THE IMPACT OF RADIO, MOTION PICTURES, AND TELEVISION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RHYTHM AND BLUES AND ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC

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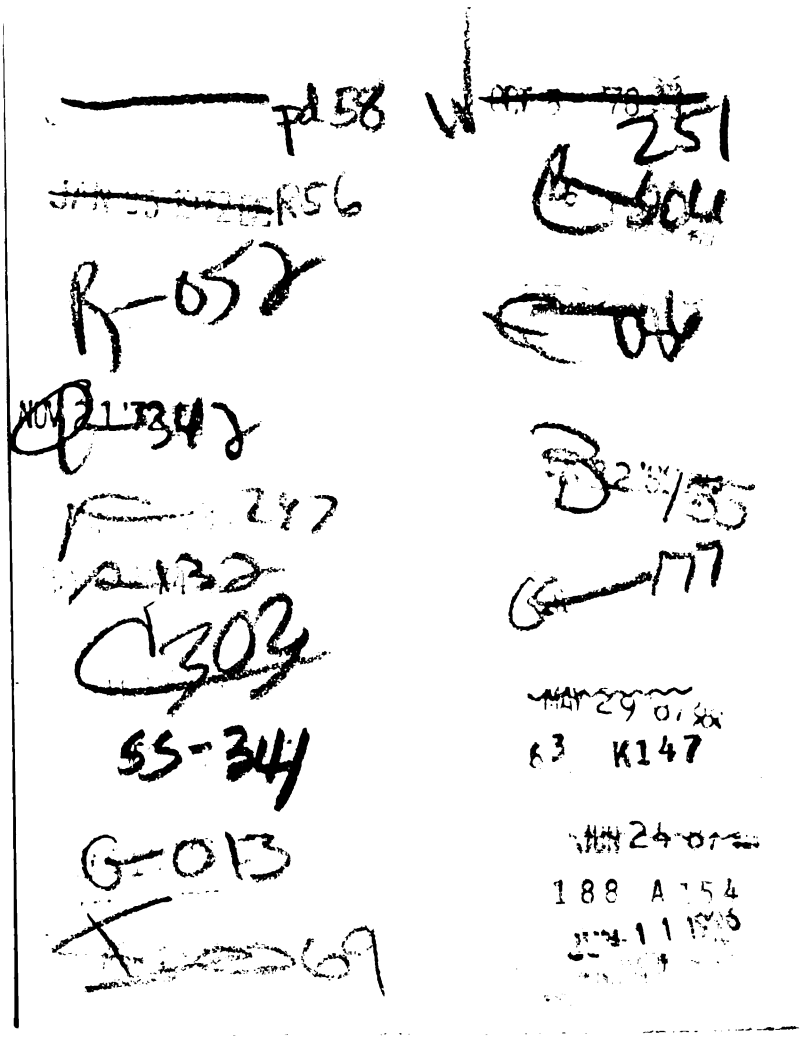

ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF RADIO, MOTION PICTURES, AND TELEVISION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RHYTHM AND BLUES AND ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC

By

Lawrence Newton Redd

This thesis is based upon the belief that Rock and Roll music is in actuality Rhythm and Blues. The purpose of this study is to present an historical development of the music called Rhythm and Blues while at the same time reveal data showing how radio, motion pictures, and television programming created a dichotomy between the Afro-American music and its synonymous description, Rock and Roll. The work lays the foundation of Rhythm and Blues and proceeds to discuss the role of radio, motion pictures, and television concerning their influence on dividing Rock and Roll from Rhythm and Blues.

The study is also concerned with the lives of men and women who pioneered blues and helped to create the music referred to as Rhythm and Blues. Whenever possible the study relates their exposure through the media and how their talents influenced other members of society and also musical trends. Although lyrics are traced to indicate the origin

of the phrase Rock and Roll, the work does not attempt to discuss technical musical terms.

The thesis follows a basic chronological pattern while unfolding and presenting the history of Rhythm and Blues in the first chapter. It points out how the blues was developed among oppressed black people and eventually discovered by people like W. C. Handy who wrote the music down. When the blues moved into the Southwest Territories it joined with heavy rhythmic jazz bands and became known as Rhythm and Blues.

The remaining chapters emphasize the roles of radio, motion pictures, and television concerning their impact and influence upon both the increase in popularity of the music and the dichotomy they created between Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll.

America has long regarded with pride its cultural melting pot. Unfortunately Afro-Americans have not themselves achieved respect and recognition for the vast contribution to the society. This is especially true in the musical arts, and no place is it more emphasized than in the withholding of such recognition through radio, motion pictures, and television.

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By

Lawrence Newton Redd

A THESIS

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Director of Thesis

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This is a pioneer study and therefore has the pitfalls and limitations of any initial journey. The endeavor has been made for truth, but all mistakes which may have occurred in the effort are mine alone.

The Dixie Hummingbirds, Riley "B.B." King, and Arron "T-Bone" Walker all graciously granted me valuable interviews for which I am deeply indebted. Their inspiration to this work cannot be measured.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of broadcasters and film producers is dictated by the audience at which they are seeking to identify and aim their programming. Broadcasters operating stations which utilize Rock and Roll music are catering to a young audience which has proclaimed love, peace, and the brotherhood of man as its philosophy of life. The young people demand that their music and its creators be real and honest. Accordingly, the role of the broadcaster has to be one which reflects a consumated programming philosophy which is permeated with integrity and respect for all mankind.

Without a Rhythm and Blues perspective of Rock and Roll it is questionable whether broadcast and film producers can meet this challenge because it requires a full appreciation of the cross-cultural foundation of the music generally accepted as the "shrine" to the "now" generation. In other words, Rock music is a product of the Afro-American culture which all broadcasters should recognize, appreciate, and accept. It is impossible for the industries to divorce themselves from this reality because these media are societal change agents and cannot risk repeating the mistakes of United States history textbooks: woven without the beauty of color.

It is therefore the broad purpose of this thesis to study the development of a significant and growing area of radio and television programming; rock music or if you prefer, modern music. Specifically we will discuss the evolution and diffusion of rock programming into the mainstream of American broadcasting. This thesis will report research which has been conducted to ascertain how much of a cultural heritage to the larger society was poured out by a segregated black America in the hope of gaining respect and acceptance as an equal member through the positive deeds of poetry, art, and dance based on Rhythm and Blues music.

This work also relates how Rhythm and Blues and Rock music came to be considered as different types of music, and the role played by the media of radio, television, and motion pictures to create the dichotomy. By analyzing the comportment of these media up until 1956, insight into the past is provided and useful information for future programming and production is conveyed.

