

LECTURE SLIDES

Chapter 2

The Birth and First Flourishing of Rock and Roll

The Nineteen Fifties (1)

- In many respects, the 1950s in the United States were simpler and more innocent than the previous decades, with a conservative value system, but other cultural developments ran counter to this trend.
- The Cold War colored U.S. politics and there was a race for technological superiority between the United States and the Soviet Union; technological developments and communist paranoia sparked an American interest in science fiction.
- Economic prosperity increased in the United States following World War II.
- Americans spent more time in their cars, many of which were now equipped with radios.

The Nineteen Fifties (2)

With the rise of the suburbs, many Americans became reliant on the automobile for transportation during the 1950s. This 1958 photo of a Utah drive-in movie theater during a showing of *The Ten Commandments* depicts the decade's "car culture."



J R Eyerman/The LIFE Picture Collection/Shutterstock

The Nineteen Fifties (3)

- The middle-class values as shown on television in the 1950s were sexually conservative, but the decade also saw the introduction of Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* and the Barbie doll.
- In 1954 and 1955, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down two important anti-segregation rulings; this strengthened the American civil rights movement, but racial struggles persisted.
- The 1950s were characterized by the cultural tensions and contradictions out of which rock and roll arose.

The Nineteen Fifties (4)

Racial segregation was one of the most divisive issues of the 1950s. This picture's original caption says it best: "9/4/1957—Little Rock, AR: Arkansas National Guardsmen turn away Elizabeth Eckford, a Negro girl, as she attempts to enter Central High School here, Sept. 4th. The troops stopped eight Negro students from entering the school. The soldiers, called out to prevent the desegregation of the school because it might set off rioting between Negroes and whites, stopped the students in defiance of a federal judge's order that the school was to be integrated." President Eisenhower eventually sent troops in to enforce the judge's order and integrate the school.



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Introduction

- There is no clear “first year” of rock and roll, but 1955 is a useful marker.
- Rock and roll was born with the emergence of rhythm and blues into the mainstream as the music of choice for youth culture.
- A middle class, teenage audience helped blur the divisions between country and western, rhythm and blues, and mainstream pop.
- This chapter considers the “first wave” of rock and roll, which occurred from roughly 1955 to 1960.
- The early years were crucial in establishing rock as a musical style and element of youth culture.

The Rise of Youth Culture in the 1950s

- The First Wave of War Babies Reach Adolescence (This Is Not Your Father's Pop Music)
 - The postwar period was the first to have a pop culture devoted exclusively to teenagers, who wanted their own music.
 - For white teens, listening to rhythm and blues was an act of social rebellion; conversely, juvenile delinquency was a concern for adults in the 1950s.

In the mid-1950s, several films helped establish the image of restless and rebellious youth that soon would become associated with rock and roll. Directed by László Benedek, *The Wild One* (1953, top) starred Marlon Brando as the charismatic and troubled leader of a motorcycle gang. James Dean also played a troubled youngster in *Rebel without a Cause* (1955, middle), becoming a legend after his untimely death in an automobile accident. Also in 1955, *Blackboard Jungle* (bottom, starring, from left, Vic Morrow, Sidney Poitier, and Glenn Ford) gave rise to adult concerns when teenage viewers got rowdy as the song “Rock around the Clock” was played in the film.



(top): *The Wild One* 1953 László Benedek Stanley Kramer Productions Distributor: Columbia Pictures; (center): *Rebel Without a Cause* 1955 Nicholas Ray Warner Brothers; (bottom): *Blackboard Jungle* 1955 Richard Brooks Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)

Radio and Records (1)

- The Rise of the Disc Jockey
 - Many white teens first heard rhythm and blues on the radio, and small, inexpensive radios were increasingly common.
 - Disc jockeys such as Cleveland's Alan Freed helped rhythm and blues break into the mainstream in the early 1950s.
 - Freed emulated other DJs who were already playing rhythm and blues across the country.
 - Freed's success took him to New York City in 1954, where he reached a much larger audience through his radio show, television, films, and concerts; he faced backlash, but also influenced many other DJs.

Radio and Records (2)

Starting out playing rhythm and blues records on a Cleveland-area radio station late at night, Alan Freed became one of the most important disc jockeys in the early years of rock music. After moving his show to New York in 1954, he dubbed it The Rock and Roll Party and took credit for giving the new style its name. While in Cleveland, Freed began to promote rhythm and blues shows for African American audiences, but soon white teens who had also tuned in to his show began to attend these events. Pictured here is an advertisement for a 1957 film, one of many he appeared in at the time.



