

Public Abstract

First Name:Joshua

Middle Name:Cole

Last Name:Cochran

Adviser's First Name:Michael

Adviser's Last Name:Budds

Co-Adviser's First Name:Judith

Co-Adviser's Last Name:Mabary

Graduation Term:SS 2017

Department:Music

Degree:MA

Title:From Race Records to Rock n Roll Elvis Sun and the Production of Culture Perspective

With the breakout success of his first commercial recordings made and released in 1954 and 1955 by Sam Phillips's Memphis, Tennessee-based Sun record label, Elvis Presley (1935-1977) quickly became a regional star with his black-white hybrid "rockabilly" aesthetic. Subsequently, after signing with the RCA Victor label in 1956, Elvis became the center of the national explosion of rock 'n' roll gaining massive national popularity among a young biracial audience. The intensified crossing of white and black musical traditions in American postwar popular music has since become a central theme in musicological, cultural, and historical studies of rock 'n' roll. Along this line of study, I employ the production of culture perspective in this thesis to examine the influence of systemic pressures, limitations, and rewards in the commercial recording and broadcast radio industries on Elvis's early career trajectory and the broader turn to black and black-inspired musical influences in the mainstream American popular music market. I argue that rather than being neutral conduits of latent social, aesthetic, or cultural forces, fundamental shifts in these commercial media formats shaped rock 'n' roll and its related cultural movement in significant, tangible ways.

More broadly, I contend that viewing the radical cultural and aesthetic shifts associated with rock 'n' roll from the viewpoint of production illuminates essential aspects of the relationship between cultural forms and the institutional contexts in which they are produced, disseminated, and consumed.