Your Name

Instructor Name

Course Number

Date

Elvis Presley

Largely acting as a catalyst for rock and roll, Elvis Presley blew up the arenas of music during the 1950s and shortly established his niche in the genre. The performance by Elvis is unprecedented and he has more number one records than any other performer belonging to the rock and roll genre. In addition to this, Elvis also starred in thirty-two movies which is prodigious as no other rock and roll performer has ever acted in this many numbers of movies. Peace activist and the rhythmic guitarist from 'The Beatles', once famously stated, “Before Elvis, there was nothing” (Inglis). From 1956, when Elvis rose to fame, to the day he died, his songs landed the top charts every week and were famously popular across the globe. Elvis also has the honor of having 115 platinum and gold records to his name. This essay strives to shed light on the reasons why Elvis Presley is an idol in the American popular culture and what factors made him timeless in contrast to his contemporaries.

Historically, Rock and Roll is known to be associated with Cleveland DJ Alan Freed since the early 1950s (Lashua). Although Elvis cannot be claimed as the creator or torch-bearer of this genre but with his unparalleled performance and style, he laid claim to the title of King of Rock and Roll and this title has remained unchallenged ever since. Amounting to the fact that Elvis was the perfect epitome of stardom and fame, he grew highly popular in the 1950s. The eagerness of music arenas for a new, rugged sound was evident from the packed stages and concert halls whenever some new singer or performer was introduced. Elvis happened to be at Memphis, Tennessee, performing R & B, when he first got widely recognized and a majority of the girls in the audience became his fan offering him perks and their contact information. The precise and up to the mark formation of Elvis's persona also played a pivotal role in his success. Elvis's persona has been successfully strengthened by its repeated portrayals in various movies and song videos. This also paved the way for hyping the bands which comprised of only male performers. One such example is N' Sync.

To reflect upon the influence that Elvis had on American popular culture, it is necessary to analyze the underpinnings of Rock and Roll, which assisted Elvis to gain worldwide recognition. Widely associated with distinct yet conspicuous youth culture, Rock and Roll is a style of music that is frequently linked with rebellion exhibited by adolescents and young adults in their early adulthood. It would appear congenital that Elvis’s music should be taken as the foundational basis for studying and analyzing the history of Rock and Roll. In-depth analysis of various concert venues, musicians, audiences, rhythms, and tunes of Elvis's music would enable an individual to illuminate the differences between old and new rock and roll fans.

Elvis successfully managed to amalgamate different types of music in the pursuit of forming a distinct style known as rockabilly, which later was signified as one of the indispensable sounds of the genre. Elvis is specifically noted for this contribution as he synthesized the South's country-western music with the blues which largely pervaded as a favored music style among the African Americans. Rockabilly dominated the recording industries and radio charts for a significant period. Before the emergence of the civil rights movement, the integration of musical styles took place and Elvis can be given credence to, for this contribution and potential influence on the American popular culture. Elvis's seminal performance resulted in this time to appear momentous in pop culture history. This peculiar integration of various musical styles taking place just before the civil rights also paved the way for the prefiguration of social integration. The youth culture was also strongly influenced by the style and persona of Elvis at that time. Shortly after Elvis rose to popularity, the teenagers started to think of their personalities slightly different from the personalities of their parents. The concept of generation gap also surfaced at that time and there was also seen a rise in the rates of rebellion demonstrated by adolescents and they spent lavishly on the Elvis merchandise owing to the economic prosperity of this period. Teens and young adults had the privilege to spend a significant portion of disposable income on themselves that resulted in large collections of Elvis's merchandise. Presley's hairstyle, fashion sense, and his momentous Rock and Roll music immediately immersed in popular culture and soon every other teenager tried to adopt this culture. In the pursuit of gaining popularity among other audiences, especially the senior citizens, Elvis frequently changes his style in music and his physical appearance. During the 1960s, he acted in his first movie and made a return to the music arenas during the next decade. Undergoing so many changes, his career was star-studded with many achievements and contrary to popular belief, his success was unflinching in the face of adversity. The popularity of Elvis's work is still alive among different groups of people accounting for various reasons of reliability and even after his demise, he continues to shine in the arenas of music and art. The important role played by Elvis in the shaping of the American history of music and film made him a cultural icon influencing a lot of people of his time and future generations.