GAB Archive/Redferns/Getty Images

Aggressive Marketing by Independent Labels

- Most rhythm and blues was recorded and released by independent labels; aggressive marketing tactics, including the practice of paying disc jockeys to play records on the radio, were required to compete with major labels.
- Independent labels operated outside the powers and institutions that had shaped American popular music for decades; the rise of rhythm and blues into the mainstream foretold a significant shake-up of the industry.

Crossovers and Covers

- Hit Records and the Charts
 - Tracking the music business and trends within it was important to people in the industry; periodicals such as *Cashbox* and *Billboard* carried sales charts that assisted with decision making.
 - Charts tracked listening populations, not musical styles, and were segregated into rhythm and blues, country and western, and mainstream pop based on assumptions about markets.
 - A new version of a song is called a *cover*; when a record or song holds a position on more than one of the three types of charts, this is called *crossover*.

The First Rock and Rollers Cross Over (1)

■ Fats Domino

- Antoine “Fats” Domino was one of the first early rockers to have consistent crossover success; he topped the rhythm and blues charts and also had many Top 40 hits.

Based in New Orleans, Fats Domino had a series of rhythm and blues hits before crossing over onto the pop charts. His easygoing style is characterized by rolling triplets on the piano and a smooth vocal delivery.

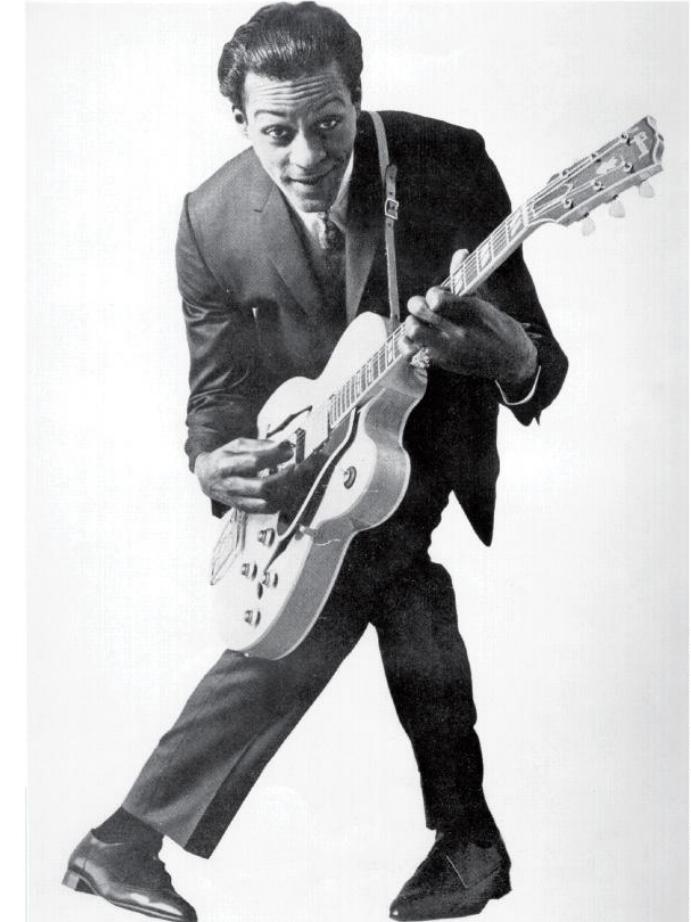


AB Photo Archives/Getty Images

The First Rock and Rollers Cross Over (2)

- Chuck Berry

- Berry recorded for Chess Records; his record “Maybellene” crossed over from the rhythm and blues to the pop charts, and he had several more Top 40 singles.
- Berry stated that his intention was to write songs geared to the average teenager.
- Berry’s lyrics were varied and can be interpreted on many levels.
- Many of Berry’s songs are in simple verse or simple verse-chorus and based on the 12-bar blues; his guitar style was widely imitated in rock.



Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

A consummate showman, Chuck Berry decided early on that he would write and perform songs that didn’t need to be changed for white radio. Berry’s attention to lyrics provided a model for many songwriters who followed, as did his bursts of lead guitar.

The First Rock and Rollers Cross Over (3)

■ Little Richard

- Richard cultivated a flamboyant, “wild man” persona; he had nine Top 40 hits, but his style made it more difficult for him to advance his career in the mainstream pop market.

Richard Penniman (Little Richard) was the most flamboyant figure in rock's first years. He often stood while playing the piano, which allowed him more flexibility to move during performances. His use of facial makeup challenged the prevailing norms of rock and roll masculinity, though he later remarked that he felt it likely made him less threatening in the eyes of white audiences, especially white men who may have suspected that Richard was pursuing white women. Little Richard had a string of crossover hits before quitting rock music to enter the ministry.