In programming and production of television, radio, and motion pictures during the mid-fifties, Rhythm and Blues artists were not regularly observed by the larger society. The subsuming of black music and stylings by the larger society resulted from white owned and controlled mass media. The resulting problem has perpetuated a misconception which prevents a true perspective of today's popular music,

commonly referred to as Rock and Roll. A large number of broadcast program and music directors continue to view Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll as separate creations. They persist in their philosophy that Rhythm and Blues influenced the development of Rock music but do not state that they are the same.

There is no need to play games by even posing the question of whether or not Rock and Roll is a carbon copy of Rhythm and Blues. That would be reflecting for the most part a white point of view; this work takes full advantage of the black perspective.

This is not a personal point of view as some might tend to think. Every black person emersed in his culture knows that Rock music is the creation of black people and a modern day theft by the larger society. They know the only real difference between what is called Rock and Roll, or Pop Music, and Rhythm and Blues which is now called Soul was the failure of whites to do the music justice in their initial performances. We know Elvis was merely a white carbon copy of black BoDiddly and other Rhythm and Blues artists. We know Bill Hayle's "Rock Around the Clock" was a copy of Sonny Dae's original. We know that the term Rock and Roll was a part of Afro-American language--a part of Rhythm and Blues lyrics and that's where Allen Freed obtained it. We know white America has stolen (because she has not given credit for it) one of black America's most treasured possession; "its" Pop Music, Rhythm and Blues.

The black experience provided a ring side seat to the history of modern music yet the most important question still remained unanswered: How did we get two kinds of popular music when in the beginning they were one? This problem haunted me for quite a long time, as a matter of fact since 1964.

I was then a senior at Tennessee State University in Nashville. Actually I can not remember ever having heard the term "Rhythm and Blues" until I entered college there in 1960. To me it had always been Blues. I heard "Rhythm and Blues" on WVOL where I was to later work. The two Top 40 white stations, WMAK and WKDA, referred to their music as Rock. This slightly baffled me because I had grown up in Michigan under the assumption that whites, just, for some reason called the music Rock and Roll, but did not really consider the music by blacks and whites really different. All I ever knew was Blues and Rock and Roll which I considered the same.

About a month before I graduated and left WVOL to return to Michigan, an acquaintance of mine, a singer named Freddie North, recorded what I considered a very promising record. I brought several copies back to Grand Rapids to drop off at the local Top 40 radio stations. This was my first hand awakening to attitudes about the differences in the music. The disc jockey at WLAV took a listen to Freddie and informed me that the record was Rhythm and Blues and

that Grand Rapids was an area which basically appreciated Rock and Roll. I thought what he was really saying was that because Freddie was black he was not going to program the record. I had, however, heard the station playing Martha and the Vandellas on my car radio; so I left very much confused.

My next stop was at WMAX. The disc jockey working this Top 40 station was from Louisiana. He also explained to me, while Martha and the Vandellas danced in the streets of Grand Rapids, that he had Freddie's record but was not going to play it because it was Rhythm and Blues, not Rock and Roll. I was hooked. What kind of off the wall jive were these cats laying on me. I was so shocked, the experience stimulated me to remember something very important which had happened on television a few years back.

During the height of the Twist, Hank Ballard was invited on the television show, "To Tell The Truth." Ballard and two other guests had questions evenly distributed among them until Hank was asked, "What is the difference between Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll?" He answered that Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll was all the same and that there was no difference. After that answer, Hank Ballard, who was as well-known to young blacks as Frank Sinatra is to everyone, was not asked another question by the all white panel, received no votes as creator of the Twist, and an offensive end of the New York Giants football

team received three votes as originator of the song and dance. It was obvious Ballard had been eliminated because of his remarks on Rock and Roll and Rhythm and Blues.

The following work is a result of my investigation into the roots of Rhythm and Blues, or Rock and Roll, and the causes surrounding the dichotomy between the two terms. This work follows a basic chronological pattern. Chapter I concentrates on the formation and development of the Blues beginning with the work songs. While briefly mentioning famous pioneers of the music the basic purpose of the chapter is historical and establishes the Blues as the foundation of Rhythm and Blues, a combination of Blues and Jazz.

Chapter II is a study revealing how radio increased the popularity of Rhythm and Blues, and became responsible for creating Rock and Roll, and also Allen Freed. It also pays special attention to the importance of black disc jockeys and gives a brief account of the development of black radio and its role in spreading Rhythm and Blues music.

Chapter II continues a historical account of Rhythm and Blues as it was captured on film, and in turn, was influenced by the motion picture industry beginning as far back as the mid forties with Louis Jordan. The significance of the song "Rock Around the Clock" and its resulting revolution is discussed.

Chapter IV establishes the early participation in television by blacks and reveals facts concerning the programming of blacks and Rhythm and Blues on television. Rhythm and Blues music is traced through the years and up to the appearance of Elvis Presley in the spring of 1956.

CHAPTER I

BIRTH OF BLUES AND RHYTHM AND BLUES

Formation of the Blues

The Blues were born on railroad gangs, in lumber camps, in cotton fields, on ocean docks and riverboats, and on southern plantations in black settlings by the rural, uneducated and most suppressed and unprepared black freedom seekers. There they were discovered in the early 1900's by people who could advance the music to the forefront. The music elements themselves, a strong beat, improvised rhythm, and call and response, were not created in America but applied to the instruments discovered here and shaped into a definite musical form by African slaves and their decendents through the blood, sweat, and tears they had to shed to survive in America.

Slaves who picked cotton in the fields composed rhythmic songs with a beat which helped to ease the pain by distracting their minds from the agony of a back-breaking inhuman work schedule. Africans behind the plow under the boiling sun composed native music as they stumbled over clods of earth six days a week and often seven, before the sun came up and until after it went down. They hollered across the fields to each other and often cried out in pain.

These soul sounds moaned across the southland seeking someone to tell their troubles. Africans needed a safety valve to release the pain, and their music became their savior.

Many times the cotton bundles were so heavy it required a team of slaves to do one job and black men composed jungle work songs of their homeland with an emphasized beat placed on certain notes in a rhythm so everyone would exert their maximum strength at the same time the note would be sung to pull, lift, or push to get the work done. The song always had a story and a lead singer would work a rhythm around and between the movements of the workers until each ebony slave was in complete synchronized rhythmic movements, singing and getting the job done at the same time. They used riffs, short musical phrases which were repeated over and over and tossed back and forth between the leader and the work crew.

WORK SONG

Leader: Oh, baby Ugh! what you gonna do? Ugh!
Three C Railroad Ugh! done run through! Ugh!

Work-gang: Me and my pardner, Ugh! him and me! Ugh!
Him and M-e-e Ugh! him and me! Ugh!
Him and me! Ugh!

