The Origins of Rock ‘n’ Roll

The Commodification of Folk Culture as popular culture
The Music Business Before Radio/Internet

- Live Performances
- Sheet Music
- Records
- Radio introduced in 1920s

Harry James and band perform at Hershey Park Ballroom, 7/25/1945
Factors leading to the rise of Rock and Roll

- **Movement**
  - Increased mobility in era after World War II
    - Cars
    - Economic prosperity
      - Travel

- **Accessibility**
  - Cheaper records
    - $1.00
  - Cheaper Record players
    - $15.00

- **Technology**
  - Improved recording technology
Cultural Roots of Rock n’ Roll

• African Work songs
  – Originating in West Africa

• Country Music
  – Appalachian English and Irish
  – Use of string instruments

• Southern Gospel
  – Call and response music

• Rhythm and Blues
  – Fast beats
  – Multiple instruments
Diffusion of Southern Culture

- Southern Migration 1900-1960
  - 28 Million Southern born Whites and African Americans migrate out of the south
  - 1950 Especially
  - African Americans for to 8 major Cities
Finding an Audience

• Original reception by lower classes
  – Individual basis

• Baby Boomers
  – Social system restructured
    • Kids staying in school longer
      – Past 13-14 yrs old
  – Looking for music to call their own

• Popularity of Television in 1950s
  – Radio left looking for stuff to fill slots left by programs leaving for television
Re-Invention of Rock ‘n’ Roll

• White guitar version of R&B
  – “Rock around the Clock”
    • 1955 Bill Haley and the Comets
    • 1st Rock song to be #1 Hit
      – By 1959 almost all #1s were Rock Songs
The First Rock ‘n’ Roll Superstar

- Elvis Presley
  - Born in Mississippi
  - Developed as a musician in Tennessee
    - “Memphis was the only city Elvis could have come from” – David Lanegran
    - Influences were all African American Musicians
  - Started at Sun Records
    - Playing music originally written by African Americans
    - Taking African American culture and finding a way to sell it to a difference audience
Spreading Influence of Rock ‘n’ Roll

• Chuck Berry (first hit ‘55)
  – Moved from St Louis to Chicago
  – Songs mostly for teens
• Little Richard (first hit ‘55)
  – From Macon, GA
  – Covered by Pat Boone
• The Five Satins (first hit ‘56)
  – New Haven, CT
  – Doo Wop music
• Buddy Holly (first hit ‘57)
  – From Lubbock, Tx
  – Country turned rock musician
• Record companies in Detroit, Chicago, and New York eager to sign artists
The British Invasion

• The Beatles
  – Started out in Liverpool, England
  – Came to the United States in 1964
  – Began diffusion of British rock music to the United States

• Globalization of cultural trait and packaged as a way to sell
  – Regional differences based of tastes and regional cultures
Spatial Diffusion of Rock ‘n’ Roll
The continued spread of Rock ‘n’ Roll

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Communities and Musical Styles</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955-1960</td>
<td>New Orleans (Jazz and R&amp;B)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chicago (Blues)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Memphis (Rockabilly)</td>
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<td>1961-1965</td>
<td>New York (Folk)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Los Angeles (Surf Music)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Detroit (Soul)</td>
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<td>1966-1970</td>
<td>San Francisco (Psychedelic)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>London (Blues and Complex Rock)</td>
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<td>Nashville (Country Rock)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971-1975</td>
<td>Austin (Country Rock)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>New York (Punk Rock)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>London (Art Rock)</td>
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</tbody>
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Sources