convinced by weak arguments, she read each draft with a discerning and analytical eye. Surely no critic has ever infused criticisms with such love and devotion. For this, and for the infinite number of supportive smiles, reassuring hugs, and cherished moments, she deserves more credit than I could ever give. Together we dedicate this book to our daughter Micaela. May she always question that which others accept as unquestionable.

INTRODUCTION

Reclaiming the Past from the Margins of History

I began work on this project with a straightforward purpose: to ascertain what it was like to grow up in the South in the years following World War II. The time and place were crucial and controversial. Between 1945 and 1960 the South would undergo a remarkable although imperfect metamorphosis. Of no little significance to the transformation were those adolescents whose development during the same span mirrored that of their homeland. Neither course would be smooth or easy. While both enjoyed the fruits of the era's exceptional economic growth and prosperity, each would also have to adjust inherited conventions and customs to novel demands and realities. As a result, southerners who experienced adolescence after the war have much to tell us about the process of transition. Their often arduous passage into adulthood might well provide critical clues for comprehending the South's troublesome coming of age in the postwar period.

The notions of teenage angst and unrest are familiar ones, of course; youth dissension is so routine that many frequently dismiss adolescent anxieties as nothing more than the clichéd and seasonal-like commodities of a modern mass media. Historians in particular are rather casual in their cyclical approach to those activities and sentiments that have involved people under the age of twenty-five. Popular styles and trends identified with youth, they say, repeat themselves every few years or so. They are fleeting and frivolous, fads that reside on the margins of history. Names and specific details may change, but basic outlines and motivations do not. In other words, the belief is that whether manifested

in the bobbysoxers who swooned over Frank Sinatra in the 1940s, the teeny-boppers who fainted at the sight of the Beatles in the 1960s, or the prepubescent girls who cried upon seeing Michael Jackson in the 1980s, the formula that sustained each episode was unchanging—likewise for the Charleston, the twist, disco, and every other craze in between. All evolved in a similar manner and traveled along analogous if not identical paths. Surely anyone even vaguely conversant with the popular music canon can decipher any and all fads that have materialized over the last two centuries. For all intents and purposes, as many mistakenly assume, the mystery was solved long ago.

As the inter-generational entertainment forms and idols of the young are judged generic, interchangeable, and uncomplicated, so, too, are young people's experiences and behavioral tendencies. Youth is generally comprehended in historically universal terms. Adolescent outlooks, dispositions, and problems supposedly transcend time and space. Young people are "supposed" to rebel against elders and authority. Their disaffection—as evidenced through choice of clothes, manners, speech, music, dance, friends, and recreational activities—is obligatory. We expect them to embrace popular culture and push the limits of sexual conduct. Such traits, no matter the period, are considered comparable and therefore predictable.

No doubt each generation is a variation of those that came before and has much in common with the ones that follow. Historians, however, customarily judge youth as nothing more than an accumulation of superficial attitudes and actions that are repeated and repackaged every generation. The names and specific details may change every decade or so but the essential aspects and motivations associated with the young do not. In essence, youth itself becomes the ultimate fad and is treated accordingly, which means that with few exceptions it is generalized, abridged, or trivialized into insignificance.

Such an approach, although generally orthodox, fails to convey the unique circumstances that greet each generation. Young southerners living in the post–World War II period are a case in point. Although they may have resembled their counterparts from earlier eras (and would correspond to those who emerged later), adolescents who reached maturity during this time faced extraordinary situations and conditions. Furthermore, they responded to those novel circumstances in ways that were just as unprecedented. As transitory figures living in a time of major transition, adolescents occupied an uncommon and

unparalleled position from which to behold and confront the changes engulfing the South. Estranged, impressionable, and exposed to a greater variety of experiences than any prior age group in the South's history, they were able to see themselves, and the world around them, in ways that previous generations would have had difficulty understanding. No one can expect a cyclical interpretation to recapture fully or adequately the feelings of attachment and alienation that the South's long-deferred entry into the twentieth century produced within its younger residents.

My interest in the subject lies primarily in reconstructing the intellectual climate—broadly defined to embody not the ideas of an elite minority but rather the assumptions and thoughts (the *mentalité*) of larger segments in the general population—that shaped the racial perspectives of those who reached maturity between 1945 and 1960. The traditions and practices associated with legal segregation unquestionably cast the longest shadow and were the most pervasive informants on all aspects of race. They had helped create a suppressive atmosphere that constantly reminded everyone that the status quo was natural, omnipresent, and immutable. Whether black or white, southerners who came of age before the late 1940s recognized that the rules and restrictions, as well as their own expectations and assumptions, were clearly defined. Reality was an institutional and social environment that emphasized black degradation and total racial separation. Despite a history of constant and various cultural crossings of the color line, southern racial ideology remained intact. The principle of separate and unequal endured and constituted the only world southerners knew. A Louisiana native in the mid-1950s symbolized the effects of this limited environment when he vowed, "I will certainly have to be among the southern die-hards. I could never accept such an idea as a Negro commanding respect, [not] on the basis of my experience and contact with them."[1]

Traditional racial relationships within the South left many adults little room for negotiation. Postwar southern youths, however, both black and white, were poised between two worlds, past and present. Unlike their parents and older siblings, whose perspectives had evolved when no more than one set of norms prevailed, sons and daughters during the late 1940s and the 1950s would draw conclusions from a myriad of sources. As a consequence, they would frequently confront diametrically opposed racial realities that challenged them to question

notions and images earlier groups had taken for granted. To be sure, conventional racial portraits, folk beliefs, suspicions, stereotypes, and arguments composed much of what they presumed about race; separation decisively accentuated faulty and unrealistic images and impressions. More often than not, those who were younger adopted at least some traditional tenets and characterizations. In many respects, they would always retain portions of what they had learned and observed in a racially segregated society. The chains that bound them to the past made absolute liberation unlikely—perhaps even impossible. To suggest otherwise would be to deny the power of culture and the deficiency of human nature.

That does not, however, tell the entire story or betray its finale. In addition to fostering ancestral patterns, the postwar chapter introduced new possibilities. The realm of the teenager, which drew heavily upon popular music and culture, seemed particularly sensitive to social fluctuation, and adolescents appeared relatively open to innovation. Southern youths enjoyed unprecedented access to alternate outlooks regarding race. Theirs was a generation that took note of positive and unprejudiced portrayals of African American culture, particularly as those characterizations were presented in newspapers, magazines and motion pictures and on radio and television. In addition, personal contact between black and white within novel and favorable circumstances also belied the lessons learned through custom and convention. Finally, this generation witnessed black discontent become manifest. Black southerners' mass public protests against the status quo, virtually nonexistent or unheard of before 1945, underscored what youths of the region had come to discover for themselves in the postwar era: Permanence within southern society was no longer as permanent as it had been. Nothing seemed immune to the changes sweeping through the former Confederacy.

The guidance and advice of ancestors or parents could hardly untangle this muddled state of racial affairs. As in other matters that adolescents deemed unique to their age group, the counsel elders provided on race often seemed outdated and obsolete, inadequate for addressing the distinct issues facing young people of the period. No longer did customary restrictions seem valid or vital, and no longer did flagrant appeals to white supremacy go unquestioned. Nor were the thoughts and actions of Dixie's younger inhabitants necessarily automatic or seemingly guaranteed. The old verities concerning the assumptions,

traditions, or system that separated the South's two largest groups suddenly appeared suspect. For those who only knew the old way, the perceptions of order lay in ruins. Some would never waver in their allegiance to the past, whereas others would either acquiesce to or develop various forms of uneasy accommodation, as historians have documented. At least one question, however, remains unanswered and even until now unasked: How did young people in the South, black and white individuals who lived in both the past and the present, worlds that contained experiences and notions so dissimilar, reconcile the differences?

■ ■ ■

This book is about how the South and its inhabitants responded to change during the region's period of greatest upheaval in the twentieth century, the years between 1945 and 1960. It was then that an old world based on rural institutions and values, status, poverty, and racial separation confronted massive industrialization, urbanization, prosperity, rural decay, and challenges to its segregationist system. Although the tumultuous process as a whole engendered varying degrees of friction and discord, the transformations associated with race caused the most contention. The fight for black equality involved those who pushed and those who resisted—both groups investing a tremendous amount of energy into their efforts.

Yet the story that unfolds here offers a different perspective from that usually associated with the subject. The main actors are not civil rights activists or segregationist politicians, although their presence is never far from the action or the reader's consciousness. Instead, this narrative centers upon the countless young people who embraced rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll music during the late 1940s and 1950s. In many ways, their musical choices signaled a significant generational departure from traditional racial attitudes and comportment. What deserves historical analysis is the potential for fomenting social change embedded within these seemingly innocuous musical practices and preferences.

In 1956, Herb Abramson of Atlantic Records hinted at a similar conviction when he predicted that "no future history concerned with the life and times of the twentieth century can leave out rock 'n' roll. It's that important."[2] Few historians of the South, however, have shared Abramson's opinion or enthusiasm concerning popular music's socio-

logical impact. That is not surprising. Music in general has not ranked high on their list of priorities. As the authors of a comprehensive chronicle of the region advised in a bibliographical essay (although curiously making no mention of songs, songwriters, performers, or audiences within 781 pages of main text), historians should pay more attention to the music of the South, "one of its greatest contributions to American and world culture."[3] As the entreaty indicates, southern scholars generally continue to treat music as if it existed on the periphery of everyday life, a sentimental souvenir best left in the attic among other personal yet ultimately inconsequential mementoes. Such an approach removes music from its social and historical environment and places it within a vacuum, where it predictably retains little meaning except as trivia.