Leader: Oh, baby, Ugh! what you gonna do? Ugh!
Seaboard Air-line Ugh! done run through! Ugh!

Work-gand: Me and my pardner, Ugh! him and me! Ugh!
Him and me-e-e Ugh! him and me! Ugh!
Him and me! Ugh!

Leader: Oh baby, Ugh! what you gonna do? Ugh!
B and O Railroad Ugh! done run through! Ugh![1]

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[1]Dorothy Scarborough, On the Trail of Negro Folk Songs (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Press, 1925), p. 216.

Africans who stayed on plantations after the Civil War caught hell the same as those who left. Many wound up on prison work farms, an extension of slavery to preserve the cheap labor force. It was still inhuman work seven days a week. It was still rough working on river boats, chain gangs, and ocean docks. It was still slave work "calling track" on railroad gangs under the scorching sun. All day long a work leader sang a statement, the work gang repeated it; the work leader sang a statement, the work gang added to it; the work leader sang a statement, the work gang exclaimed about it. They slid into their notes; their voices swooped around and under notes, playing with them, refusing to hit them straight on; and they paused in order to create more lyrics while the rhythm and beat continued to work. Then, finally it happened. Under those painful conditions the Blues began to surface. LeRoi Jones in his famous work entitled Blues People succinctly describes the logical evolution of the music.

> Very early blues did not have the 'classic' twelve-bar, three-line, AAB structure. For a while . . . blues-type songs utilized the structure of the early English ballad, and sometimes these songs were eight, ten, or sixteen bars. The shout as much as the African call-and-response singing dictated the form blues took. Blues issued directly out of the shout and, of course, the spiritual. The three-line structure of the blues was a feature of the shout. The first two lines of the song were repeated, it would seem, while the singer was waiting for the next line to come. Or, as was characteristic of the hollers and shouts, the single line could be repeated again and again, either because the singer especially liked

> it, or because he could not think of another line. The repeated phrase also carries into instrumental jazz as the riff.[2]

The ring shout was shuffling ceremonial dance African slaves brought from their native land. They shuffled around in a counter-clockwise circle as participants chanted and clapped hands. The accent and emphasis was upon rhythm more so than melody, and some persons sang as they danced while others clapped their hands and stomped their feet. (The spirit of the ring shout is well-preserved in "black" Christian churches today.) The repetitious musical phrases and body movements created a hypnotical effect upon the participants, and as the dance progressed in speed, and intensity, flavored with improvised syncopation, the dancers became possessed with the Spirit, screamed and shouted and flung themselves joyously in complete spiritual ecstasy.

The gay happy-go-lucky, carefree, sleepy-eyed slave portrayed in 19th Century minstrel shows singing, dancing, and joking (signifying) though not the only side of the African, it was what the white people of that time in this nation's history wanted to see in those ebony human beings. The serious side of the African was for decades plus scores intentionally overlooked and thought unimportant to say the least.

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[2]LeRoi Jones, The Blues People (New York: William Morrow, 1963) p. 62.

Popularity of the Blues

It took the "Father of the Blues", W. C. Handy a black minstrel and Ma Rainey who discovered and groomed the great Bessie Smith to emphasize to the world that black secular music had humanness. However, Mr. Handy and the first of the great female blues singers, Mrs. Rainey, had to first be convinced themselves. Handy was educated, read and wrote music, was city raised, and leader of a big band which traveled with Mahara's Minstrels, an all-black show. Just as white men discovered gold among the slaves and founded the minstrel show, Handy, a one-time college professor, discovered gold among his black country brothers of Mississippi in 1903. He abandoned imitating black imitators and like a thirsty man at sea cast down his bucket for the real thing:

> I hasten to confess that I took up with low folk forms hesitantly. . . . As a director of many respectable, conventional bands, it was not easy for me to concede that a simple slow drag and repeat could be rhythm itself. . . . My own enlightenment came in Cleveland, Mississippi. I was leading the orchestra in a dance program when someone sent up an odd request. Would we play some of 'our native music,' the note asked. This baffled me. . . . A few moments later a second request came up. Would we object if a local colored band played a few dances? Object! That was funny. What hornblower would object to a time out and smoke on pay? We eased out gracefully as the newcomers entered. They were led by a long-legged chocolate boy and their band consisted of just three pieces, a battered guitar, and mandolin, and a worn-out bass.
>
> The music they made was pretty well in keeping with their looks. They struck up one of those over-and-over strains that seem to have no very clear beginning and certainly no ending at all. The strumming

> attained a disturbing monotony, but on and on it went. . . . A rain of silver dollars began to fall around the outlandish, stomping feet. The dancers went wild. Dollars, quarters, halves . . . the shower grew and continued so long I strained my neck to get a better look. There before the boys lay more money than my nine musicians were being paid for the entire engagement. Then I saw the beauty of primitive music.[3]

Unlike the black grass root people who created and enjoyed the music initially, Handy was educated and wrote the music down. In Dorothy Scarborough's On the Trail of Negro Folk Songs, Handy gives credit for the Blues to his culture:

> Each one of my blues is based on some old Negro song of the South, some folk song that I heard from my mammy when I was a child. Something that sticks in my mind that I hum to myself when I'm not thinking about it. Some old song that is part of the memories of my childhood and my race. I can tell you the exact song I used as the basis for any one of my blues.[4]

While traveling with a show under a tent in the southwest one year earlier Ma Rainey heard the Blues as recounted by John Work in 1940.

> Ma Rainey heard them in 1902 in a small town in Missouri where she was appearing with a show under a tent. She tells of a girl from the town who came to the tent one morning and began to sing about 'the man' who left her. The song was so strange poignant that it attracted much attention. Ma Rainey became so interested that she learned the song from the visitor, and used it soon afterwards in her 'act' as an encore.
>
> The song elicited such response from the audiences that it won a special place in her act. Many

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[3]W. C. Handy, Father of the Blues (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1941),). 76.

[4]Scarborough, loc. cit., p. 265.

> times she was asked what kind of song it was, and one day she replied, in a moment of inspiration, 'it's the blues'.
>
> She added, however, that after she began to sing the blues, although they were not so named then, she frequently heard similar songs in the course of her travels.[5]

The blues began to emerge in the early 1900's from a forest of rural black folk singers. Often they were heard being sung by prisoners and guitar players who drifted from place to place in search of work; often finding it by entertaining other black men in labor camps. It became a music between a black man with plenty of trouble and his understanding guitar and attains its wealth in the soul of the layman digging and chipping away at an insolvable problem of life: somewhere to go but no way to get there, a pressing debt but no money to pay it, a desire to love but only a cold and empty world to embrace, or a thirst to relax but no place to rest.

