

History – Elvis Presley Sources Question

- 1) What can you learn from source A about Elvis Presley's impact on popular music in the USA in 1955?

Source A shows that Presley had a great impact on America. I know this because the article shown in source A is from 'Billboard', a prestigious US music magazine. The fact that an article on Elvis features in the magazine already shows the popularity of Elvis in the states. Also, the title to the article is in large black capitals, indicating the article is important or of interest to many readers. The title also shows the popularity of him as it says, "A WINNER! PRESLEY AS HOT AS \$1 PISTOL!" The fact that the magazine says that he is as hot as a \$1 pistol probably describes Elvis for what he was, like a \$1 pistol he was popular, dangerous, forbidden and controversial.

The article also says that Elvis is the hottest artist on the RCA Victor label. As at the time the RCA Victor label was the biggest and the best at that time, being on the label was an attribute in itself, but being described as the "Hottest" artist on the biggest American label proves his popularity. Elvis is also described as the "amazing country warbler".

The article goes on to state how six of Elvis's hit singles are on the company's hit list of top-25 best sellers, and that Elvis's coupling of "Heartbreak Hotel" and "I Was The One" is the labels' number two best seller, right behind Perry Como's "Juke Box Baby". (Perry Como was also a popular artist). Previously, it was mainly only crooners who were popular but Elvis revolutionised popular music and cleared the way for other artist's similar to him.

- 2) Source B gives different impressions of Elvis Presley to that given in source A.

(i) In what ways do the sources differ?

Primarily, the sources differ because source A is supporting Elvis, whereas source B is against Elvis. Source A, which is the article

from "Billboard", is displaying facts, i.e. the number of hits he has had, whereas in source B which shows extracts from American newspapers, so source B is opinions. Source B is mainly about Elvis's "primitive physical movement". Source B was written after the showing of Elvis's appearance on the Milton Berle Show. This was Elvis's first televised appearance. All of the papers comment on his "vulgar" movements and his "appalling" singing. The New York Journal states that his "display of primitive physical movement is difficult to describe in terms suitable for to a family newspaper" and that he has an "inadequate voice", while the Daily News states that "he gave an exhibition that was suggestive and vulgar" and was "appalling musically", the New York Times simply states that "Mr. Presley has no singing ability." From reading source A that states Elvis's has had six massive hits, and then reading source B which was written after his controversial TV appearance, it would appear that the writers for the papers are more interested in how controversial he is. The fact that he has had six hits was never mentioned. Source B is biased so I would say source A is a more truthful and reliable source as it is stating facts rather than opinions.

- (ii) use sources C and D, and your own knowledge, to explain why sources A and B differ.

The main reason why the sources differ is because the sources are written for different types of social groups. Source A is written for a music magazine so the people who would have read this would obviously be interested in modern day, popular music. Whereas source B are newspaper extracts so they would have been written for a different target group; probably older people than those who would have read "Billboard". The articles reflect this, the kind of people who read those newspapers probably would have had the same kind of view of that expressed in the newspaper articles and vice-versa for the "Billboard" article.

In source C, it says "If his entertainment could be confined to records, it might not be too bad on the young, but unfortunately Presley makes personal appearances." This backs-up my statement that the older generation of that time only objected to Elvis after he

had made a personal appearance. However, there is also evidence that the young found Elvis shocking too. In source D, Roy Orbison, who was around the same age as Elvis, said his "diction was real course, like a truck driver's." He also describes Elvis as a "punk kid".

Source C is an extract from the Catholic Weekly magazine "America" and would be written for the same social groups as that of the newspaper articles. The reason why sources B and C agree is because they are aimed at older people who are worried about Elvis's influence on their children. They both state that his movements are "obscene" and "primitive" and source C speaks of how the teenagers are reacting to this by apparently going wild and "rolling in the aisles".

Source A is just purely about his music and his singing ability because the article is for a music magazine whereas sources B, C and D are about Elvis's behaviour and how controversial he is because the people writing these articles (in B and C) are concerned about his influence he will have on children.

- 3) Do sources E and F support the evidence of source B about the impact of Elvis Presley? Use your knowledge to explain your answer.

Source F is backing up source B as Elvis's dance moves are frequently mentioned in two of the newspaper articles describing his moves as "vulgar", and source F is a picture of how Elvis typically dances at his concerts. The picture shows Elvis dancing suggestively as described in the newspaper articles. However, source F is not necessarily reliable as it only captures one moment in time although the other sources do suggest that the suggestive dancing is continuous throughout concerts.

Source E however, is contradicting source B as source B says that Elvis shouldn't have been allowed to appear on the television but the show topped all of the TV ratings. The reason that source E contradicts B is because E is written for an American TV and radio magazine so they are more interested in ratings. The reason that the ratings were so high was probably because a lot of people would have watched it because there was so much controversy surrounding him and people wanted to see what it was all about.