Yet the place that music has occupied in the southern experience is far from trivial. In a region legendary for restrictions affecting race, class, and gender, music provided, as Bill Malone aptly recognized, "a means of release and a form of self-expression which required neither power, status, nor affluence."[4] For a people who traditionally enjoyed few gratifications associated with material success or political prerogative, music could furnish a significant source of personal satisfaction and creative sustenance. Consequently, in order to appreciate fully how the majority of southerners worked, played and worshiped, loved, laughed and cried, celebrated, mourned, lived, and died, it is necessary to integrate issues relating to music into a larger historical context. In other words, any examination that seeks to be complete must acknowledge that music, including rock 'n' roll, affected people and how they saw themselves and the world around them.

Granted that concession, it is unlikely that many would quarrel with the assertion that music has consistently stimulated emotions, socialized individuals, and assisted in the construction of personal and group identities. Yet questions remain about how music has produced these cultural consequences. Ordinarily, we would attribute these tendencies almost exclusively to the literate elements or words of musical material. Scholars have without doubt placed heavy emphasis on lyrical content in gauging music's social and historical significance. They have particularly valued songs or performers that espoused overt political statements or messages of resistance and largely disregarded those that did not.

Although useful, a method based strictly on lyrical substance reveals

little about the bulk of commercial music produced and consumed during the twentieth century. Few people would associate the songs and styles that have dominated popular music (minus the occasional exception, such as war songs in the 1940s or protest songs in the 1960s) with impassioned causes or noble crusades. It is necessary, therefore, to account for and discern the considerable effect that music of an arguably apolitical nature has had upon people and the historical process. It is also vital to pay attention to the testimony of youth of the postwar era, who, in describing their attachment to rock 'n' roll, steadfastly maintained, "We're hep to music, not words."[5] It is essential to grasp the meaning behind and within the declarations of one excited teenager who declared in 1956 that rock 'n' roll "gives you a sort of feeling of freedom. It makes you relax and want to jump. Youth's gotta have freedom today. You know?"[6] Finally, it is critical to take seriously the account of a student who claimed, "I went out to see Elvis and to laugh, but when I saw him and listened to him, I found that there was a lot of value there."[7]

■ ■ ■

Although historians have commonly acceded that rock 'n' roll of the 1950s was a cultural phenomenon (much akin to Fess Parker's coonskin cap, the hula hoop, and the Edsel), rarely have they rated it as history. As a consequence, the subject remains one of the least understood yet repeatedly misrepresented of the twentieth century. Invariably cloaked in stereotype, myth, and nostalgia, it stubbornly eludes serious historical analysis and inclusion and instead provides a quaint reminder of a supposedly simpler era that was inordinately susceptible to mass media manipulation and exploitation. Numan Bartley's highly anticipated and acclaimed *The New South, 1945–1980: The Story of the South's Modernization,* for example, follows this pattern and devotes little space or attention to rock 'n' roll. When Bartley does address the topic, he disapprovingly describes the music as a commodity to be sold, a hackneyed commercial (and, presumably, illegitimate) composite of its authentic southern folk sources. Although he briefly acknowledges that Elvis Presley and other rhythm and blues–influenced performers may have transcended racial genres to create a style that evinced class and regional alienation, Bartley concludes that rock 'n' roll ultimately "made southern music more packaged, more homogenized, and less southern."[8]

That abrupt and casual dismissal of mass or popular culture is not unexpected; it has seldom received a warm reception within the historical profession. Instead, scholars have recurrently treated popular culture as an unwelcome guest, to be looked upon with suspicion and doubt. There are usually two reasons for such disdain. The first involves the issue of taste. Perceiving popular culture exhibitions as vulgar or uncultivated, academics habitually resist investigating the realm of the "low brow" to protect their own (or someone else's) notion of intellectual integrity. Yet allowing aesthetic bias to shape an appraisal of the past can have serious consequences. According to Pierre Bourdieu, cultural consumption classifies individuals and groups according to particular socioeconomic and educational backgrounds; aesthetic distinctions necessarily reflect social ones. Basing an evaluation of the past on taste, therefore, solidifies social hierarchies by granting certain perspectives and articulations predominance over others. Because the masses have normally not possessed equal access or exposure to the cultural forms favored by the wealthy and well placed, the way they have expressed or entertained themselves in art and music has been different from that of their more aristocratic counterparts. To assume those differences to be tasteless and unworthy of scholarly examination is to imply that only the powerful and elite deserve attention. Under that scenario, the significance of what happened yesterday plainly becomes subject to the prejudices of historians who work today.[9]

The second reason for scholarly avoidance of the popular is more problematic. Many historians assume that popular culture necessarily implies illusion and deception and that a deleterious "culture industry" intentionally manipulates the inert patrons who purchase its products. According to that definition, popular culture is an opiate, and the exertions and inclinations of consumers are as repetitive and meaningless as the pabulum they consume. Drugged or numbed into submission, individuals are no longer able to resist or evaluate critically what the media inflicts upon them. For large numbers of historians, such assumptions have become automatic and generally dogmatic. They have also led to a general scholarly contempt for selected popular manifestations, including rock 'n' roll. Significantly, as Lawrence Levine has suspected, the habits of distrust, denigration, and eventual dismissal are difficult to break: "We have become so accustomed to what appears to be the imposition of culture upon passive people by modern media that it is difficult to perceive variations in the pattern."[10]

Theodor Adorno is responsible at least in part for the prevailing inability of historians to "perceive variations in the pattern." He (along with Max Horkheimer) first introduced and defined the anti-populist term *culture industry* in 1944 to discredit any interpretations that depict mass or popular culture as being spontaneously derived. For them, mass culture emerged from corporate boardrooms as a means of priming the capitalist pump and imposing ruling-class ideology onto everyday people. The people, for their part, could do nothing but lapse into anesthetized and mechanical sameness; entertainment conglomerates had already inculcated individuals' responses to commercial culture. Adorno's resulting insightful disclosures on the economic and ideological motivations and methods of a well-entrenched and imperialistic culture industry are compelling. Given the overall history of the media and audience reaction, it is understandably difficult for even the most emphatic popular culture apologists to overlook or discard his arguments.[11]

Adorno's general one-dimensional approach that comprehended the culture industry as a monolithic entity without conflict and division, however, is rudimentary at best. It defies plausibility to characterize the various participants associated with popular music after World War II (composers, publishers, major and independent record companies, artist and repertoire personnel, radio station owners, disk jockeys, jukebox dealers, record retailers, dancehall and nightclub proprietors, performers, talent scouts, and personal managers involved in popular, country, and rhythm and blues music on national, regional, and local levels) as a seamless confederation in perpetual conspiratorial agreement. Similarly, except for those who distrust or dislike the masses, Adorno's portrait of those who indulge in popular culture as passive victims or dopes remains unsatisfying. Deemphasizing or ignoring the fact that consumers could interpret, decode, re-create, and even reject what a multifarious culture industry delivers to them, Adorno failed to appreciate popular culture's ultimate complexity.

Such caveats in no way call for the repudiation of Adorno's admonitions; rather, they urge that his critical approach is meant to illuminate or inform, not terminate, serious popular culture scholarship. A more effective interpretation would combine Adorno's perceptive evaluations (continuing his vigilant watch over an exploitative and preying entertainment business) with a sensitive appraisal of popular culture genres and audiences. The resulting analysis would appreciate that

although the balance of power in popular culture is indisputably unbalanced in favor of the corporate few, the authority they possess is not absolute. There is room, within the chronically unsettled environs of a fragmented culture industry, for genuine and active consumer participation. Touched up with a symbiotic brush that highlights the ongoing negotiation and dialogue between the media and its audience, Adorno's former one-dimensional canvas would reveal a deeper resonance and complexity. As a subject for investigation, popular culture would become what it has usually been in everyday experience: an intricate, enigmatic, and persistently open-ended phenomenon.[12]

■ ■ ■

In the remaining chapters of this volume, I will examine various aspects of the rock 'n' roll phenomenon. Chapter 1 is a discussion of the specific racial, class, and historical factors that allowed the South to produce musical artists who would differ substantially from those who originated elsewhere. Any interpretations dealing with the issue of rock 'n' roll and racial appropriation must address the distinctive cultural affiliations that all the region's inhabitants, black as well as white, have shared or sustained. In chapter 2, I situate a time frame that includes the emergence of both the civil rights movement and rock 'n' roll. I contend that post–World War II trends in popular music, as part of larger modernizing forces intruding upon the South, affected long-standing attitudes relating to race. Reexamining the region's opposition to public school desegregation, I focus on the South's younger inhabitants, for whom "massive resistance" was neither uniform nor comprehensive.

Applying Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony to the popular music business of the post–World War II era, in chapter 3 I document how popular music of the 1940s and 1950s evolved from an ongoing (and periodically conflicting) dialogue between a hierarchical entertainment industry and its assorted personnel and audiences. From the evidence, it is clear that popular culture purveyors may not have been as dominant (and their audiences as submissive) as previous explanations have claimed. The popular culture process was instead complex and uncertain and did not represent only the unilateral decisions and mandates of anonymous corporate shareholders and board chairs. It also embodied the interests and outlooks of others far less connected to the actual manufacturing and distribution of popular culture as product.