GAB Archive/ Redferns/Getty Images

The First Rock and Rollers Cross Over (4)

- The “Whitening” of Rhythm and Blues
 - The practice of changing the lyrics and music of rhythm and blues songs to appeal to white listeners could be called the *whitening* of rhythm and blues; Bill Haley did this in some of his records and helped establish a model for early rock and roll.
 - Haley was originally a disc jockey and country swing musician; Bill Haley and His Comets were signed with Decca in 1954, and had hit singles that appeared on both the pop and rhythm and blues charts.
 - Pat Boone covered rhythm and blues songs such as Fats Domino’s “Ain’t It a Shame” and Little Richard’s “Tutti Frutti,” and his versions sometimes outperformed the originals on the charts; Boone’s image made him less threatening to white parents, allowing him to help establish rock and roll within mainstream pop music.

The First Rock and Rollers Cross Over (5)

- The Controversy over Cover Versions
 - The success of cover songs may have reduced the crossover potential for the original records and artists, benefitting mainly record companies and white performers.
 - In 1955, it was still common for several singers to record a given song in their own styles; many white covers of rhythm and blues, however, were close copies.
 - Singers like Pat Boone and Bill Haley claimed that the rhythm and blues songs they covered would not have been played on white radio otherwise.

The First Rock and Rollers Cross Over (6)

Fueled by the success of “Rock around the Clock,” Bill Haley and His Comets became one of the first successful white acts in rock and roll. In addition to recording many popular hits in the early years of rock, the group also appeared in several rock-oriented films.



Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo

The First Rock and Rollers Cross Over (7)

If Elvis Presley seemed dangerous to middle-class parents, Pat Boone was the alternative. Boone's cover versions of songs by Fats Domino and Little Richard outperformed the originals on the pop charts, and together with his other hit records made him one of the top-grossing pop artists of the late 1950s.



Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

The Rise of Elvis Presley: In Steps Corporate America (1)

- Elvis at Sun
 - Elvis Presley further blurred the boundaries between pop, country and western, and rhythm and blues.
 - Elvis was raised in Memphis from the age of thirteen; Sam Phillips owned and operated a record label there, Sun Records, where Elvis made his first records.
 - Elvis's recording with Scotty Moore and Bill Black of "That's All Right (Mama)" launched his career and established Sun Records on a national level.



The Rise of Elvis Presley: In Steps Corporate America (2)

- A Performance that Launched a Career
 - Elvis's performance on the *Louisiana Hayride* in 1954 made it clear that something big was in store for him.

The Rise of Elvis Presley: In Steps Corporate America (3)

- The Big RCA Deal
 - Sam Phillips sold Elvis's contract to RCA in 1955; Elvis's manager felt that Phillips did not have the capital to promote Elvis, and Phillips needed the funds to keep Sun going.
 - Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" was a hit on the pop, country and western, and rhythm and blues charts, and he began to gain international exposure.
 - Elvis's move to RCA marked the beginning of major label interest in rock and roll.

The Rise of Elvis Presley: In Steps Corporate America (4)

When Elvis (center in background, choosing his uniform from clothing bins) was drafted into the U.S. Army, many predicted his career would be over. However, Elvis's manager, Tom Parker (second from right, talking to two RCA executives), calculated that military service would show that Presley was a good, upstanding American boy. This image would position the singer closer to the center of the entertainment business mainstream. Presley recorded several records before he shipped out to boot camp, and these singles were released while he was away, keeping his career alive until his return.



Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

The Rise of Elvis Presley: In Steps Corporate America (5)

- Covers in Elvis's Early Career
 - Elvis was not a songwriter; he chose from a wide variety of songs and stylistic influences.
 - Elvis's Sun records helped establish a style known as “rockabilly.”

The Rise of Elvis Presley: In Steps Corporate America (6)

- Presley's Move to RCA for Broader Appeal
 - Elvis broadened his appeal beyond a teenage audience during his years with RCA, when he also made films and served in the U.S. Army.

Referred to early in his career as “The Hillbilly Cat,” Elvis Presley became one of the biggest stars in show business when RCA bought his contract from Sun Records. The young Elvis was handsome, sexy, and dangerous. Presley scandalized parents and became extremely popular with a wide variety of teenagers.



