

## **Chapter 2**

### ***Elvis and Rockabilly***

#### **OVERVIEW**

This chapter charts the rise of Elvis Presley and rockabilly music. It highlights the lower-class, Southern backgrounds of the artists and shows the merger of country music and the blues, a common theme throughout rock and roll. It also shows the importance of independent record labels, television and national marketing in the emergence of the music, which swept the nation and can be considered the first rock and roll movement in the U.S. and Europe.

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- Show the close connection in background and social patterns between poor Southern whites and blacks in the South.
- Demonstrate the consistent pattern in rock and roll of small entrepreneurial companies starting a musical movement, which then is overtaken by major labels.
- Allow students to analyze the importance of race in the emergence of rock and roll as a national phenomenon.
- Comprehend the importance of television in the creation of a national market and the ability to create music as a mass consumer product.
- Connect the concept of rebellion with the emergence of rock and roll.
- Demonstrate the change in music with the mass commodification of rock and roll.
- Show how rock and roll combined various types of music (country, gospel and R&B) for a new sound.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss the similarities and differences between Elvis and the rockabilly and Chicago blues artists.
2. Talk about the importance of technology in making rock and roll a national phenomenon.
3. Listen to and discuss the differences between the music and the early and later Elvis Presley. Identify some reasons why the music changed.
4. Discuss the importance of race in the emergence of rock and roll as the national music of youth.
5. Discuss the connection between rock and roll and the image of the rebel.

## ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a paper about the concept of juvenile delinquency during the 1950s. In the paper, identify the various social manifestations of the idea and link the emergence of rock and roll to it. Talk to some people who were teens during the era, asking them their recollections of it and its impact on them. Who, for example, did they consider a juvenile delinquent? And what did it mean? And how did Elvis fit into this notion?
2. Make a presentation about the history of television and its emergence as a popular medium during the 1950s. Find out the most popular television shows in 1956 and identify the importance of television to the emergence of Elvis Presley and other rockabillys. Find someone who personally saw Elvis on the *Ed Sullivan Show* and ask them about its impact on them.
3. View three movies: *The Wild One* (Marlon Brando), *Rebel without a Cause* (James Dean) and *Jailhouse Rock* (Elvis). Then write a paper comparing and contrasting the view of youth that these three movies portray. Also, explain how all three movies helped in the emergence of rock and roll.

## TEST QUESTIONS

1. Name three rockabilly artists on Sun Records.
2. Name four rockabilly artists not on Sun Records.
3. Describe the social backgrounds of most rockabilly stars.
4. What types of music did Elvis listen to and merge for the rockabilly sound? Why did he choose these genres of music?
5. Analyze the concept of the juvenile delinquent and how it contributed to the growth of rock and roll.
6. How and why did Sam Phillips create a new sound with Elvis Presley?
7. How did the concept to race relate to the popularity of Elvis and the rockabillys?
8. What role did Tom Parker have with the creation of Elvis as an icon?
9. Compare and contrast Elvis and Bill Haley. Why did Elvis become so much more popular than Haley?
10. Why was the concept of the rebel so important to rock and roll? Does it still have the same importance?
11. Analyze the importance of a national market on the popularity of Elvis Presley.
12. What role did radio play in the emergence of Elvis and rock and roll?
13. What type of people reacted negatively to Elvis, and why did they do so?
14. How and why did the music of Elvis Presley change over a ten-year period?

## MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. How did Elvis discover black R & B music as a youth?
  - A. From his father
  - B. On late-night radio
  - C. At juke joints
  - D. At dances

Answer: B

2. What types of economic backgrounds did the rockabillys experience as youths?
- A. Lower class
  - B. Middle class
  - C. Upper class
  - D. Upper-middle class

*Answer: A*

3. Who was a major rockabilly artist?
- A. Jerry Lee Lewis
  - B. Chuck Berry
  - C. Arthur Crudup
  - D. Little Richard

*Answer: A*

4. Who managed Elvis Presley?
- A. Colonel Tom Parker
  - B. Hank Saperstein
  - C. Roy Orbison
  - D. Leonard Melrose

*Answer: A*

5. Why did Elvis first become so popular nationally?
- A. Television appearances
  - B. His stage appearance
  - C. Promotion of Sun Records
  - D. Film appearances

*Answer: A*

6. Who represented a juvenile delinquent to adults in the 1950s?
- A. Sam Phillips
  - B. James Dean
  - C. Bill Haley
  - D. Paul Newman in *Hud*

*Answer: B*

7. What rockabilly star came from Lubbock, Texas?
- A. Buddy Holly
  - B. Roy Orbison
  - C. Elvis Presley
  - D. Jerry Lee Lewis

*Answer: A*

8. What rockabilly got their start as an actor on a weekly television show?
- A. Jerry Lee Lewis
  - B. Gene Vincent
  - C. Ricky Nelson
  - D. Eddie Cochran

*Answer: C*

9. What television show first featured Elvis?
- A. *Stage Show* by Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey
  - B. *The Ed Sullivan Show*
  - C. *The Milton Berle Show*
  - D. *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*

*Answer: A*

10. What rockabilly act became known for the song, "Blue Suede Shoes"?
- A. The Everly Brothers
  - B. Carl Perkins
  - C. Johnny Cash
  - D. Gene Vincent

Answer: B

11. Who was a member of the Sun Records Million Dollar Quartet?
- A. Elvis
  - B. Gene Vincent
  - C. Buddy Holly
  - D. Sam Phillips

Answer: A

## LISTENING FROM MYLAB

Click to listen to "Carl Perkins: Rockabilly Pioneer"

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1382108>

Click here to listen to "Hound Dog and Don't Be Cruel"

<http://www.npr.org/2000/01/10/1068986/hound-dog-dont-be-cruel>

Click to listen to "Remembrances: Johnny Cash"

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