Chapter 4 is an evaluation of rock 'n' roll within the historical and

social context of southern racial intolerance. Although many have repeatedly dismissed the musical amalgamation as an inevitable link in the postwar national chain of beats, hipsters, and outsider teen movies aimed at a targeted consumer audience, my discussion underscores the contradictions of a southern working-class culture struggling to come to terms with the legacy of racism. I conclude that a generation that came of age after World War II, in creating and consuming rock 'n' roll, broke with a past traditionally tied to racial subordination.

The problems that emerge when cultural critics allow the issue of taste to affect their perceptions of society are considered in chapter 5. The intellectual elites who served as cultural connoisseurs enjoyed enormous sway over the larger population. They controlled the mechanisms and symbols necessary to define what constituted legitimate and valid forms of cultural expression. By making taste a major criterion for assessing cultural relevance, the intellectual elite virtually closed serious debate alluding to class, ethnic, gender, racial, regional, and generational dialogue in post–World War II society. Although historians should rightly worry about a culture industry's power to determine what becomes popular, they must also admit that the cultural or intellectual elite of any given period is equally influential in deciding what is good, what is important, and, in the end, what is historical.

Gramsci's concept of the "organic intellectual" will be employed in chapter 6 to help identify the persons and events responsible, at least in part, for altering age-old perspectives on race. For post–World War II southern teenagers who sought an identity and a style, there were several unorthodox types—disk jockeys, musicians, and performers—who provided, in the form of cultural tools (fashion, language, appearance, and outlook) the approaches and demeanors considered integral to their social survival. Significantly, organic intellectuals (those nontraditional leaders unaffiliated with formal institutions of power) often promoted the acceptance of notions contrary to prevailing regional race ideology. Documenting the rise of radio programming for African Americans, the popularity of rhythm and blues, and the public outcry against segregationists who sought to eradicate the music's influence, I propose that the rock 'n' roll phenomenon mirrored and ultimately helped create an environment conducive to racial respect and tolerance.

For many, Elvis Presley (more specifically his commercial success) symbolized hundreds of years of racial oppression and exploitation. His fame, fortune, and prominence are presumed to have rested on the

entertainment industry's effective promotion and marketing of a counterfeit. It has become fashionable to read Presley as nothing more than an untalented and irreverent white usurper of black rhythm and blues. An alternate interpretation of his relationship to black culture appears in chapter 7 and augments explanations that rely solely on nineteenth-century blackface minstrel paradigms (those hypotheses which, in various forms, repeat the cycle of empowered whites pilfering the music of dispossessed African Americans for profit). Although such models have illuminated the racial (and racist) background of American popular music in general, they have nonetheless distorted the complexity of rock 'n' roll's racial, class, and regional origins. In contrast, I will employ Gramsci's notion that a particular group's appropriation of a minority music may have signified the similarity of each one's position in relation to the mainstream or dominant culture. Consequently, I conclude that the issues of race, class, and region cannot be separated or ignored when analyzing the evolution of rock 'n' roll.

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Considering the voices generally consigned to history's margins, I hope to encourage the incorporation of themes and approaches associated with popular culture and music into southern historiography. The success of this enterprise hinges upon reconceiving the relationship between popular culture and history, two entities frequently seen as never crossing or bearing upon the other. Merging the two may cloud how we comprehend the past. New questions will have to be asked and uncommon parameters constructed, and the resulting answers may not always be as neat, as orderly, or as clear-cut as those generally exhumed through historical scholarship. Yet a methodology sensitive to popular culture promises to expand, not thwart, our understanding of the South after World War II.

Rock 'n' roll, which fused the music and mannerisms of both the black and white working classes, provides an invaluable glimpse into how individuals and groups used popular culture to define themselves and the world around them. An examination of this process may very well lend a significant corollary to orthodox and familiar interpretations concerning the postwar South's struggle with change. It may reveal that the region's population included individuals and groups who were multidimensional in their character, disposition, and attitudes toward race. It may also show that contrary to popular belief and vintage newsreels, not all white southerners of the 1950s were spitting epithets, throwing bricks, or shouting insults at their black counterparts.

Ralph Ellison once remarked that it was through popular culture that "ethnic resistance is least effective. On this level the melting pot did indeed melt."[13] In many ways, Ellison has motivated me to reexamine the issue of race in the postwar South. Accordingly, this book is neither a history of early rock 'n' roll nor a biography of Elvis Presley, although elements of each are contained within these pages. Instead, it is an investigation of how popular culture affected the racial attitudes of white southerners who lived during a period of unprecedented possibilities. Some southern historians will no doubt disagree with some of my interpretations. That is good, because to object implies to counter or refute, which in turn leads to further scrutiny. With this volume, I hope to initiate a dialogue and to suggest that we look at the South's past from a fresh perspective. If, in the process of doing so, we acquire a more comprehensive and complex picture of the region and its people, my efforts will have been successful.

■ ■ ■

In 1954 the editors of *Ebony* magazine advised students of race relations to put aside their charts and statistics for a moment and search for the nearest jukebox. It would be there, "found on an R&B record purchased for forty-five cents at the dime store," that scholars would locate "the real inside story."[14] Accordingly, George Lipsitz has observed of popular music consumption and consumers, "As one would expect from any practice so laden with emotional investment and so central to the invention of one's own identity, the use of music inevitably becomes conflated for these individuals with other important issues: how they make meaningful connections with others, how they monitor and remake themselves, how they remember the past, and how they dream of something better for the future."[15]

The counsel of *Ebony* and Lipsitz calls to mind a discussion Hank Williams had with a correspondent from a national magazine in 1952. His songs, Williams declared, communicated the feelings and sentiments of "what some call the 'common people.'":

> I call them the "best people," because they are the ones that the world is made up most of. They're really the ones who make things tick, wherever they are in this country or in any country. They're the ones who understand

what we're singing about, and that's why our kind of music is sweeping the world. There ain't nothing strange about our popularity these days. It's just that there are more people who are like us than there are the educated, cultured kind. There ain't nothing at all queer about them Europeans liking our kind of singing. It's liable to teach them more about what everyday Americans are really like than anything else.[16]

1

Race and Class in Southern Juxtaposition

The Forgotten Roots of a (Rock) Revolution

In *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class,* Robin D. G. Kelley suggests that to write history from the bottom partly entails gauging the reactions of the powerful to the powerless. In this way, one can gain much insight into the past social significance of the latter's utterances and activities. Dominant groups would not concern themselves with the "common people" unless those people somehow constituted a challenge to their security and status. "Knowing how those in power interpret, redefine, and respond" to the activities of the politically impotent, Kelley contends, reveals much as to "how power operates, and how seemingly innocuous, individualistic acts of survival and resistance shape politics, workplace struggles, and the social order generally."[1]

If Kelley is correct, rock 'n' roll of the 1950s (a phenomenon one contemporary derisively defined as "illiterate," "monotonous," and "simple-minded," a misbegotten dissonance born in the South, "where Negro and white populations are evenly mixed, causing the two musical forms, [rhythm and blues and hillbilly] to 'integrate'") suddenly becomes a subject of considerable historical importance.[2] Few domestic disturbances of the postwar era generated greater passion or vitriolic opposition. It was apparent, judging from its critics and their criticisms, that the music infuriated and frightened many who sustained the status quo. As both a musical and a social force, rock 'n' roll (and the individuals and groups who produced and consumed it) evidently made many people uncomfortable. Addressing the "rabble-rousing

techniques" that were infiltrating popular music in the middle of the 1950s, one jazz aficionado put the feelings and fears of his colleagues and many others into telling perspective. It was a sentiment that betrayed the class snobbery that often motivated those opposed to rock 'n' roll: "It is one of the embarrassments of democracy that this is the age of the common man."[3]

"If so many people like something, it must be good," the editor of the *Richmond News Leader* sarcastically wrote about the booming popularity of rock 'n' roll in 1957. "*Vox populi vox deorum est,* etc. To which we say, Humbug." As he tried to reassure readers, many of whom perhaps feared that civilization was teetering on the verge of collapse, "One of the chief disadvantages of democracy is that in order to insure political equality, it is forced to go along with the myth of intellectual and cultural equality. They are in no wise related. The virtues of the one do not extend over into the other."[4] Such reassurances apparently did not console many of his adult contemporaries. "What is this thing called rock 'n' roll?" one *New York Times* columnist implored. "What is it that makes teenagers throw their inhibitions as though at a revival meeting? Is this generation of teenagers going to hell?"[5] "Is this music or madness?" inquired a writer from *Look* magazine.[6] An earlier editorial in a jazz periodical had ventured along similar lines, perhaps wandering further into desperation: "Are we to move towards a world in which the teenagers, dancing hysterically to the tune of each latter-day Pied Piper, will inflict mob rule in music? Should we surrender to the teenagers?"[7] As rock 'n' roll continued to blur market and cultural boundaries, the *National Review* could only lament, "May the Lord have mercy on us."[8]

The musical articulations of the "teenage mob" defied orthodox behavior and deportment. They disputed the tastes, worldviews, and values of those in power, who in turn characterized the new sounds and assertions as uncultured heresy. Guardians of the establishment endlessly attacked what they construed as "noise," denying that cacophony constituted music. Yet as the intensity of the opposition usually indicated, there was also something political at stake in their assaults. They were not merely denouncing music for music's sake. The powerful of any era do not enjoy having their dominance contested, no matter how subtle or seemingly harmless the irruptions might be. Music that achieves popularity without having attained official approval or endorsement (or that enjoys success despite incurring the wrath

of "authorities") threatens the peace, stability, and order that guarantees the well-being of the well-entrenched.