- 4) Study source G. Use your own knowledge to explain why these different views were expressed.

Emmanuel Cellars, who was a Republican Politician disapproves of Elvis and says that Rock 'n' Roll should be sung by black people. Cellars expresses a white, conservative, racist point-of-view. There was still a lot of racism around, especially in the south of America where Elvis was from and he obviously believes that doing "Black Music" is not good enough for a white person and it will somehow drag white people down to the level of black people, who to many white, conservative American's, were considered a bad influence and immoral.

In the second part of source G, a member of the Ku Klux Klan speaks of how he is trying to "do away with him". This view is pretty much in sync with that of the first part of G, the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing and a white person "promoting" black people was considered a bad thing, as many people were still racist. The Ku Klux Klan disapproved of him sing "black music".

The third part of source G is a quote from Billy Graham. Billy Graham was opposed to Elvis because as an evangelical preacher, he believed in keeping families together and the parents having authority over their children. He would have felt threatened by Elvis's influence over teenagers as Elvis encouraged them to develop their own tastes and rebel against authority.

- 5) Study source I. Source I suggests that attitudes to Elvis Presley were beginning to change by 1958. Use the source, and your own knowledge, to explain why this was happening.

When Elvis was drafted into the army in 1958, attitudes towards him began to change. By going into the army, and not opting out, he gained the respect of many American's, proving to them that he was just an average American boy who was achieving the American Dream - to come from nothing to being a respected member of American society. Source I says, "Where else could a nobody like Presley become a somebody so quickly...this is US democracy at its best." As this statement points out, Elvis had become a

somebody by going into the army and not opting out like he so easily could have. He had gained the respect of many Americans.

When he left active duty on March 5th 1960, his image had changed too. He became less controversial and more middle-of-the-road, appealing to a wider fan base. The main reason for these changes was his manager Colonel Tom Parker. He wanted to change his image so he would appeal to more people so Elvis – and himself could make more money. Elvis toned down his image and made less appearances. This way, Elvis had more of a family feel to him and was no longer “dangerous” and controversial. He was able to keep his old fan base but also gain new fans through his new image creating more money.

Colonel Tom Parker had firm control over Elvis and dictated what Elvis could and couldn't do. Colonel Tom Parker got around 25-50% of Elvis's earnings, this is probably why he decided to change Elvis's image – to get a wider fan base and therefore more money for him.

Elvis's image change paid off, in the year that he left the army he starred in “King Creole” for which he got his best ever acting write-up. He also had three number 1 hit singles, one number 2 album, a number 1 album plus other hit records that year.

- 6) ‘The impact of Elvis Presley on US society during the 1950s was more the result of television coverage of his performances than of his music.’ Use the sources, and your own knowledge, to explain whether you agree with this view of the career of Elvis Presley. I agree with this statement to a certain degree because if you read source A, which shows Elvis's impact before he made any personal appearances, all the emphasize was on Elvis's music and stated the number of hits he had and described him as the “amazing country warbler”, but after his first televised appearance, all of the reviews of him became more about his controversial dance moves than his singing ability. This gave Elvis's a “dangerous” image to children of that time and parent's tried to stop their children from listening to Elvis's music, as they believed him to be a bad influence. Elvis seemed to encourage rebelling against authority and because of

things going on in America at that time, i.e. the Civil Rights Movement, I think a lot of people believed that children would rebel against them and the more controversy Elvis caused among elders, the more hated he became amongst grown-ups, and the more loved among children.

America was not ready for Elvis. He came at the wrong time. He was a white boy singing "black, immoral music" right in the middle of all the racism that was going on. People of authority who were white conservatives would have believed that Elvis was promoting black people and all the controversy that was surrounding him due to his "primitive physical movement" made white children more interested in him and, as they may have believed, more likely to support black people.

When Elvis was on the Milton Berle Show, the ratings topped all other TV shows. This shows that the controversy of him attracted viewers. People wanted to see what it was about so they watched the show and he gained more fans. Many of the sources claim that Elvis's popularity is due to controversy and children wanted to rebel and Elvis backed this up.

At the height of his popularity, Elvis was making many hits and albums and even films, all of which were very popular. Although without the controversy Elvis would still have been popular (as source A shows because it was written before TV appearance), but he would have had a lot less press and less press means less people know about you so not as many people buy your records. I think a lot of his success is also due to the fact that before Elvis you were either a child or an adult; there was no in-between. Elvis created teenagers and encouraged them to be who they are and rebel against authority. The teenagers could relate to him and listened to his music to rebel against their parents.

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