(I've Been Treated Wrong)

> I don't know my real name, I don't know where I was born
> (repeat)
> The troubles I been having seems like I was raised in an orphan home.
>
> My mother died and left me when I was only two years old,
> (repeat)
> And the troubles I been having the good Lord only knows.

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[5]John Work, American Negro Songs (New York: Howell, Saskin and Company, 1940), p. 33.

I been treated like an orphan and worked just like
a slave,
(repeat)
If I never get my revenge evilness will carry me to
my grave.

Now I been having trouble ever since I been grown.
(repeat)
I'm too old for the orphan and too young for the old
folks' home.[6]

Perry Bradford, as a young black growing up in the South at the turn of the century, heard black prisoners singing these soulful songs. His home was located next door to the Atlanta jail and he was intrigued by the prisoners' music. Later as a young musician in New York, having traveled the country, Bradford tried desperately to convince record companies to record some of the blues songs. He related his efforts in his colorful book Born With The Blues:

> I tramped the pavements of Broadway with the belief that the country was waiting for the sound of the voice of a Negro singing the blues with a Negro Jazz combination playing for her. I felt strongly it should be a girl and that was what I was trying to sell. I was laughed at by all the wise guys in Tin Pan Alley. I had pleaded with Columbia and Victor companies to issue a record of a Negro girl. Though they were attentive, there was 'no dice' after the 'conference' with Executives.
>
> . . . but I was too stubborn to give up the idea because I had traveled all over the country singing and playing the blues. And I knew the people were waiting for that sound on the record because it was the sound of America, Negro and White.
>
> The south was especially crazy about the blues, a cry of a broken heart that echoed from every levee and bayou up and down the Mississippi River. It was a 'cry,' but still the outburst seemed to ease the pain.[7]

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[6]Samuel Charters, The Country Blues (New York: Rinehart, 1959), p. 189.

[7]Perry Bradford, Born With The Blues (New York: Oak Publications, 1965), p. 13.

Finally Bradford convinced the Okeh record company people to record Mamie Smith, a beautiful black woman from Cincinnati, singing a blues number he had written. So on August 10, 1920--

> . . . she cut Bradford's 'Crazy Blues' with its choruses based on a twelve-bar structure, the first vocal recording to employ a blues form. For months the disc sold some 7,500 copies a week, revealing the existence of a market that the record companies were not slow to exploit. In Alberta Hunter's words, Mamie Smith 'made it possible for all of us'.[8]

This explains why rather than recording the real male country blues, the record companies at first recorded black females singing a smoother style that was to become known as classic blues. Miss Smith was soon to be forgotten and names like Ida Cox, Ma Rainey, and Bessie Smith were soon to reign. Not much is written about Ida Cox, but this author's father insists that she was one of the big three. Bessie Smith became the most popular female blues singer although it was Rainey who discovered her in Chattanooga, Tennessee and groomed her for show business. Bessie became known as "Empress of the Blues" and very few doubt it. Bessie's voice was similar to that of Mahaila Jackson's, and the statuesque beauty of a handsome woman's painful cry could make empathy very easy with a frank song such as "Empty Bed Blues." Southern Jim Crow turned a serious automobile wreck into a fatal accident when she couldn't get

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[8]Paul Oliver, Blues Fell This Morning (New York: Horizon Press, 1966), p. 1.

admittance to a white hospital because she was black.

Ma Rainey is monumental for she was the first great female blues singer. One of her biggest hit songs which she also wrote was "See See Rider." She was married at sixteen to Will Rainey who directed the famous Rabbit Foot Minstrels. She began her recording career in her mid thirties and retired during the Depression. Before she died on December 22, 1939, she had established the vogue for female blues singers.

Record companies soon found that the blues by women were not the most sought after music. The male country blues singer was the source most blacks preferred. In the meantime, Mamie Smith's recording had made Okeh a major company, and to meet the new demand for country blues, and yet keep "colored" music separated from white, Okeh coined the term "race records." Sam Charters maintains that Okeh recording director Ralph Peer created the stigma which was to last well into the late forties: "Ralph Peer was trying to think of a catalog title for his new records, and rather than calling them "Negro" records, decided on "Race" records, and the name lasted."[9]

Record companies began selling millions of records to the "Race," Negroes. The nineteen twenties were deluged by recorded blues: Falling Rain Blues; Looking Girl Blues; Too Light Blues; Down Hearted Blues, the list is endless.

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[9]Charters, loc. cit., p. 47.

Emerging in the early 1920's, from a forest of blues and work song folk singers to nurture the country blues into popularity, were rough country styled singers like PaPa Charlie Jackson, Gus Cannon, Hosie Woods, Furry Lewis, Will Shade, and a host of forgotten drifters who perfected clever inter-play between themselves and the guitar. The blues were everywhere there was a "ghetto" and the leading exponent became Blind Lemon Jefferson. Lemon was born blind on a small farm just outside Wortham, Texas in 1897. He had a gift for guitar picking which was just about the only thing a blind uneducated boy could do to earn a living later on in life. Neighbors taught him all they could, but most of the guitar learning Lemon got on his own, by singing and playing at picnics and parties. He got to Chicago by way of Dallas and began recording for Paramount Records in 1925. Though his records were most popular among blacks he was never well paid. His sliding and swooping voice moaned and cried and attempts to imitate his talking guitar, once his records became available, were numerous. His impact on guitar players is prevalent today. One night after a recording session in the winter of 1930, Lemon left the studio and walked into a snow storm. The next morning Blind Lemon Jefferson with his guitar near his side was discovered frozen to death. He had, however, left a warm legacy of over seventy recordings behind, and a guarantee that the blues would never die--only change with the times.

Black people who had moved from the farm during and shortly after World War I began to adopt an "urban taste" of living, and the country blues began to lose a bit of its vast popularity in the late twenties. The basic blues, however, were still very popular although the sound began to soften and move toward what is basically referred to today as the urban blues vain.

Rhythm and Blues Develops

In 1928, a young singer-piano player left his native Nashville, Tennessee home for the big city and bright lights of Chicago, at the encouragement of friends, to make a name for himself. The young man never wrote back to say how he was making out, but he did send word. It was a hit recording of "How Long, How Long Blues" which he was to re-record six times before his death. The young man's name was Leroy Carr, and if you've ever heard the song or "In the Evening (when the sun goes down)," you have some idea of the great talent he possessed.