Consequently, it is not difficult to understand why Plato at one time seemed so concerned with the musical choices of youth. That the young had spurned parental advice and embraced their own style of song displeased and troubled him. Their actions implied that the authority of their elders was neither absolute nor necessarily binding. They were set to view themselves and the world around them in ways that did not coincide with existing rules and statutes, codes that ensured harmony and patriarchal domination. If not suppressed, Plato warned, the next step would be "a contempt for law," a "refusal to submit to the magistrates," and, finally, "emancipation from the authority and correction of parents and elders."[9] What Plato bemoaned was the fact that through music the once silent and visibly passive multitudes had suddenly located a voice. He cautioned contemporaries to be ever-vigilant; musical misdeeds could induce further violations of social standards and systems held most sacred.

Thus, some two thousand years before Chuck Berry disavowed Beethoven, Plato issued an advisory to those intent on defending and preserving the status quo: Behold music's subversive nature. The words would be as relevant in 1956 (when adults worried that "kids have no respect for their parents, their teachers, or their country") as they had been in 375 B.C. and would caution any who took lightly the capacity of melody and rhythm to bring about societal transformation.[10] As Plato warned, "A change to a new type of music is something to be aware of as a hazard of all our fortunes. For the modes of music are never disturbed without [an] unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions."[11]

■ ■ ■

The identification of youth dissent with popular music was hardly unique to southerners in the middle of the twentieth century. During the 1920s, many young adults across the nation had adopted jazz and new styles of dancing (as well as smoking, drinking, flirting, and dressing flamboyantly) to define themselves within an increasingly impersonal, urban, and industrial society. As young men and women came into contact in school and work settings, issues of age began to govern their agenda. Shared experiences led to shared outlooks. The growing influence of a youth peer culture (at the expense of parental authori-

ty), particularly on and around college campuses, infused extracurricular endeavors with a symbolism that routinely transcended fun and frivolity. Students were setting themselves apart from older and orthodox beliefs and values in order to establish identities within the modern world. Through their adherence to popular music, youthful iconoclasts were able to attain and exhibit the new-found cultural freedom and independence associated with the Jazz Age.

Youthful tendencies instituted in the 1920s accelerated as the Jazz Age gave way to the swing or big band era of the mid–1930s. With the help of motion pictures, radio, jukeboxes, phonograph recordings, and mammoth dance halls, popular music reached a larger, younger audience. Adolescents in particular enjoyed greater access to jazz and jazz-related activities. Like their college-age predecessors who a decade earlier had sworn allegiance to syncopated music, many teenagers in the 1930s and early 1940s also deemed their commitment to swing to be a form of rebellion against the establishment. They developed or appropriated styles of dress, appearance, language, dancing, and other ritualistic forms that defied prevailing social norms. Swing terminology and slang (hepcat, zoot suit, bobby sox, jive, jitterbug, shag, trucking, pecking, lindy hop, and Suzy-Q), instantly recognized and exalted within the teenage community, quickly entered the nation's vocabulary. Exasperated and concerned parents worried that the music, dance steps, language, and conduct of their children were corrupting traditional morals and values. Yet as one contemporary music critic reassured overwrought adults (while initiating a modern precedent to which later cultural guardians would refer in attempting to nullify the social meaning of their children's exploits), swing simply exemplified "the immortal right of adolescence to assert itself."[12]

Many young people before the post–World War II era and the appearance of rock 'n' roll had asserted themselves. Large numbers of teenagers had dissented from the values and philosophies of their parents, and popular music had typically represented the most effective vehicle for verbalizing their discontent and estrangement. There is little doubt that rock 'n' roll bore a strong resemblance to these earlier musical trends and that it encompassed many of the same rebellious tendencies and characteristics. Some might very well render the rock 'n' roll phenomenon as no more than another episode in a long history of youth-oriented alienation and disaffection, an all-too-predictable stage in the adolescent passage to adulthood. Young people themselves, by

comparing rock 'n' roll to earlier musical phenomena, supported such a cyclical interpretation. (It's worth noting, however, that each succeeding generation, in order to gain acceptance, argues that what they do is no different than what their parents or grandparents had done in previous eras. Such assertions should be examined carefully.) Yet rock 'n' roll did not materialize out of thin air solely to fulfill a cycle. In addition to its past, it also owed much to a present—in the midst of what would unfold as a pivotal stage in the evolution of contemporary American society.

Technological and communication innovations inside and outside the media, conflicts and resolutions within the music business, material prosperity and a consumer culture that such abundance generated, changing attitudes toward sexual activity, and dramatic postwar demographic shifts all contributed greatly to rock 'n' roll's emergence and resulting popularity. These developments (in conjunction with the Soviet threat) also helped create what Harrison Salisbury anxiously defined as an uncommon variety of young people.[13]

Salisbury's apprehension was far from unwarranted. The cold war pairing of affluence and anxiety created exceptional tensions and pressures that radically transformed the cultural landscape. Accordingly, adolescents in the 1950s differed greatly from those who had reached maturity in the 1930s and early 1940s. The designation Salisbury ultimately applied to them, the "Shook-Up Generation," betokened postwar society's deepest fears concerning the children who grew up in the uncertain Atomic Age. As one disconcerted parent pondered in 1957, "Today's teenagers . . . are living [with] the constant threat of annihilation and violence. . . . It's a wonder that only three percent of [them] turn bad."[14]

Youth culture had evolved greatly during the years after World War II and the end of the swing era. Teenagers of the Shook-Up Generation were marrying at a younger age, engaging in sexual relations earlier in their lives, working at jobs that provided disposable incomes, purchasing consumer goods that sustained leisure activities, and generally looking and acting differently than their counterparts in previous periods. Much of the change was because of postwar affluence, which, coming on the heels of depression and wartime rationing, transformed the world of teenagers. They were now economically independent and able to make numerous decisions free of adult control or supervision. Guidance furnished at high school and at the various after-school hang-

outs where the teenagers could gather abruptly challenged the advice and counsel normally dispensed at the family dinner table. Youngsters and their peers, not parents, increasingly decided how their outlooks, tastes, and attitudes would develop.

Peers were not the lone influences on postwar teenagers. By the middle of the 1940s, youths represented a potentially lucrative yet virtually untapped consumer market. That was not the case for long. As the 1950s came to a close, the embryonic adolescent consumer industry had already realized its promise. Consumers were spending more than $10 billion a year on merchandise aimed directly at teenagers. The mass media played a large role in nurturing and exploiting this market. The publishing, radio, recording, motion picture, and (eventually) television industries—not to mention their commercial sponsors and advertisers—all designed products and programming to meet (and create) the needs and desires of adolescents.

For parents charged with instilling the lessons of their own (often idyllic in retrospect) childhoods, the media was intruding into family matters. Teenagers, however, envisaged these encroachments as essential to the ability to interact with contemporaries. Social divisions based on age, in evidence since at least the 1920s, generally grew wider and shifted downward after World War II. Young people who would have been deemed children in previous decades now acted out their own versions of adult reality. As *Life* magazine discerned with some apprehension, "They have minds of their own about what they want."[15]

The rock 'n' roll era, therefore, definitely provided its own elements to the popular music cycle and represented a distinctive period in American and southern history. In addition to purchasing clothes, cosmetics, magazines, comic books, and secondhand cars or hot rods, adolescents were also consuming popular music. By the late 1950s, the popularity of rock 'n' roll with young people would ensure that the music industry would sell more than $75 million worth of recordings each year.[16]

Rock 'n' roll owed its existence to the earlier dissemination and endorsement of rhythm and blues. That was particularly true in the segregated South, where black as well as white teenagers began to seek R&B recordings in the late 1940s and early 1950s. That this happened at a time when immense transformations were poised to occur in the region's racial system indicates at least a vague connection between the two in the historical narrative. To reach a substantive conclusion

concerning this relationship will involve an extensive examination of the evidence. It will also necessitate going beyond the superficial, impressionistic, nostalgic, romantic, or stereotypical suppositions that usually shape discussions on the subject. Finally, it will entail comprehending the rise of Elvis Presley.

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Elvis. The first name alone evokes images and sounds that spark instant recognition. A surname is unnecessary. Although it is true that Elvis Presley may not have invented rock 'n' roll, few can deny that he helped transform what many assessed as a minor musical novelty into an international phenomenon. In the process, he became one of the most successful entertainers of the twentieth century and one of history's more controversial cultural figures. His southern dialect, working-class origins and persona, and black-derived and overtly sexual performing style galvanized both partisans and critics alike. His entrance on the national stage in the mid–1950s enthralled, enraged, and bewildered a wide array of observers. His exit some twenty years later fueled a relentlessly impassioned and contentious debate that has persisted, unabated and unresolved. What, exactly, did the emergence and enduring popularity of Elvis Presley say about American society? What did it all mean? A contemporary English music critic perhaps provided the best approach (although not necessarily the tone) needed to seek the answers: "I don't regard his rise as a strange or shameful accident. Those who sneer at Elvis Presley should, therefore, redirect their antagonism. Presley just had to happen. He is a symptom of the times. What we should examine and try to understand are the plaguey circumstances that produced him."[17]

Focusing on Presley (and the "plaguey circumstances that produced him") does not automatically terminate the significance of other artists, black or white, who contributed to the rock 'n' roll explosion. Preferably, emphasizing him will at least partly highlight the similarities, not the differences, among major rock 'n' roll performers of the 1950s. Even a cursory glance will substantiate that many of these entertainers had a great deal in common, including generational ties, social and economic class backgrounds, and performing styles that owed much to African American sources.