Alfred Wertheimer/Getty Images

Rockabilly in the Wake of Presley (1)

- Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, and Jerry Lee Lewis at Sun
 - Carl Perkins was a singer-guitarist whose “Blue Suede Shoes” sold more than a million copies and was a hit on all three charts.
 - Johnny Cash was popular on the country and western charts, though he crossed over with “I Walk the Line” before moving to a major label.
 - Jerry Lee Lewis was known for energetic performances at the piano; he had hits that appeared on all three charts before his career stalled due to a scandal.

Rockabilly in the Wake of Presley (2)

After Elvis left for RCA, Sam Phillips invested in a number of other artists, including the blond-haired, piano-banging Jerry Lee Lewis. Lewis enjoyed a string of hits but was chased briefly from the business when reporters learned that his wife was only thirteen.



Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

Rockabilly in the Wake of Presley (3)

- Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran
 - Other labels also signed rockabilly artists: Gene Vincent recorded for Capitol and Eddie Cochran for Liberty.

Signed by Capitol Records to take advantage of Elvis Presley's rising popularity, Gene Vincent made his most lasting mark with a song that almost beats Elvis at his own game. Recorded in Owen Bradley's studio in Nashville, the iconic opening vocal and Cliff Gallup's guitar solos—both drenched in slapback echo—help make "Be-Bop-a-Lula" a rockabilly classic.



Photo by David Redfern/Redferns/Getty Images

Rockabilly in the Wake of Presley (4)

- Rockabilly Ladies
 - Women also performed and recorded rockabilly, including Brenda Lee, Janis Martin, and Wanda Jackson.

Rockabilly in the Wake of Presley (5)

- Buddy Holly
 - As rockabilly became mainstream, artists such as Buddy Holly, the Everly Brothers, and Ricky Nelson developed a musical style that was more pop and less country.
 - Buddy Holly was influenced by the rock and rollers who were active in 1955 and 1956.
 - Records by Holly and his band, the Crickets, were released by Decca Records and two of its subsidiaries.
 - Holly had seven Top 40 hits before his death in 1959; he also wrote songs that were made into classics by other artists.
 - Buddy Holly can be compared to Chuck Berry, as both were guitarists and songwriters with unique performance styles.

Rockabilly in the Wake of Presley (6)

- Buddy Holly (cont.)
 - The songs “Oh, Boy!” and “Peggy Sue” illustrate Holly’s distinctive stylistic approach.
 - Holly was most influential as a songwriter; he employed more song forms and stylistic influences than many of his contemporaries in 1950s rock and roll.

Hailing from Lubbock, Texas, Buddy Holly blended country twang with R&B rhythm to become an important songwriter and performer during rock’s first wave. Shown here with the Crickets, Holly died in a plane crash in February 1959—an event singer-songwriter Don McLean would later describe as “the day the music died.”



CB Photo Archive/Getty Images

Rockabilly in the Wake of Presley (7)

■ Latin Inflections

- Ritchie Valens's recording of the traditional Mexican song "La Bamba," sung entirely in Spanish, marked an important point in the emergence of Latin rock.
- The Champs scored a number-one hit with their instrumental song "Tequila."

Though Ritchie Valens' career was tragically cut short, his music would continue to make its mark in rock history long after his hit singles faded from the charts. "La Bamba," a song that Valens adapted from a familiar Mexican song and sang entirely in Spanish, would inspire later rockers in Latin America, who sometimes mistook the Los Angeles-born Valens for a Mexican-born artist. Valens (left) is shown here alongside Bob Keane (president of Del-Fi Records) in a 1958 television appearance.



Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

The Day the Music Died (1)

- The Misfortunes of Many in Rock and Roll's First Wave
 - Rock and roll suffered a series of setbacks at the end of the 1950s, resulting in the loss or departure of many important figures.

The Day the Music Died (2)

- The Payola Investigations
 - The longstanding practice of payola in the music industry was the subject of investigation and scandal beginning in 1959.
 - The payola scandals were caused in part by struggles between major labels and independent labels, and between BMI and ASCAP, two organizations that collected royalties for songwriters.
 - Some opponents of rock and roll thought that its popularity could be explained only by indie labels buying airtime; in 1959, a congressional committee began investigating.
 - Radio stations that played rock and roll were a focus of this investigation from the start; the FTC and FCC became involved, and stations made changes to avoid poor public perception or the loss of their broadcast licenses.

The Day the Music Died (3)

- The Payola Investigations (cont.)
 - Alan Freed and Dick Clark were high-profile subjects of the investigation; Freed was driven out of the music business.

The U.S. government hearings on payola in the radio business were the undoing of many in radio, including Alan Freed. However, Dick Clark (center) emerged from the investigation relatively unscathed and went on to become one of the most powerful figures in pop-music broadcasting.



Bettmann/Getty Images



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