The single most consequential figure in the history of Rock and Roll, Elvis unreservedly revolutionized the prevalent styles of music and his powerful influence transformed the entertainment industry to the greatest extent. During his initial performances in the South, the racial minorities were highly segregated and the African-Americans experienced racial discrimination daily. Presley's music served as a transforming device regarding these attitudes and his music broke these widely prevalent racial barriers. His music succored to unite the racial minorities and majorities in the South and somehow led the African Americans to realize their fundamental human rights. Presley introduced his music to young teens and adolescents belonging to the white ethnicity which chiefly helped to incorporate the African-American talent into the mainstream talent. The normative moral and social values were also challenged by Elvis's music as his works led to the creation of an entirely new way of thinking. Until the end of 1955, Elvis Presley became a nation-wide sensation whereby girls particularly swooned over his style and amazing voice. Parents of the young adolescents were largely concerned with the way Elvis presented himself on stage and they tried to turn their children against him, but these things did not pose any barrier in the way of Presley’s increasing success. This can largely be accredited to the belief that Elvis’s music posed as an imminent threat to the values associated with the white American society. The beginning of youth culture, the end of racial segregation, and the deconstruction of sexual inhibition are some momentary turning points that were put into motion by the effects of Presley's music.

Initially, people were unaware of the dynamics of Elvis's music and they also didn't know about the massive potential his music had. The listeners belonging to different age groups were unable to categorize his music as country or rhythm and blues. Irrespective of their initial naivety about the categorization of this music, listeners still clamored and longed for any piece which came from Elvis. The daytime radio at that time primarily blasted quirky and chirpy music and Elvis gave it an all-new perspective. Presley's music was studded with a driving energy and a reckless abandon. It simultaneously celebrated life and also wallowed about it. The most apparent thing in his music was the force of life that led many adolescents to pursue careers and lifestyles of their own choice, rather than the impositions that their guardians or parents imposed on them. The divergent strands of country music and blues were fused into a dynamic sound that galvanized an explosion into the cultural and musical preferences of that time. The echo and reverberations of that time are felt even today in spite of the unmatched advancement in music genres and styles. Elvis and his name started to appear on almost all the forms of media, particularly, in movie theaters, stage, television, and on record charts for a very long time. The charismatic appeal of Elvis was shortly recognized by the producers and directors of television networks and films. His persona was so strong that the younger audiences earnestly began to look forward to his appearances in different places and his performances on the live stage.

Slowly and gradually, throughout the 1950s, there was a steep rise in the popularity of rhythm and blues and Elvis became the true focal point of these genres of music. He also talked independently about the significance of country style blues and R&B in his music and interviews, he frequently stated and conversed about those singer about whom reporters had never even heard of. In a famous interview with the Charlotte Observer newspaper, Elvis elucidated the inspirations and origins of his music. Elvis stated that,

“The colored folks been singing it and playing it just like I’m don’ now for more years than I know. They played it like that in the shanties and in their juke joints and nobody paid it no mind ‘til I goose it up. I got it from them, down in Tupelo, Mississippi I used to hear old Arthur Crudup band his box the way I do now, and I said if I ever got to the place I could feel all old Arthur felt, I’d be a music man like nobody ever saw”, (Wallace).

An evolution of the American popular culture was observed after his dramatic rise as various audiences largely started to listen and enjoy the music associated with and produced by African Americans. Elvis’s music was instrumental in waking up the racial majorities from their superiority complex and made his music chiefly accessible to various communities in America, especially white teens. Performers and singers such as Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Fats Domino can also attribute their success to the influence of Elvis Presley. His music also paved the way for many African American people who had massive potential in them but did not have a channel for expression due to racial discrimination. With his heart wrenching and poignant performances, he succeeded to transform the social parameters of his time as well.