Their regional origins provided the key collective experience. A large number of artists and acts associated with rock 'n' roll hailed from

below the Mason-Dixon Line. Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Carl Perkins, Little Willie John, Bo Diddley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Clyde McPhatter, Fats Domino, Ray Charles, Roy Orbison, the Clovers, Joe Turner, Ruth Brown, Buddy Holly, Chuck Willis, Gene Vincent, Sam Cooke, the Everly Brothers, Lloyd Price, and Presley, southerners all, helped create and popularize the new music. A supplemental roster would uncover another eighty luminaries who made an impact on popular music charts. As native southerners, they shared a history and culture that simultaneously sustained failure and fortitude, tragedy and resilience. Their connection to the South represented a centuries-old bond that would invariably separate them from northern, western, and British counterparts.

Augmenting their regional affiliations, the performers were, with a few exceptions, approximately the same age. Seventy-six were born in or after 1930; by 1955, a pivotal year in the history of rock 'n' roll, the average age of the artists was twenty-two. The implication is clear. The vast majority entered adolescence during and following World War II, an extremely disruptive period in the history of the South. Unlike previous generations of southerners in the twentieth century, they encountered substantial change at a relatively early age. The experience was surely a profound one. They represented a group that had a foot planted in two worlds, a situation that furnished them with an outlook unusual for natives of the region. Having reached maturity in a constantly shifting present, they could therefore confront the future with a perspective not entirely mired in the past.

In addition to being southern natives who had come of age in the tumultuous postwar period, virtually all the artists were from working-class backgrounds. Their music would necessarily represent an essential form of regional, generational, and class articulation. Rock 'n' roll's social register, after all, included former truck drivers, mechanics, construction and shipyard laborers, tenant farmers, dishwashers, and factory workers. How they chose to verbalize their desires and emotions, or make music of them, was distinctive. The substance and style of their articulations differed greatly from those of the mainstream, where Tin Pan Alley and Hollywood collaborated to present a widely accepted (although often illusive and elusive) version of adult middle-class, middle-American values and concerns. The large majority of the southern rock 'n' roll artists of the period had roots in either country or rhythm and blues, genres traditionally linked to the working class.

Finally, most of the rock 'n' roll artists also performed in a manner at least partially derived from black folk and popular music. The majority typically had an overtly sexual performing style (some more than others), and they, like rock 'n' roll in general, threatened middle-class standards of morality, tastes, and conduct. Furthermore, all of the rock 'n' rollers went against the conformist tendencies of southern society, particularly in violating racial strictures, yet still became enormously popular in their native region. In addition, as young members of a southern working class seeking to realize the postwar American dream of upward mobility, they represented one of the region's first generations to succeed in terms that the nation had defined. Their emergence would challenge the obstacles of poverty, isolation, and ignorance that had habitually blocked the South's course to progress and tolerance.

Although Elvis Presley was undoubtedly a singular figure in the rock 'n' roll onslaught, he might best be understood within this larger historical framework. His apparent merging of black music and culture with white symbolized similar trends materializing simultaneously throughout the South. Without doubt, the musical and cultural elements that would eventually coalesce into what became rock 'n' roll had begun to shift into place before Presley emerged. Still, due to his atypical talent, extensive exposure, and enormous success, he became the individual most associated with rock 'n' roll. Writers, entertainment industry insiders, teenagers, clerics, and parents were well aware that the hip-swiveling shouter stood at the center of the storm.

Simultaneously acclaimed and vilified, Elvis Presley personified the excitement and fears identified with rock 'n' roll. Moreover, as a figure who thoroughly encompassed within his celebrity the volatile issues of class, race, and age that shook the postwar South, he embodied the conflict and tension of a southern world in transition. Although it is not likely that the vast controversy concerning him will soon subside, neither is it conceivable that any amount of revision will alter the pervasive influence he had on his era. Set in this context, the words of two academics from 1958 seem remarkably appropriate: "As a subject for polemic Elvis Presley has few peers, and too many people have experienced sudden shifts in blood pressure—either up or down—for him to be regarded as anything but an authentic barometer of the times."[18]

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Such a scenario would have been difficult to predict. Elvis Presley was born into anonymity in Tupelo, Mississippi, in the midst of the Great Depression. After years of enduring dwindling economic opportunities and downward progression in their already-low social status, he and his working-class family eventually migrated to Memphis. There, young Elvis sought to defy the invisibility that accompanied poverty and displacement. Inspired by entertainers and movie stars, he developed a penchant for flashy clothes, slicked-back hair, and long sideburns. Furthering his quest for identity, he also tuned into the radio. Listening to virtually everything that was being transmitted, he absorbed an eclectic assortment of musical styles: rhythm and blues, country, pop, and gospel. Eventually, he would integrate these various influences into a synthesis that helped launch rock 'n' roll.

Yet as the cold war heated up and the 1940s melted into the 1950s (and audiences by the millions tuned in to hear Johnnie Ray and Patti Page), Presley's future as it pertained to rock 'n' roll materialized slowly. In the summer of 1954, a year after graduating from high school, the nineteen-year-old was driving a delivery truck during the day and studying to become an electrician at night. Only after several failed attempts to gain the attention of people in professional music did he finally make his first commercial recordings for Sam Phillips's Sun Records Company. He also joined the *Louisiana Hayride* in Shreveport and toured extensively on one-night stands throughout the South and Southwest.

By the end of 1955, when he signed with RCA, Elvis Presley had become one of the hottest commodities in country music. Yet his new manager, the flamboyant Col. Tom Parker, sought a larger and more diversified audience for his client. In 1956 Parker booked Presley onto several network television programs, including three financially lucrative appearances on Ed Sullivan's variety series. Beamed into the living rooms of millions, Presley's popularity skyrocketed. The sales of his records exploded; each new release was seemingly guaranteed to sell more than the last. Hollywood beckoned, and the singer quickly became a movie idol. Yet not all were happy with the Presley juggernaut. Furor mounted over his sexually aggressive stage routine. The criticisms that resulted, however, only heightened Presleymania, and by 1958 the media had crowned him the undisputed "King of Rock 'n' Roll."

Between 1956 and 1963, Presley dominated popular music. Even a two-year stint in the U.S. Army at the height of his meteoric rise failed to stifle his popularity. Upon his discharge in 1960, the singer devoted his energy almost exclusively to making motion pictures and solidifying his position within the entertainment industry. The results did not bring him critical acclaim, but he did become one of the highest-paid actors of the decade. Yet by the mid–1960s Presley's creativity and influence appeared irreversibly diminished. Mediocre and formulaic movies had ruined his credibility with all but the most devoted. Then, in 1968 a highly successful television special in which he returned to the music of his past surprisingly revived a moribund career, and he began touring extensively for the first time in more than a decade. To the astonishment of many, Presley recaptured the vitality that had characterized his performances before entering the army. After 1973, personal difficulties, including a failed marriage, health problems, and ballooning weight finally took their toll. On August 16, 1977, Elvis Presley died of heart failure and complications due to extensive drug use. Millions the world over mourned him and gave his memory the attention commonly reserved for presidents, kings, and other heads of state. Although some engaged in hyperbole, calling his death a global disaster, and others wondered what all of the fuss was about, nearly everyone agreed that his passing had unquestionably signaled the end of an era.

Elvis had clearly captured the imagination of broad segments of the population. His life and career conveyed elements that apparently appealed to large numbers of people everywhere. Yet despite fame and fortune, his stature and achievement remained somewhat dubious. Although he may have been the most successful entertainer in the history of show business, he was, to the mainstream, an outsider, "a musky banality, a back-country southern boy, a kind of poor ole boy's Liberace."[19] Once likened to a "jug of corn liquor at a champagne party" and more recently satirized by journalists and comedians alike, Presley has continued to serve as a surrogate for those who deride the southern working-class culture into which he was born and which he never abandoned.[20]

Scholars in particular have continually repudiated everything Elvis symbolized. They have tended to dismiss the singer as representative of "poor white trash," a designation in itself that seeks to rationalize academia's neglect of those with whom it does not want to associate. Any semblance of recognition given to Presley might impart an un-

seemly and unscholarly impression. To appreciate him, Linda Ray Pratt aptly noted two years following the singer's death, "was suspect, a lapse of taste. It put one in beehives and leisure suits, in company with 'necrophiliacs' and other weird sorts."[21]

Ambiguously received outside his native region, frowned upon within academic circles, and everywhere the constant target of media barbs and sarcasm, Elvis nevertheless attained mythical stature in the white, working-class South. Nowhere did he engender greater veneration and awe. To many of those who identified with him, Presley personified a version of the Horatio Alger hero, a poor boy who strummed and shook his way to fame and fortune yet never forgot his roots or the fans who faithfully bought his records and attended his concerts.

