the 70s, despite his own prescription drug abuse (Ponce de Leon, 2007). Soon, his marriage with Priscilla would break down, and his Aloha from Hawaii special saw the first instance of his signature, garish, rhinestone-studded jumpsuits for which he would become famous (Brown, 1997). From this point on, his career would start to decline even further, as well as his physical and mental wellness (Ponce de Leon, 2007). After a particularly harrowing encounter with four men who attacked him on stage, Presley became paranoid about future attacks, and more nervous about recording; his recording career basically came to a stop. His health started to decline as a result of the barbiturate use he was engaging in, and eventually he died in 1977 of health complications brought on by this abuse (Brown, 1997). After Presley's death, his career and influence still raged on; many people still think he faked his death, and there is a cotton industry of Elvis impersonators whose job it is to

capitalize on the unique look and universal popularity of the singer. Many posthumously released songs became extremely popular, and his songs are still covered today.

One of the most important and enduring components of Elvis' career and influence on American culture is his famous house, Graceland. For such a living legend, one would expect his house to be incredible and lavish - Graceland fits all of these definitions and more. Starting out at the home of Elvis Presley, it soon became one of the most important cultural landmarks in America. Graceland is a testament to the importance and legacy of Elvis Presley, and of rock music's evolution into a popular art form, with a rich history and immense character. Graceland's size and boldness is representative of the financial success and cultural impact that Elvis had as a rock star, and indicates the ability for controversial and unconventional figures in American entertainment to express themselves in the most flamboyant ways.

Graceland is located in Memphis, TN, on what is now Elvis Presley Boulevard. The mansion spans nearly 14 acres, and rests about ten miles from downtown Memphis. The purchase of Graceland by Elvis was one of necessity; he needed a nice place to enjoy solitude and rest from the adoring fans he was constantly swarmed with. By 1956, Elvis had begun a star in the Memphis region, and ended as a worldwide sensation. In that year, he released two platinum-selling albums for RCA, had nearly a dozen appearances on national television, and became a movie star with *Love Me Tender*, his first movie in a seven-year contract with Paramount Pictures. Elvis' appeal was new and exciting, as his provocative appearance made

rock 'n roll cool for whites, and the controversy about his lewd performing style merely led to greater fame. Elvis had already purchased a three-bedroom ranch home in east Memphis, but he needed to move elsewhere due to the throngs of fans who would constantly beat down his door. What's more, his neighbors were also complaining about the cavalcade of fans disturbing their own homes in the neighborhood, which left Elvis with no choice but to find somewhere bigger and more isolated to go. To that end, he purchased Graceland from the YMCA, who had acquired it from the family of publisher Stephen C. Toof (Elvis Australia, 2012).

After Elvis bought Graceland in March of 1957, he made many of the significant changes to the property that you can still see today. He added the infamous music gates, large metal gates guarding the entrance to Graceland which are adorned with musical notes, as a special touch to emphasize that which made him so famous. His parents put in vegetable gardens and a chicken coop, since they had come to live with Elvis as well and wanted to accommodate their hobbies. Other buildings and additions were added as well to further embellish the property, which were only expanded when the location became a museum in 1982 (Elvis Australia, 2012). These additions helped to provide Elvis with a sanctuary from the outside world and its pressures, a small world in which he could live and get away from it all.

Elvis turned Graceland into an opulent palace, a fitful place from which to rule the genre of rock and roll, as well as the American cultural revolution. In 1964, Elvis built a meditation garden in the courtyard of Graceland, anchored by a circular, twelve-foot-long fountain pool and a series of jets that sprayed water up constantly. This allowed Elvis a measure of quiet in his private

sanctuary away from the demands of the world, and it is where he would be buried after his death. In addition to the main house, there is a small brick guard house, a shuttle bus stop, and many other utilitarian buildings meant to facilitate transportation and security (Elvis Australia, 2012). The main house is decorated in an incredibly gregarious and quirky fashion, with different rooms having their own aesthetic. The Graceland Dining Room is filled with marble and richly decorated Romanesque chairs and class cabinets. The Jungle Room is the den in which green shag carpeting, comfortable furniture and strange 1970s wood paneling and coloring dominate; the room was also capped by a built-in waterfall (Elvis Australia, 2012). He would also use this room (as well as the TV and pool rooms in the basement) to record some of his most famous albums, *Moody Blue* and *From Elvis Presley Boulevard*.

While there, Graceland became more than just a home for Elvis; it was the home base for rock and roll, and Elvis' legacy itself. Elvis' family, even his extended family, stayed there and played both houseguest and bodyguard. Every one of his relatives were very well kept, with his father having a swimming pool in his bedroom, with a jukebox next to it with Elvis' most favored records. Elvis' own quirky aesthetic and unorthodox ways of living were reflected in the rooms; the TV room in the basement held three television sets, where he would watch them simultaneously - a full bar was also contained in the room. Graceland became so tied to Elvis' personality and tastes that when Elvis toured, he would ship his furniture ahead of time so the hotel rooms would be remodeled to benefit his room at Graceland, allowing him some comfortable climes.



However, Elvis would not be able to enjoy the comforts of Graceland for long. When Elvis met an untimely death in 1977, Priscilla Presley became the executor of his estate after his father Vernon passed away. As the finances for maintaining Graceland grew, Priscilla turned Graceland into a museum to generate revenue for the Presley family and provide the lavish home as an American landmark. In 1982, Graceland opened to the public and provided tours throughout the property. Since that time, Graceland has entertained millions of people who visit Graceland, with thousands coming by every year. In fact, it is second only to the White House as the most visited home in America (History. com, 2012). To many of these visitors, Graceland takes on a significance that nears the religious. Many wish to see the " King of Rock and Roll" and understand more about his life, and where he came from. The museum itself offers this tour of the King's life, as relics and artifacts of Elvis' history and career adorn the halls of Graceland. Elvis is also buried at Graceland, in a meditation garden where people often pray and sing hymns celebrating the artist (Davidson and Gitlitz, 2002).

In addition to Elvis' home, Graceland became a cultural institution, and an international phenomenon. Celebrities and notable figures from around the world would be invited to visit Elvis' mansion and property, further indicating its relevance and significance as an American cultural landmark. In 1957, fellow musicians Richard Williams and Buzz Cason came to see Graceland; this was but the first of many instances in which Graceland would be guest to public figures in rock and roll, as well as in politics. In 2006, George W. Bush invited the Prime Minister of Japan, Junichiro Koizumi, to tour the mansion, making it the first non-political venue for a meeting between two

heads of government.

Elvis Presley is revered by many as one of the most prominent cultural and musical icons of the 20th century. His humble roots turning into extravagant, overnight success, Graceland is the perfect microcosm for Elvis' life. Elvis has a history that is tied in closely with the Korean War, pop culture, counterculture, Vietnam and much more. He lived opulently and eccentrically, all attributes that are more than evident in the Graceland museum and in his life. Elvis lived life in a very flamboyant and fascinating way; his high profile exposed him to a great many aspects of a changing American culture, such as Eastern spiritualism, American politics, and the realities of military life. Besides all that, however, he was an entertainer; Elvis was a hugely popular, influential artist who released album after album of impeccably written and performed songs, creating a huge body of work that was the envy of anyone during the rock era. He was also a big influence in the Civil Rights Movement, striking right at the moment when black music was becoming popular, and becoming the conduit for that popularity itself. He was one of the first major celebrities as well, given the age of television and popular music, no one before him had enjoyed this level of recognition and ubiquity all over the world. To that end, Elvis became the poster child for celebrity, and the model that many celebrities have followed, for better or worse, ever since.

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