Leroy had met Francis "Scrapper" Blackwell in Chicago. Together with Carr's smooth approach to playing piano and singing the blues and Blackwell's relaxed guitar playing, they completely influenced a new style of singing and playing the blues. According to Charles Keil, Leroy Carr's

> . . . thoroughly citified and sophisticated blues style was immensely popular; in many ways the Carr-Blackwell recordings foreshadow the Kansas City florescence. Along with guitarist Lonnie Johnson,

> a thorough musician and technician from St. Louis, Scrapper Blackwell's single-string lines helped clear the way for the first electric guitarists, Eddie Durham and Charlie Christian of the Kansas City era. Carr's songs were used by Basie and Rushing in the late thirties; on some early recordings, Basie and his rhythm section do two of Carr's blues that show the influence of Carr's piano style as well. Many of today's bluesmen--B. B. King and Jimmy Witherspoon, for example, credit Carr and Blackwell as being two of the first modernists in the field.[10]

The urban blues matured and climaxed as a result of a combination which brought together country bluesmen who moved westward and swing era jazz bands of the Southwest. In the 1930's these itinerant Territory bands in the Southwest and Texas (where there was relatively greater musical freedom of expression) began to appear and finally culminated in Kansas City with a male blues vocalist as a permanent part of the group.

Keil goes on to say of the Kansas City scene:

> Many singers from the Kansas City phase were not instrumentalists, but relied upon a reed or brass player for responses to their vocal calls. Saxophonists in the Jay McShann band, which once included Charlie Parker, provided the foil to the singing of Walter Brown, Al Hibbler, and Jimmy Witherspoon; many of the instrumentalists in other bands came to be almost as well known as the vocalists they were paired with--trombonist Dickie Wells with Jimmy Rushing, pianist Pete Johnson with Joe Turner. . . . The modern blues style that these men epitomize was transformed and remolded after the war.[11]

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[10]Charles Keil, The Urban Blues (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 65.

[11]Ibid., p. 63.

The characteristics of the Kansas City style of male blues singers performing with heavy rhythmic jazz bands is described and compared with the earlier styles of Rainey, Smith, Cox, and Leroy Carr, by Raymond Horricks in Count Basie and his Orchestra:

> The singing became suddenly more superficially energetic, more prone to aggression in its delivery, and so in keeping with the rhythmic excitement and attacking swing evidenced by the town's jazz groups. The blues song became more catholic in outlook, embracing all moods and all spirits, therefore suitable for the expression of excitement as well as depression. The dramatic, heart-searching dirge of Bessie Smith was replaced by the volatile driving song of Jimmy Rushing. Lyrics retained their message of outcry against a lost lover or against some oppressive action by the authorities, yet the phrases which propagated the stories took on a rhythmic force, edging closer than ever to the moulded, decorative phrases of a jazz instrumental solo. Make no mistake, the blues songs didn't lose their sincerity or their intensity. If anything, pushing the approach closer to the alive, swinging style of the Kansas City jazz unit served as a precautionary measure against undue elements of sophistication creeping in. Jimmy Rushing singing a blues at medium tempo above the emphatic beat of the Count Basie rhythm section didn't represent a dilution of the lament-type blues brought to perfection by performers such as Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Ida Cox, and Leroy Carr. If one considers the linking of the plaintive lyric with the force and delivery methods of a jazz group a crime, then Rushing could be adjudged guilty. Yet while he and others took on the spirit of jazz musicians, of the men with whom they worked, they still retained all the old intensity and feeling in their singing. If Rushing felt sad he sang a slow blues; but if he felt gay he didn't just stop singing, for fear of desecrating the blues form. Like the musician he used the blues for every mood and he worked constantly with jazz groups.[12]

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[12]Raymond Horricks, Count Basie and His Orchestra (New York: The Citadel Press, 1957), p. 41.

Midway during World War II a young man from the Southwest, a Texan named Arron T-Bone Walker, began to rule a substantial share of blues popularity. He learned to play the blues from his father and uncle. As a young boy, he played guitar for a medicine show when school was not in session. This author interviewed T-Bone in March of 1965 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the pioneering blues singer pleasantly recalled the "Big B Tonic" by Doc Breeden. Although Breeden claimed the tonic would cure anything, T-Bone says it was only Black Daught. Fifteen dollars a week was good money for a young boy although ten did go home.

T-Bone remembered leading Blind Lemon around several times and picked up some guitar pointers. He recorded at the age of sixteen but his records were not very successful. Later in his career he played for Cab Calloway's big band. That was his shortest engagement. When he showed up late for work he was fired. That was the second night he was with the band. T-Bone's smooth guitar style accompanied the great Ida Cox and also Ma Rainey on some of their recordings. Eventually his travels led him to California where he joined the Les Hite's orchestra in 1939. This was his biggest break.

He went with the orchestra to New York the same year and recorded "Wichita Blues." He formed his own band which had a heavy rhythmic flavor of the Southwest which was

reflected in the Kansas City movement. The recording led him to stardom which was to last well over a decade. According to Morgan Babb, former program director of radio station WVOL in Nashville, Tennessee, T-Bone, as part of his dance routine while playing the guitar, would jump straight up in the air with his string instrument high above his head and come down in a split with his guitar behind his head but never losing a beat. Meanwhile, women in the audience would jump up, scream, and shout just like it was revival time. During the interview the author asked the famed bluesman if he still did the split. T-Bone smiled warmly as if remembering the good times and said, "I do sometimes, but I am not as young as I used to be you know." Charters maintains that Walkers dance routines were copied by many, including BoDiddley who was copied by Elvis Presley.[13]

T-Bone mastered the electric guitar at its early inception, and although Charlie Christian is considered the modern influencing electric guitarist, T-Bone was the first blues singer to achieve astounding success with it. He influenced many of the current blues singers employing the electric box and of this influence Keil has also agreed:

> Although Wynonie Harris, Joe Turner, the Browns (Walter and Roy), and Percy Mayfield exerted

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[13]Charters, loc. cit., p. 238.

> considerable influence in the late forties and early fifties, T-Bone Walker and Jouis Jordan seem to have had the greatest impact on their follow bluesmen.[14]

Louis Jordan will be discussed later.

T-Bone made several television appearances during the early 1950's and wrote one of Bobby Bland's biggest hits, "Stormy Monday Blues." If you ever hear the old heads mumbling "the eagle flies on Friday" it is because they remember the great Arron "T-Bone" Walker singing it in the mid-to-late 1940's.

Post war years were boom years and black people were risking their lives endeavoring to slip away from southern farms and plantations at night to journey north and west for a better life. The work was at the bottom of the ladder but the conditions were better, so they thought, and the money was good. Many were getting their "kicks on Route 66" as the King Cole Trio hit song suggested. Life was less restricting for the rural cultured blacks who moved to the city. The new freedom spirit attained by the heroic performance of blacks in the war and the new hope the world had in general was reflected in the music. It was truly a new day. The traditional country blues was out of style and the new blues was more rhythmic. Jazz and blues had joined together. The Kansas City style was the new foundation on which to build free and swinging vocal blues.