Presley's greatest attribute may have been an ability to communicate and convey effectively the dreams and values of his audience. For that, they placed him on a pedestal that no condescending critic could ever topple. He belonged to them, and they would not take lightly any other group laying claim to or criticizing him. An American original, he transcended the entertainment arena to become a larger-than-life icon. Although it may seem startling, William Ferris's observation after extensive fieldwork and travel in the South should not be surprising: "In the poor white homes was the photograph of Elvis Presley, usually over the mantel, right where Reverend [Martin Luther] King's would be in the black homes."[22]

Linking Martin Luther King and Elvis Presley may seem inappropriate if not irreverent. There are several reasons why no subject associated with Presley causes greater controversy and conflict than that of race. He was, after all, a white performer whose financial success rested upon the songs and styles of black artists historically excluded from the popular music marketplace. Second, he hailed from the former slave-holding and segregated South. Third, he belonged to a white working class traditionally antagonistic to its African American counterpart. Fourth, upon achieving affluence, he purchased an antebellum-style mansion in Memphis that to many recalled the Old South as represented in *Gone with the Wind.* Fifth, he associated with racially conservative politicians such as George Wallace and Richard Nixon. Finally, he presumably uttered a racial slur on at least one public occasion during his career. Although there are some legitimate doubts about the veracity of the incident, knowledge of and belief in the alleged affront are widespread within the African American community. As the bearer of too many painful images and memories, Presley has become a symbol of all that was oppressive to the black experience in the Western Hemisphere. As a rap group notified the world in terms that are forthright and unequivocal: "Straight up racist that sucker was. Simple and plain."[23]

Although inflammatory in language and tone, the statement represents a perspective that has gained favor, particularly on university campuses. In academia, the reaction against Elvis Presley appears to be similar to the one that has engulfed Thomas Jefferson, a slaveholder who espoused freedom. Like the Sage of Monticello, Elvis has come to represent the dominant culture's oppressive race- and gender-based traditions. Many similarly denounce him as the "quintessential dead white male."[24]

That perspective is based on the conviction that Presley was an ungrateful usurper and mimic who despised and disparaged the impoverished black artists who made his material success possible. In light of the past transgressions associated with American popular music—for example, blackface minstrelsy—the viewpoint is a valid one. Only the most insensitive and obstinate would refuse to give it consideration. That does not mean, however, that it should be accepted without question. In Elvis Presley, the complex issues of race, class, age, region, and commerce intersected. The collision that transpired ostensibly suggested (strongly) that the popular music establishment discriminated against African American performers. Sam Phillips's famous search for a white man who could perform with the same feeling as the black vocalists he recorded merely exposed the racial intolerance and segregated circumstances inherent in the music industry after World War II. The Sun Records producer realized that a black rhythm and blues act stood little chance of gaining the broad exposure needed to achieve large-scale commercial success.

Phillips, of course, eventually found Elvis. And although Presley may have performed rhythm and blues with an integrity, style, and passion generally equated with his black counterparts, he also enjoyed the benefits of a system that perpetuated racial inequality. Yet even before he became a professional entertainer Presley exhibited many of the characteristics attributed to his black contemporaries. Furthermore, the evidence is far from conclusive that the adolescent Presley immersed himself in black deportment and music solely as a means of success in the entertainment business. When he finally auditioned for

Phillips, the producer looking for a "white boy who could sing the blues," the singer did not render such material. Instead, he performed a repertoire that consisted of standard pop fare.

That he apparently sought to become the next Dean Martin is mystifying and seemingly contradictory. Yet in spite of various inconsistencies and discrepancies, many scholars seem determined to assess Presley in terms that are rudimentary and irreconcilable, terms that highlight the racial divisions polarizing American society. Consequently, it is difficult for even the most dispassionate students of southern history not to conclude that present characterizations of Elvis Presley remain firmly grounded in caricature and stereotype.

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That historians have had difficulty putting Elvis Presley in historical context rests partly upon their reluctance to proceed beyond conventional explanations that emphasize race and ignore issues concerning class and region. In *Love and Theft,* an innovative and provocative interpretation of mid-nineteenth-century blackface minstrelsy, a northern entertainment form, Eric Lott casually extends his analysis to include the post–World War II South and Elvis Presley. Place, time, and history magically dissolve; almost instinctively Lott envisions Presley as a natural heir to earlier minstrels such as Thomas Rice, Dan Emmett, E. P. Christy, and Stephen Foster. Lott stresses that Presley, like his antebellum counterparts, assumed black characteristics to invigorate his sense of masculinity—a process of racial appropriation representing a "complex affair of manly mimicry." When whites like Rice and later Presley dabbled in blackface—by the 1950s burnt cork and greasepaint were no longer required accessories—the practice provided a gratifying, albeit temporary, means to "become black, to inherit the cool, virility, humility, abandon, or *gaité de couer* that were the prime components of white ideologies of black manhood."[25]

Lott's premise is intriguing and establishes an important foundation for any investigation concerning Presley and race. Yet it is also troubling, for in equating Elvis Presley to earlier minstrels Lott too easily conflates the class and regional differences of those whom he compares. Unlike Presley, the leading nineteenth-century minstrels were northerners of urban origin who emerged from middle- to upper-middle-class backgrounds. Their families were influential and enjoyed ample access to political power. Despite social and economic advantages, the sons

who would become blackface entertainers dissociated themselves from the larger white society. They rejected the comforts and privileges of their inherited rank and sought to "indulge their felt sense of difference." As adventurers in pursuit of freedom and pleasure outside of the legitimate world of work and responsibility, nineteenth-century blackface minstrels "inaugurated an American tradition of class abdication through gendered cross-racial immersion."[26]

The class and regional backgrounds of socially detached nineteenth-century minstrels betray that those men did not altogether anticipate or resemble Elvis Presley, who once said, "I am not ashamed of my background, or the fact that I drove a truck . . . I don't regard money or position as important. It is what a man does that is important." The minstrels did, however, look a lot like Norman Mailer's post–World War II "White Negro," the often confusing, semiautobiographical amalgam that combines elements of the bohemian, the juvenile delinquent, the lower-middle-class "average white," and the hipster.[27] An urban male renegade, the self-marginalized outcast embodied his creator's existentialist response to the period's emphasis on social conformity. Living dangerously and on the edge, he sought release from the confinement of a regimented culture that provided little inner satisfaction. Venturing out at night, the White Negro stumbled upon his liberation in Mailer's romanticized version of black under-class life that included sex, drugs, danger, violence, jazz, pleasure, leisure, and overall hedonism. If he could have miraculously traveled in time, there is little doubt that Mailer's White Negro would have fit right in with Lott's blackface minstrels.

James Weldon Johnson had classified the type earlier in the century when he perceptively wrote of "white sightseers and slummers" who entered Harlem's nightclubs secure in their ability to return home once they had concluded their adventures.[28] Jack Kerouac, a Columbia University dropout and contemporary of Mailer's, also wrote of hipsters who indulged in stereotypical fantasies about a primitive, exciting African American subculture as a means to renounce what they perceived as the dull and bland values of the white middle class. Sal Paradise, the narrator of *On the Road,* predictably expresses a driving desire to exchange places with an imaginary black man. He wished to be "a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night."[29]

The sentiment provides an insightful glimpse into how lower-middle-class white intellectuals who had disavowed their culture's materialist and conformist tendencies could project their aspirations onto African Americans, the most conspicuous and dispossessed outsiders in American society and history. Did the same longing necessarily motivate southern working-class whites such as Presley in their correspondence to black culture? According to Lott, it did. From his perspective, there was no discernible difference between the Beats, Elvis Presley, and Mailer's White Negro. Together they represented the indisputable "genealogical legacy" of "antebellum racial cross-dressing."[30]

Given such a limited paradigm concerning racial appropriations, it is no wonder that one scholar, treating Elvis Presley, Sal Paradise, the Beats, the slummers, and the White Negro as if they were interchangeable, could ask, *"What is it about their whiteness that made them want to be black?"*[31] Although an important question, it demands qualification. First, the absence of any reference to the class, regional, and experiential diversity of the various appropriators necessitates that any answer would be superficial at best. The inquiry tacitly assumes that "whiteness" is synonymous with homogeneity. It infers that all whites are the same and that they all share the same backgrounds, values, and attitudes. Many scholars would likely challenge that proposition. Elvis Presley and Pat Boone, although both white, from the South, and approximately the same age, differed immensely in their approach to rhythm and blues. Their music, like their experiences, outlooks, and class backgrounds, diverged a great deal. They were far from identical. As Boone, an English major at Columbia University, indicated about his anxiety at recording rock 'n' roll: "I was afraid my Shakespeare professor might find out."[32]

Second, the question seems to overlook the possibility that many appropriators were attempting to forsake not their whiteness but rather a bourgeois or middle-class ethic that they considered repressive. That they chose African Americans to embody their model of liberation (and whose qualities they embraced, confiscated, and distorted) is significant. No one can deny that society had traditionally denied African Americans full membership into the American mainstream and economic marketplace; societal prejudice and economic barriers had compelled many to retain traits antithetical to the middle-class ethic. Those traits had great appeal to those opposed to the dominant culture.

Third, the question similarly ignores the countercultural nature of the

South and its inhabitants, a region and populace that historically have neither shared nor completely adopted the nation's bourgeois view of the world. Neither have they enjoyed the material fruits of the northern perspective and experience. "What of the South?" David Riesman asked in 1956, the same year that Presley invaded millions of living rooms across the nation via television. It is "a question you can ask in any country, for whether in Italy or France, China or the United States, the South is always [seen as] another country, sometimes another colony."[33]

Finally, unlike their middle-class counterparts elsewhere who were fully integrated into the "culture of work, discipline, efficiency, saving, and capitalist social relations associated with Yankees and Europeans," many southerners had not divided leisure and labor into separate spheres or compartments.[34] The two could merge and regularly did. Inasmuch as most natives historically were slaves, sharecroppers, or small farmers, the incentive or means to work diligently in the hope of acquiring capital was nearly nil. Workers thus adopted an unhurried pace and routine that suited non-market purposes. In this system, one's social life (recreation, relaxation, and diversion) remained as important and relevant as one's labor or the accumulated capital that labor failed to produce.