Elvis Presley is also considered as the American idol for influencing pop culture because he not only increased tremendous opportunities for the African Americans in the horizons of music but also opened many new doors for them in various socio-economic aspects. The African-American music became immensely popular due to his influence and there was a radical shift in the cultural and economic beliefs in the behavioral patterns towards racial minorities. In a study, a critic of music and art reinstated that although Rock and Roll were chiefly enmeshed and immersed in the progressive politics of the 1950s, it still led to the amalgamation of the styles and values primarily associated with the American Americans in the mainstream culture. Intentionally, or unintentionally, Elvis's name is predominantly associated with this social and cultural integration. His music and its unique interpretation smoothed the grounds for granting fundamental civil rights to the African Americans which was otherwise not possible in a transformative manner.

Another reason that Elvis Presley is considered as an idol for influencing the popular culture in America is that through his music, he portrayed sexual liberation as a socially accepted concept rather than presenting it as a taboo as was the generality of that time. Many adults and senior citizens viewed him through the lens of vulgarity and deemed him as a pervert who was playing an influential role in the deviation of youth. Although the 1950s and 1960s were considered as times of economic prosperity and general well-being of the society, sexuality remained to be a subject that disseminated controversy. In the wake of the Second World War, the adults in societies were agitated due to the potential weakening of conventional morality, and the diminishing control of clergy and religious scholars over the young generation. The parents grew agitated and were frequently involved in conflicts with their children but nothing could stop Presley’s influence from prevailing over the hearts and minds of teens and adolescents.

The ascendancy of Rock and Roll was highly pronounced in the United States of America. Elvis’s music assisted in accelerating and steering the path directed towards the unification and homogenizing of African Americans and propagated the civil rights movement (Alderman). Through the unique styles and energetic delivery of vocals deployed in Rock and Roll, the American youth was able to attain their own identity. This new identity had its values and roles in society. The younger generation was also able to adapt and maintain perspectives and opinions which differed from those of their parents. Furthermore, Rock and Roll were and still is the most permeating and insidious form of music belonging to the popular culture in American history. The prevalent themes of retention and containment in the American society that dominated the policies regarding domestic and foreign matters were also agitated by the ubiquitousness of Presley’s performances and music videos (King). The younger generation also embraced the driving forces emanating from Presley’s art and strived hard to legitimized their energies in the pursuit of challenging the status quo. The adolescents and young adults dreamed of values based on liberty and freedom and could not be restrained by anyone from listening to Presley’s music.

Elvis Presley is appraised as a revolutionary singer and a legendary idol in the history of American popular culture as he substantially redefined music and protested against the social and moral values prevailing during his time (McConnell). Presley's style and his sound while singing combined to challenge and refute against the racial barriers which did not allow the racial minorities to be a part of the American economy. Elvis Presley foreshadowed and initiated a whole new style and culture of American music and other popular forms of entertainment. By the intricate integration of country music, gospel, and diversified varieties of rhythm and blues, he modified Rock and Roll in such a way that changed the way people thought of American history forever.

# **Works Cited:**

Alderman, Derek H., and Joshua FJ Inwood. " "The National Civil Rights Museum, Memphis, Tennessee."." *Southeastern Geographer* (2015): 1-5.

Inglis, Ian. "Ideology, Trajectory & Stardom: Elvis Presley & The Beatles."." *International Review of the aesthetics and sociology of music* (1996): 53-78.

King, Christine. "1 The Death of a King: Elvis Presley (1935–1977)."." *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (2016): 164.

Lashua, Brett. "In the Moondog's House: Alan Freed, Leo Mintz, and the "Invention" of Rock 'n'Roll."." *Popular Music, Popular Myth and Cultural Heritage in Cleveland: The Moondog, The Buzzard, and the Battle for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (Emerald Studies in Music and Place)* (2019): 37-47.

McConnell, Scott A. "The meaning of Elvis."." *Quadrant* (2019): 127.

Wallace, Marcie. "Elvis Presley: A Revolutionist." ." *History* (2012).