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[14]Keil, loc. cit., p. 65.

Private Cecil Gant was singing "I Wonder," Joe Liggins wrote "The Honey Dripper," another big hit in 1945, and Helen Humes with Bill Doggett scored big with "Be-Ba-Ba-Luba." It was a period when Lionel Hampton was popular with "Hey! BA-BA-RE-Bop," the Mills Brothers continued their success with "Dream, Dream, Dream" and "Across the Alley From the Alamo," and Johnny Moore and His Three Blazers released "Merry Christmas Baby." Friends knocked on doors and yelled, "Caldonia! Caldonia! What makes your big head so hard," or hollered out, "Open the door, Richard!" The residents were not lost for words either. Often they replied, "Ain't nobody here but us chickens."

The greetings were from song titles and Jouis Jordan popularized two of the three. Jack McVea co-authored and recorded "Open the Door Richard" which was based on an old black vaudeville skit by Dusty Flecter. So many whites copied the song until people around the world knew about the man who could not get into his own house because Richard was asleep and had the only key.

Louis Jordan was a jazz saxophonist and leader of his own band which he called the Tymphany Five. Maud-Cuney Hare mentions him with the same tributes afforded Duke Ellington and Earl Hines in her 1938 book Negro Musicians and Their Music.[15] His home was Brinkley, Arkansas which

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[15]Maud-Cuney Hare, Negro Musicians and Their Music (Washington, D. C.: Associated Publishers, 1936), p. 154.

is about sixty miles from Memphis. Whatever happened in Kansas City first, soon happened in the Memphis area second, and when Kansas City began to slow down Memphis became second in music only to Chicago. Jordan eventually moved to Chicago, but the Kansas City-Memphis influence was already working.

After the war and perhaps during that period Jordan's career began to bloom and spread in all directions defying any classification of the day. Everything he was doing then is in vogue today. In April of 1945, Billboard Magazine had this to say about Jouis Jordan who was ascending to the peak of his career:

> Theater "Talk"! The biggest Hit at the Paramount Theater, New York, in years! Completed first engagement Feb. 27, 1945--returned by demand June 13, 1945 and already booked for third return engagement nine months later.
>
> Trade "Talk"! Jordan is a great showman--belongs at the top of the heap! This guy's good!--"Variety"--Jordan's all over the place singin', dancin', clownin', and totin' his sax. He packs in laughts and customers, to.... "Billboard".
>
> Movie "Talk"! Louis Jordan is a natural showman. We are testing him for a comedy lead in one of our forthcoming pictures--Paramount Pictures.
>
> Record "Talk"! Louis Jordan's recording with Bing Crosby of "My Baby Said Yes," and "Your Socks Don't Match" promises to be a real hit. Jordan's rendition of the novelty tune, "Caldonia" is great--Dave Kapp, Decca Records.
>
> Song "Talk"! "Caldonia (what makes your big head so hard)" is the novelty hit of 1945 thanks to Louis Jordan's Decca recording and his terrific vocal rendition--Henry Spitzer, Morris Music.

> Short "Talk"! Louis Jordan's an actor, too; his work in the musical short, "Caldonia," is superb--Wm. F. Crouch, Director.[16]

Jordan did not stop here, he cut records with Ella Fitzgerald, Jimmy Dorsey, and Guy Lombardo. Wild Bill Davis arranged for him. He went on to record such hits as "Choo Choo Ch' Boogie" which sold a million, "Ain't That Just Like a Woman," recorded again by Elvis Presley in the sixties, "Don't Let the Sun Catch You Crying," and other famous hit songs like "Beware," "Jack You're Dead," "Saturday Night Fish Fry," and "Beans and Cornbread."

People yet talk about "letting the good times roll," primarily because Louis Jordan made a hit song out of it in 1946.

Black people openly resented the label "race music" after World War II and in 1948 Billboard Magazine began calling the new blues Rhythm and Blues, and Louis Jordan, even more so than Walker, was king of Rhythm and Blues. It swung, it had more jazz rhythms, it was intoxicated with greater freedom and had no clear direction as to where it was alluding--the music truly rocked. In 1948 Earskin Hawkins released "Blues After Hours" and black people adopted it as their national anthem. "Stick" McGhee was singing "Drinkin' Wine Spo-dee-o-dee," Roy Brown was "Rocking At Midnight," Amos Milburn made the charts with "No Rollin' Blues," Little Ester and Johnny Otis had twin hits,

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[16]Billboard Magazine, April 7, 1945, p. 2.

"Mistrustin' Blues" and "Double Crossing Blues," Lucky Millinder who later became a disc jockey arrived with "D' Natural Blues," and Bull Moose Jackson softly crooned "All My Love Belongs to You."

Meanwhile the African group work-song had retained its structure and emotional zeal in the form of gospel quartet singing which was very popular, especially among southern blacks. Although gospel quartets which preceded even the Fairfield Four, Golden Gate Quartet, and Delta Rhythm Boys remain the least researched element of modern musical roots, their style and tradition gave birth to the secular quartet groups such as the famous Ink Spots who also used the African work-song structure of call and response. Their 1941 hit recording of "If I Didn't Care" sold over a million copies. By 1949 the work-song quartet style hit the Rhythm and Blues charts to stay.

Ebony magazine captured the creation of the Orioles in a 1952 article which related how a white song writer, Deborah Chester, telephoned a friend and discovered Sonny Til and his friends singing in the background.

> Excited, Deborah listened more closely, arranged to meet the Orioles (then called the Vibronaires). A week later, she had arranged an Arthur Godfrey audition in which they competed against a British pianist named George Shearing. The Orioles lost the Godfrey contest but 24 hours later, Deborah, back in her Baltimore home, received a frantic long-distance call from Godfrey.
>
> 'The mail's piling up and the phones are going crazy," the famed talent scout shouted. 'Everyone's saying the Orioles should have won and they won't

> drink any more Lipton's Tea. Bring them back to New York right away.'
>
> The Godfrey triumph and waxing of a Deborah Chester tune Too Soon to Know sent the Orioles soaring to success.[17]

The African style of singing was so imitated, Chuck Lowery, ex-Pied Piper (the Pied Pipers held Downbeat poll honors for years and were part of the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra), stated in a 1953 Downbeat issue that most of the singing groups were lousy and that "those lousy Ink Spots started the decline. That Bill Kenny whinning, with three nondescript so-called singers moaning in the background."[18]

Though Lowery may have been referring to current white groups his mention of the Ink Spots as the genus of this African style of singing slightly off key to the European ear is important because it notes the Afro influence Kenny, Deek Watson, Charlie Fuqua, and Hoppy Jones had on the Pop musical scene. And it was a secular quartet, because of their popularity, who brought attention to the Rhythm and Blues lyric phrase Rock and Roll, an Afro-American expression popular among blacks for many years.