A majority of people in the South, therefore, practiced every day a "leisured lifestyle" that blackface minstrels and their "genealogical" descendants could only hope to achieve by immersing themselves in an African American culture that was completely alien to them. To live such a life Louis Rubin concluded, "permitted a man to enjoy himself, to know the satisfaction of being something more than a cog in a machine."[35] For blackface minstrels, popular culture provided a romanticized lifestyle as an illusive alternative to a mundane reality. For southerners, popular culture constituted a real and integral part of daily life. "These were arts of living," John Crowe Ransom once stated of the southerner's preoccupation with the popular, "not arts of escape."[36]

The South, then, was different, and so were its people. Countless historians, novelists, journalists, social scientists, and other interested pundits have endeavored to locate the one characteristic that has distinguished the South from the world surrounding it. Although explanations have yet to achieve consensus, the immense literature surrounding the subject attests that the region's history has deviated greatly from that of the larger nation. Slow to industrialize, urbanize, modernize, or demographically diversify, the South remained for more

than three hundred years an unyielding folk and agricultural society grounded in the conspicuously minimal shades of black and white. Constancy imparted forces that were as likely to exhaust as they were to exhilarate, to extinguish as they were to ignite the promise generally associated with the American past and future. Without doubt, the South's was, in the words of C. Vann Woodward, an "un-American adventure in feudal fantasy."[37]

Any appraisal of racial appropriations by southern natives that does not refer to the South's ahistorical experience compared to the rest of the nation must arouse apprehension; so, too, should the notion that a white working-class southerner such as Elvis Presley merely represented a twentieth-century version of a blackface mimic. In the South, the issues of race, class, and culture have had a long and intertwining history, a past that is complex and persistently contradictory. It is a history that no one evaluating Presley or rock 'n' roll can afford to ignore.

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Scholarship has intimated that the exaggerated sense of masculinity Eric Lott attributed exclusively to white perceptions of the black male was evident in certain Europeans before their arrival in the New World. That was especially true for those immigrants transplanted to the future Confederacy. David Hackett Fischer has concluded that those who settled the southern backcountry brought with them (from the northern counties of England, the north of Ireland, and the lowlands of Scotland) folkways that valued and accentuated masculinity, particularly "in manners, speech, dress, decorum, and status." For those who peopled northern Britain, "The first principle was that men were warriors. The second was that women were workers."[38]

Emphasizing physical strength, valor, pride, courage, conservatism, and deference, it was a culture that stressed fighting over laboring, conquering instead of cultivating, and obeying rather than defying the ways of ancestors or the authority of those in command. Grady McWhiney has also discerned that people from Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Cornwall were intensely male-driven. He ascribes the South's proclivity toward idleness, leisure, self-indulgence, and incontinence, qualities associated with "manly" behavior, to Celtic sources and traditions.[39] And as one novelist warned of a particular individual "fleeing his Scottish bondage for the brave new world," so, too, likely did others: "Watch for

a wild boy of no particular clan, ready for anything, always armed. Prefers fighting to toil, drinking to fighting, chasing women to booze or battle: may attempt all three concurrently."[40]

Once relocated to the South, northern British and Celtic immigrants, the majority of whom were landless and impoverished, discovered that emphasizing masculinity mitigated their otherwise low standing within their new environment's historically rigid hierarchical social order. Rooted in agriculture, the South's social structure was pyramidal—steep and narrow at its apex, where a landed elite ruled; relatively broader as it traveled downward to allow for a nominal middle class of small landholders, professionals, managers, and public officials; and widest at its base, where most southerners resided at or near subsistence. Although caste constraints segregated blacks and whites at the bottom, it was also true that aristocratic barriers separated ruling classes from everyone else. As one native insisted at the midpoint of the twentieth century, "This is the South which not only likes the Negro 'in his place' but likes every man in his place and thinks there is a certain place providentially provided for him."[41]

From the plantation hegemony of the nineteenth century through the county-seat dominance of the twentieth, the South maintained a semifeudal and chronically static society based on status. The region extolled itself as being "held together by an intermixture of loyalty and command, a recognition of the organic relation between leader and led."[42] Each individual in the community had certain obligations and responsibilities, a particular role to play. For planters (and their allies, the mill owners, merchants, and bankers), that meant operating under the terms of noblesse oblige, a practice by which the strong helped the weak and the powerful protected the powerless. In return, the elite expected cheap labor and unconditional fidelity. It was a patriarchal system that resembled a closely knit family. The patriarch saw himself (and others concurred) as the ultimate source of authority and benefits, not only for immediate relatives but also for all within reach of his economic and social influence. As V. O. Key described the relationship in 1949, using language that many twentieth-century Americans unaccustomed to a feudal past would surely have presumed offensive and un-American, "The responsibility of the lord is to his tenant—who will always be a tenant, and whose son will probably be a tenant."[43]

Such a structure exemplified the unequal nature of southern society. If contemporaries distinguished the "father" as the benefactor, they also

characterized the "children" as his dependents, individual adults unable to survive on their own. The existence of social inequality, therefore, constituted the system's fundamental premise and was assumed as part of the natural order. Howard Odum observed in the mid–1930s that the region's aristocracy looked upon those who were less fortunate—the "millions of marginal folk, white and black, [who] had in reality no semblance of equality of opportunity or even of living much above the subsistence level"—in inevitable terms: "There always would be shiftless poor people. There always had been."[44]

By the end of the next decade, Key recognized a similar sentiment among the upper classes: "The tenant and the sharecropper are regarded as lazy, degenerate, shiftless fellows who get what they deserve."[45] Southern attitudes, like conditions, remained constant. In the late 1950s, William Nicholls felt that ruling groups in the rural South, schooled in the customs and habits of command, continued to assume that "their low-income neighbors are poor 'only because they deserve to be poor.'"[46] The misanthropy and pessimism directed toward the "marginal folk," of course, negated much of the supposed benevolence that noblesse oblige had traditionally promised. Indeed, the compromised nature of the entire concept became evident when captured in the uncharacteristically blunt words of a southern intellectual defending his region against modernization, public schooling, and change: "The inferior, whether in life or in education, should exist only for the sake of the superior."[47]

The so-called inferior masses of the South had clearly figured out, as one economist realized, "which side [their] bread was buttered on."[48] Given the circumstances, they had little choice but to endure their less than exalted place within a planter-dominated status society. Those who had roots in Africa would find the ordeal devastating. Slavery, segregation, peonage, and the second-class citizenship accorded to African Americans bequeathed a painful legacy that continues to haunt. For many whose ancestors had once lived in Great Britain, the experience also proved debilitating. The lower orders of whites saw themselves derisively reconfigured into crackers, hillbillies, low-downers, rednecks, clay-eaters, peckerwoods, no 'counts, wool hats, white trash, and po' whites.[49] Virginia Durr, whose family was financially strapped but well-bred, recalled, "I was told by my mother and father and anybody whom I respected and loved that these people were just that way. . . . If they had pellagra and worms and malaria and if they were thin and hungry and immoral, it was just because that was the way they were. It was in their blood."[50]

Accordingly, as John Dollard has asserted, "If it is said that the Negroes do not have social equality in the South, it is equally true that this class of white people does not have it either."[51] Having worked their way to the bottom of the southern white hierarchy, many of the poverty-stricken British descendants became, in the eyes of their better-placed neighbors, a debased and impotent lot content with their lowly status. (Durr, who "learned" early that the majority of the region's whites were biologically inferior, likewise recounted, "I was told the same thing about the black people.")[52] To make matters worse, the upper and middle classes deemed poor whites as nonessential and expendable, particularly in contrast to their more dependable and manageable black counterparts. Unwanted and unneeded, the white masses, Charles Johnson understood, "had no place in the plantation system and had only a bare foothold in other rural areas."[53] Accordingly, they were, as Hortense Powdermaker observed, "the most despised class in the South, shunned and scorned by both whites and Negroes."[54]

In a highly stratified agricultural society where the belief in white supremacy and black inferiority overrode virtually all else, the fact that their community placed them on the same level or below that of African Americans stamped an indelible imprint on the psyche of marginalized white southerners. In the context of their culture and circumstances, whiteness provided the sole "advantage" that most could muster. Many were frantic in their desire to protect the "purity" of their blood and racial heritage; some stopped at nothing to prevent any threat that "would open the gates of miscegenation and widespread racial amalgamation."[55] Yet as Johnson appreciated, white supremacy for the lowest on the social ladder represented a "very meager and uncertain superiority."[56]

Not surprisingly, racial resentment festered and periodically erupted as whites on the bottom rung sought to protect and exaggerate what little economic and social integrity they did possess. They jealously guarded their material position, particularly in respect to jobs and employment opportunities, against black encroachment. In the name of self-interest, they habitually felt justified in intimidating, attacking, and eradicating black neighbors who were in a similar or potentially better economic situation. So, too, did whites painfully realize that blacks were "making progress, and for the most part, they [were] not."[57]

Charles Johnson and Hortense Powdermaker both believed that whites on the bottom also used African Americans as scapegoats because they were unable to attack what truly oppressed them. Unable to vent disappointments against the social structure (a reality they could neither change nor control), their contemptible place within it, and the unreachable elite that oversaw practically all that transpired, they instead struck at individuals whom southern law, justice, and custom refused to protect.[58] As Gunnar Myrdal observed, the animosity that they focused on blacks conceivably reflected "their own social and economic frustrations in white society."[59] In a region where skin color theoretically bound certain groups together and ostracized others, poor whites found that African Americans, who could and did hold them in contempt, enjoyed a better relationship with the gentry. As Johnson realized, "The Negro is the target of the poor white not only because he is a competitor but also because of the Negro's identification with the upper class white group of the South."[60] Taken together, the region's emphasis on white solidarity and white debasement created tension bound to produce racial conflict. The South's social system guaranteed hostility, uncertainty, and alienation.

