

ELVIS PRESLEY COURSEWORK

QUESTION ONE

In 1955 America underwent a social revolution, the youth of the time wanted to express themselves. Leading the way was Elvis Presley, riding on the power of television and commerciality.

Source A is from a music magazine, it details Elvis' ride to fame, using words like "A winner" "Amazing" and "The hottest artist", tells us that people were buying his singles. The title "Presley hot as a \$1 pistol" this gives the impression that Elvis was both dangerous and desirable. From the information in source A, Elvis Presley's impact on the US music scene in 1955 was very important he was selling records and appealing to a large audience the record companies would soon be battling to have Elvis on their books.

QUESTION TWO

Elvis' impact was huge; whether it was positive or negative, whether people liked him or loathed him he was everywhere.

Source B is extracts from some of the most popular newspapers in the US. They are mostly taken from conservative newspapers they give a general negative opinion of Elvis, "Mr Presley has no singing ability".

Source C is from a popular broadcasting magazine it proves that people were still watching programmes that included Elvis, it doesn't however, mean that these ratings were because of Elvis' involvement in the show.

Source D is a photograph of Elvis performing, it shows him gyrating explicitly, and it also shows young girls reaching out towards him. Elvis is dressed in dark clothes adding to his mysterious demeanour.

Source B highlights the fact that Elvis is having a huge impact on American society, source C also shows that Elvis could have been having a massive impact, source D adds further clarification to Elvis impact, he was driving people crazy having a massive effect on the young people in the 50's. Both sources support C however; they both support it in different ways. Source C shows people are watching the programmes identified in source B, source D shows the main attractions of Elvis, his moving and his outrageous disregard for social expectations. This makes source C feasible he may well have "No singing ability" but that was never the attraction.

QUESTION THREE

The usefulness of a source is very important; to calculate the usefulness of a source we need to know the content, the reliability and the bias. Source E is three quotes from three highly influential and conservative members of the American right wing.

The statements vary in ferocity, source E I is fairly mild, it likens Elvis' music to that of the black peoples of America. Source E II is possibly the most disturbing, "To do a way with this cannibalistic, Negro-loving rock and roller." Each word has been carefully chosen to cause maximum impact and offence. Source E III fits somewhere between the two, yet all three have equal importance.

Source F is a list of top selling singles for the years 1955, 1956 and 1957.

Source E's content tells us what we already knew, conservative members of American society opposed Elvis. As with any development these people will disapprove of the changes. This does tell us that Elvis' impact was large enough to warrant people's opinions. The reliability of this source is good as they are opinions we assume that they are as intended by the author. This source is, however, extremely biased; all the opinions are from a similar group of people. In conclusion this source is moderately useful when determining Elvis' impact.

Source F's content is factual information plotting the rise of Elvis' chart sales. Its reliability is superb as they are undoubted facts, there is some bias as the years selected were the years when Elvis was selling records, it doesn't show the years prior to 1955 or after 1957. This source is extremely useful; from this source we can learn just how big an impact Elvis had on the music industry, however as the social impact is not discussed it is not as valuable when discussing the social impact.

Source F is the most useful source when looking at the impact caused by Elvis.

QUESTION FOUR

By 1958 attitudes to Elvis were beginning to change, one of the reasons this change occurred was because of Elvis joining the army, this provided him with a grounding that many of his opponents reason to respect him and realise his achievements, this combined with the fact that people were getting used to Elvis led to opposition fading.

As with any social revolution, the revolutionary period will slowly be accepted as the norm, this process of slowly seducing the majority of the population can take years, however Elvis appealed to the teenage generation, as these people grew up they become the people in power, the people who three years ago had opposed Elvis. As the supporters of Elvis grew into positions of power the opposition crumbled.

One of the main arguments people had with Elvis was his lack of patriotism, they believed his music belonged to the black people and he was undermining the American society by infiltrating it with this black music. These rumours were halted when Elvis enlisted in the army, anyone who fights for their country must have pride in their country, and this gave many of Elvis' opposers the opportunity to see his achievements.

The new style was moving in and the old was moving on, the anti-Elvis attitudes were moving on with them, allowing Elvis to continue on his way to musical success.

Another point to consider here is Elvis' style, by now he was starting to become more commercialised Elvis was a movie star and Elvis merchandise was everywhere, Elvis was a household name not only for his explicit dance moves but also for his dazzling movie career.

QUESTION FIVE

Without television, Elvis would never have been as famous as he was, but he was only famous because of his music and performance.

The big attraction of Elvis was the fact that he is rebellious and different and exciting, his music is like nothing anyone had heard before and his dance

moves were today's equivalent to sex on stage. This was the big pulling force behind Elvis. Source D shows people adoring Elvis' music and performances.

Although it must be said that in order to reach the millions of people he did television was crucial. In 1950 around two-thirds of the American population had television sets. One of the most popular shows was the Ed Sullivan show. Millions tuned in to watch; there was something for everyone. It didn't take long for Elvis to realise this was the place to be; he made several appearances on the show to terrific acclaim.

During Elvis' career he appeared in several films, it should be noted that Elvis was by now means a terrific television personality, more like a famous footballer who requires constant prompting and guidance, the main reason for Elvis' success on the screen was the fact he was Elvis, people weren't coming to see Elvis act, they were coming to see Elvis.

To the teenagers of the time Elvis was a god, bored of following in the steps of their parents they began to carve out identities for themselves, the invention of the "Greaser" and the "Preppie" occurred at this time. They were all united by one common cause, a need to strike back they began to slick back their hair and listen to Elvis. Elvis created the teenager with his music; it provided an outlet for the troubled teens.

Elvis' success is mainly attributed to his music and performances but without the use of television the southern states would never have had to share him and he would never have reached the audiences he did.