Rhythm and Blues Lyrics

Though it is not the purpose of this work to trace lyrics, it is necessary to establish the phrase Rock and

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[17] Ebony Magazine, September, 1952, p. 26.

[18] Downbeat, December 30, 1953, p. 3.

Roll as an intrinsic part of the Afro-American language and Rhythm and Blues song. The late Langston Hughes established a point of reference in his work, The Big Sea, when he told of a high society matron's response when a sister got down on "My Daddy Rocks Me With One Steady Roll": "My dear! Oh, my dear, how beautifully you sing spirituals."[19] This was in the swing era of the 1920's.

Joe Turner, one of the very first of the Kansas City Blues shouters, co-authored "Cherry Red", a 1939 Blues hit with Pete Johnson, and there is no question about the sexual reference made toward "Rock".

> Take me pretty mama, chunk me in your big brass bed
> And rock me mama till my face turns Cherry Red.

In the late forties Amos Milburn, one of the real greats of Rhythm and Blues, recorded a hit song called "No Rollin' Blues."

> When you come home in the evening
> And everything you do is wrong
> You might as well pack your clothes and leave
> Cause somebody else is carrying your rollin' on.

Although "Cherry Red" and "No Rollin' Blues" were hit recordings, neither sold three million copies as did the 1951 secular quartet recording of "Sixty Minute Man" by the famous Dominos.

> Listen here girl I'm telling you now
> They call me loving Dan
> I'll rock 'em and roll 'em all night long
> I'm a sixty minute man.

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[19]Langston Hughes, The Big Sea (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 254.

These are only small examples of many songs which made a sexual reference to rocking, rolling or both and most were before 1950. To an outsider the sex reference may have been hidden because the words did not always indicate a sexual meaning. "Yeah! We're gonna rock this joint tonight," meant a musical happening. Sometimes the meaning wasn't exactly clear either: "Let it roll, let it roll, all night long, let is roll." Maybe "it" was music and goodtimes, maybe not. The important factor is that Rock and Roll were significant Afro-American social expressions and can be observed as an intrinsic part of early Rhythm and Blues music.

The success of African work-gang structured groups, The Orioles and Dominos, revealed, just as Perry Bradford and Mamie Smith had done decades earlier, a whole new vista for popular Afro-American music. And just as the phonograph was the factor in the twenties, radio by 1951 was the cause agent. As Arnold Shaw author of The World of Soul has stated,

> I have become convinced that the role of Black radio and Black disk jockeys in the history of the blues has been grossly neglected. Because recordings are accessible long after they have been released, their impact on bluesmen has been stressed and overstressed. But cotton patch workers are not record collectors.[20]

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[20]Arnold Shaw, The World of Soul (New York: Cowles Book Company, 1970), p. x.

Although the last statement can be argued, Shaw's intended point is clear, and our next chapter will discuss radio's impact upon Rhythm and Blues.

CHAPTER II

RADIO

The Disc Jockey

There were no radio stations in 1900. The phonograph was only a concept and usually referred to as "talking machine". Music, however, was an important part of American life. Afro-Americans, for the most part, made their music from the soul, what they heard and memorized, and what they created in jam sessions. The formal music industry was, as it had always been in America, controlled by music publishing companies. At the turn of the century, if you wanted music you had to play it yourself or find someone else who could perform. The publisher sold sheet music to all who could read. That is where the money was. And do not kid yourself, that is where a great deal of money is today--publishing. The publisher decided which songs deserved to be initially pushed and plugged.

In one sense the major impact of radio on the music industry has been the transfer of this power from the publishers into the hands of broadcasters, whether the publishers liked it or not. And they did not. When disc jockeying first peeked its head in the 1930's, as near as

anyone seems capable of determining, some artists like Bing Crosby and Fred Waring had the record label to include the warning, "NOT LICENSED FOR RADIO BROADCAST." The birth of the disc jockey was unwelcomed right from the beginning.

> But in 1940 the litigation came to a debacle in a suit involving Paul Whiteman records. The court ruled that a broadcaster, having purchased a phonograph record, could broadcast it without further obligation, regardless of the wishes of artists or manufacturers. The warning on label was held to have no legal significance. The U. S. Supreme Court declined to review the case. The ruling put the disc jockey for the first time on secure legal footing.[1]

Broadcasting stations of course paid the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers fees for playing recorded music.

ASCAP decided to increase broadcasting royalty rates in 1941. Broadcasting replied by successfully banning all ASCAP material temporarily from the air. ASCAP withdrew its demands. The disc jockey had proven his ability not only to make sales for sponsors but also to increase record sales where market performance had been "killed" during the Depression. By 1935, the D.J. had revived sales in both sheet and phonograph categories. Many music houses by 1941 had long since phased out their piano player whose job it had been to play newly released sheet music for customers. Without broadcasting as a mass catalyst to phonograph sales

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[1]Erik Barnouw, A History of Broadcasting in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 217.

which spurred sheet music sales--ASCAP was hurting. The balance of power was shifting.

During the Depression, Barnouw, reveals that networks and large stations remained profitable. However, post World War II was a financially profitable era even for small stations. The disc jockey was on the case with ad lib commercials and rip and read news from the AP or UP of INS news ticker service. The new image of radio in America was perhaps best described by J. Harold Ryan, who in 1945 was the newly elected president of NAB:

> American radio is the product of American business! It is just as much that kind of product as the vacuum cleaner, the washing machine, the automobile and the airplane. . . . If the legend still persists that a radio station is some kind of art center, a technical museum, or a little piece of Hollywood transplanted strangely to your home town, then the first official act of the second quarter century should be listing it along with the local dairies, laundries, banks, restaurants, and filling stations.[2]

Post World War II radio made every effort to achieve the goal Ryan spoke of. The networks began by hiring some of the top names in the show biz world as D.J.'s in an effort to successfully ride the bandwagon of the "disc jockey." Ted Husing, Paul Whiteman, Duke Ellington, Kate Smith, Deems Taylor, Mel Allen, Woody Herman, and Tommy Dorsey were signed at astonishingly high salaries to do

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[2]Charles Siepmann, Radio's Second Chance (Boston: Brown, Little and Company, 1946), p. 186.

D.J. work back in 1946.[3] Arthur Treacher and Eddie Cantor also tried their hand at disc jockeying.