Lacking any real access to social, economic, material, or even racial power and security (planter William Alexander Percy was certain that poor whites of the region secretly suspected that they were inferior to African Americans), estranged whites relied upon other assets to enhance their sense of self-worth.[61] Louis Rubin has suggested that because most white southerners were unable to correspond personal integrity and worth to the *"doing of things,"* they instead "concentrated on *being.*" And "being," Rubin explains, meant focusing "on one's existence as a recognizable individual in a social fabric designed above all to provide for individual identity."[62] Taking a page from ancestors who had extolled "war above work, force above reason, and men above women," the masses of impoverished whites created an alternate space for themselves.[63] Although unlikely to enhance their status within southern society, their emphasis on traditional non-market values accentuating masculinity provided personal satisfaction and fulfillment.

Wilbur J. Cash's characterization of the poor southern white male as "one of the most complete hedonists ever recorded" accords with that picture.[64] Egotistical, prideful, and seemingly unmindful of the scorn that the upper classes felt toward them—Percy ruminated that "they were the sort of people that attend revivals and fight and fornicate in the bushes afterward"—the white masses continued in their unrepentant ways.[65] As Cash held, "To stand on his head in a bar, to toss down a pint of raw whiskey at a gulp, to fiddle and dance all night, to bite off the nose or gouge out the eye of a favorite enemy, to fight harder and love harder than the next man, to be known eventually far and wide as a hell of a fellow—such would be his focus."[66]

If Cash furnished an accurate description of poor southern white males, so, too, did the Farm Security Administration photography of Walker Evans and the prose of James Agee. Each successfully documented the hesitancy and timidity that informed the region's poverty-stricken whites. Agee in particular captured the insecurity and subservience that, although seemingly far removed from the "hell of a fellow," composed one aspect of his personality. In recounting a conversation with a sharecropper in front of a courthouse, Agee wrote of the reverence and apprehension in the man's eyes. Agee, because he had a university education, stood superior to his companion. In the southern social scheme of things, status governed how each person could and would react to the other. As a consequence, Agee perceived the man to be thinking, "O lord god please for once, just for once, don't let this man [Agee] laugh at me up his sleeve, or do me any meanness or harm."[67] Another white tenant later described a similar relationship in a softer yet no less moving perspective: "The landlords were, I guess you would say friendly, but they was just in a higher class than we were and so we just didn't feel as comfortable with them as we did with our common sharecropping neighbors. . . . And of course we didn't think much about it. We was used to second place."[68]

To those who "counted" or occupied "first place," the status quo needed no repair. Change would bring nothing but chaos, discord, and disorder. It would threaten a hierarchical system that had long divided southerners. Thus, although the standard of living for the southern masses consistently remained far below that of the nation and was deplorable, the region's elite repeatedly denounced agencies and enterprises that could have possibly helped the general population advance and prosper. As two scholars wrote in 1940, the leaders in the South "believe[d] that most southern people must be kept dependent."[69] Animosity greeted any institution or entity that imperiled the upper-class reality, as a statement from 1953 attests: "Industrialization, with its shift from status to contract and its creation of a new rich, rootless class of people, is plainly instigated by the Devil."[70]

For much of its history, such sentiments and those who professed them helped the South retain continuity. Accordingly, poverty, prejudice, ignorance, intolerance, tenancy, peonage, disease, and hopelessness, as well as cotton, long constituted the region's primary staples. To fully interpret racial appropriations in the South (and how they differed from those by others elsewhere) is to concede the historical perceptions and certainties that evolved from such continuity: "The mass of Southern Negroes and the majority of the whites are incapable of directing their own affairs . . . [and] are biologically inferior."[71]

Significantly, status rather than economic condition generally defined a person's place in regional culture. Knowing this, it is possible to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable Cash and Agee portraits. Although each epitomized a bearing and emotion that seem incompatible, both depicted the same historical figure. Taken together, they certified that the region's marginalized whites, like the South itself, were complex. Members of the group could be exceedingly aggressive and self-assured; they could also be inordinately deferential and submissive. Ironically, the characteristics that Eric Lott attributed exclusively to African Americans, the qualities of "cool, virility, humility, abandon, or *gaité de couer,*" could be assigned in similar forms and at various times to southern whites on the bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid. Charles Joyner has even surmised that traits emphasizing masculinity could have originated in Great Britain, developed further in a southern Anglo-American milieu, and then propelled their way into the African American community. As he proposes, thus muddying existing interpretations, the attributes some theorize that whites appropriated from African Americans may have been "characteristics learned by the slaves from Celtic whites."[72]

That is not to imply that African Americans have had no influence upon white southerners. "The basic fact of our lives," James McBride Dabbs noted in 1958, is that "the white Southerner is the man he is because he has lived among Negroes." As Ralph Ellison concluded, "Southern whites cannot walk, talk, sing, conceive of laws or justice, think of sex, love, the family or freedom without responding to the presence of the Negro."[73] What is asserted is that culture in the South embodied a complex process involving black and white. There has been, as Mechal Sobel speculated, "a deep symbiotic relatedness that must be explored if we are to understand either or both of them."[74] Working-class white southerners, due to their historical position within the social structure and their traditional emphasis on preindustrial, non-market values, retained characteristics that predisposed them to the merging of black and white along cultural lines. To be sure, the convergence (and the resulting interchange) was not a welcome one. As Carl Degler has contended, an important theme of southern history may "be the effort of white southerners to escape or to prevent such interaction."[75] A similar thesis might well refer to the unrelenting failures of those efforts. "There was an atmosphere as I grew up in the South that permeated the air," Sam Phillips recalled. "A lot of us maybe didn't recognize it. But there was a permeation of the spirit of the black man and the white man."[76]

It is within that context of cultural conflict to ensure racial integrity that the southern origins of rock 'n' roll should be placed. Rock 'n' roll represented one of the South's more conspicuous failures regarding attempts to prevent black and white interaction. The social and political ramifications of that defeat have yet to be assessed or acknowledged. Rock 'n' roll mounted serious assaults upon the vulnerable yet still heavily fortified attitudes associated with Jim Crow segregation. It did so at venues and through media not usually acclaimed as sponsors for social change: concert halls, dance floors, phonograph recordings, jukeboxes, and the airwaves. Although the battles are long over and the overall outcome has been decided, the details of the engagements and the actions of the participants might prove surprising.

■ ■ ■

Because of historical (and undeniably mythical) circumstances, particularly those of Civil War defeat and northern-imposed Reconstruction, change in the post–World War II South had to come from within. The region's black and white inhabitants would have to transcend an imperfect past and create a new milieu where racial tolerance and respect could be forged. The task would not be easy. The federal government would be forced to intervene constantly on behalf of African American residents, who had become easy and vulnerable targets for the most vengeful and malicious. A violent and resonant defiance indeed seemed absolute and insurmountable.

In 1960, Harold Fleming of the Southern Regional Council discussed those natives resisting the changes sweeping the region. Although he undoubtedly did not have popular music in mind, his words must have reminded some of rock 'n' roll's recent emergence and the opposition

that it, too, had provoked. The biracial music and the artists, both black and white, who performed it (not to mention the audiences of both races who consumed it) had definitely unsettled the status quo. Some applauded the upheaval; others vehemently opposed it at every turn. Recalling the admonitions of Plato, it is difficult not to conclude that something political was at stake in both the music and the assaults upon it. Thus as Fleming accurately deciphered and disputed the postwar South's seemingly ubiquitous defiance against change, he also correctly diagnosed the region's relationship and response to rock 'n' roll: "The South's troubles are not caused by a resurgence of an older order; they are the results of an older order's last desperate rally against new forces it can neither understand nor control."[77]

2

Popular Culture and the Struggle for Black Equality in the Postwar South

Rethinking the Relationship

In discussing the circumscribed environment from which rock 'n' roll emerged during the 1950s, Carl Perkins suggested that popular music may have challenged the South's racial institutions. As he recalled:

> There was an integration problem in this part of America, a pretty severe problem back then. But there was no [segregation] in music. When you walked up to an old '54 or '55 model Wurlitzer jukebox, it [didn't say] "Blue Suede Shoes," Carl Perkins, white, "Blueberry Hill," Fats Domino, black. No. There was no difference. Kids danced to Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Elvis . . . Chuck Berry said to me one time, he said, "You know Carl, we might be doing as much with our music as our leaders are in Washington to bring down the barriers." He was right.[1]

Perkins and Berry presented an intriguing appraisal of race relations in the South after World War II. The two musicians, one white, the other black, suggested that popular music may have helped alter the age-old conventions and customs associated with regional racial intolerance. They also equated the undertakings of rock 'n' roll artists and audiences to the deeds of politicians and statesmen. Popular culture and music, they implied, are as relevant and reliable in gauging past social tendencies and trends as legislation, executive orders, or judicial decisions.

At first glance, such claims seem persuasive. Yet do they bear closer inspection? Will the contention that popular culture and music initiated or reflected meaningful alterations in postwar southern racial at-