Simply having a big name spin records was not enough to captivate radio audiences, and young unknowns working small independent stations soon began dominating the airwaves from their local and regional locations. In short, they upset not only the broadcast establishment, but more so the music world.

> In the past couple of years the record promotion block has emerged as a key factor in the new music business. Before the disk became "king" of Tin Pan Alley, the publishers' contact men were solely responsible for the tune plugs, but in today's wax age, the disk promotion man, operating on an indie basis, has become the dominant plug force.
>
> Disk promotion developed into a booming biz during the last five years as artists realized that the disk jockey outlet was the main source of pop record sales promotion at the consumer and juke level. As they began latching on to disk promotors for personal service, an increasing number of flocks moved into this field.
>
> As one disk promoter put it--'we're to the record industry what an advertising agency is to any other biz.'[4]

The new phonograph advertizer was not welcomed with open arms by everyone in the business. The disc jockey became a very controversial figure in the late forties and early fifties. He was praised by some and criticized by

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[3]Andre Baruch, Variety, Vol. 173 (January 5, 1949), p. 173.

[4]D.J.'s Key Factor," Variety, Vol. 190 (April 29, 1953), p. 51.

others. Editorials appeared in music trade magazines both pro and con. Old timers remembering the good old days said D.J.'s had too much power, and criticized the current music of the day by such people as Johnnie Ray and Ralph Flanagan. Music critic Nat Hentoff sided with the old heads.

> Our level of popular music has become so pitiful, not because of the public primarily, but because of the recording directors, the song publishers, and, especially, the disc jockeys.
>
> Who is responsible for the musically unmerited success of more recent tonal gargoyles like Johnnie Ray and stale dance bands of the depressing caliber of Ralph Flanagan and Ray Anthony?
>
> With a few highly commendable exceptions, the contemporary disc jockey has reached a fantastic state of pompous musical ignorance and limitless arrogance in the use of that ignorance. These grotesques would be laughable except that they exercise tremendous power.
>
> They decide what their listeners will hear, and don't let any of them tell you it works the other way around. Look at these shabby "hits" manufactured by incessant, relentless disc jockey plugging.[5]

Payola, was a subject of grave concern almost the instant disc jockey post World War II popularity mushroomed. Some people in the music business referred to disc jockeys as the Frankenstein of the music industry, the music publishers to be specific. Others claimed the disc jockey gave new talent a break, weeded out the no talented big busted 39 inch female who could not be seen via records, and gave the independent record producer a fair shake. Those who

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[5]Nat Hentoff, Downbeat, March 21, 1952, p. 1.

sided with the disc jockey claimed that Payola could be stopped if the publishers themselves would cease the dollar stampede. At the height of the disc jockey dispute of power in 1951 a then well-known disc jockey who refused to be identified laid out the heart of the matter to Variety:

> There's no disputing the stature of the deejay and his affirmative contribution to the music business. . . . but the music publisher has lost control of his copyright which technically is owned by his publishing firm but which is theoretical because the recording company takes hold, and from then on the fate of the song, the songwriter and the publisher are in (a) the disk interpretation and (b) the disk jockey.[6]

Even beyond the arguments between music publishers and disc jockeys, lay the fundamental crux of the matter. Radio was opening the airways and giving people a choice of wider selectivity. Somebody had to win, or worse yet, lose. Noted music critic Ralph J. Gleason summed up post World War II this way:

> After World War II, radio changed under pressure from television to low budget music and news programs. The pop-record business eagerly took over the AM air waves. City and country blues and hillbilly music were available on the air alongside the Broadway show tunes and popular ballads. For the first time young people had a truly free choice in what they wanted to listen to on the air.[7]

Generally, Broadway held its own through the late forties, and Hank Williams lifted country and western to its greatest popularity, at that time, in the early fifties.

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[6]Variety, August 3, 1951, p. 41.

[7]Ralph Gleason, The Young Americans (New York: Time Inc., 1966), p. 68.

Even in country and western music, radio was a major influencing factor in its popularity growth.

> Primarily, four factors are responsible for the evolution: the creation of the singing star, a shift in national population, the growth of radio, and the decline in the quality of the popular music that flooded the country.[8]

Then the final music selection was made. The musical course which was to shape the world and future generations was extraneously agreed upon. At first the sound of Rhythm and Blues was like a soft drum whose beat traveled great distances and faintly touched the ears of young Pop radio listeners. It tickled and made non-creators laugh and make jokes about it. The music was an esoteric message that spoke only to its creators and very hippest of non-members who told their friends. To many of them the beat was funny and they called it a passing fad. But the winds of rhythm grew stronger and louder; it touched the souls of young white Americans. They rocked and spun "aboutface" embracing Africa's rhythmic beat. And when it was too late their parents protested; called the music vulgar, barren, and animalistic. But it was too late, there were no ships sailing for Africa.

By 1954 America was in the midst of a musical explosion. Abram Chasins, then music director of a New York radio station, WQXR, wrote an article for Variety claiming

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[8]Downbeat, Vol. 21 (June 30, 1954), p. 66.

that radio had the major impact on modern music's popularity explosion.

> At this moment, the art of music has the largest audience ever assembled to hear it in the history of mankind. . . . those responsible for the musical wealth of our country include composers, interpreters, inventors, publishers, recording companies, licensing agencies (whose protection encourages composers and facilitates the availability of their music to the user.) an eager public, and to my mind, the most effective force the broadcasters.[9]

Afro-American Programming

Ironically, Afro-American music has a long, though thin, history in broadcasting. The first radio station in America went on the air in 1920, WWJ in Detroit. In 1924 Bessie Smith appeared on Memphis radio station WMC.

> Bessie Smith, colored singer of deep indigo blues, gave WMC listeners a treat with a score of her latest successes as she led the mignight frolic at 11 o'clock last night, with Yancey and Booker's orchestra and the Beale Avenue Palace theater orchestra playing accompaniments in slow, negroid rhythm.
>
> 'Sam Jones Blues,' 'Chicago Bound,' 'St. Louis Gal' and 'Mistreatim' Pap' led the way for a score of others. Bessie has a voice that will never be mistaken for another's. She is in a class by herself in the field of 'blues.'
>
> The two orchestras, splitting the midnight frolic were delightful in their original handling of the popular numbers of today. They took back the numbers written from the old Negro folk songs and put that Negro touch to them that the authors missed. The boys put Beale Avenue into the air, with the result that WMC was flooded with requests from the territory and was the recipient of wires from East, West, North, and South.[10]

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[9]Abram Chasins, "U. S. Coming of Age on Music: Radio a Big Factor," Variety, Vol. 196 (October 20, 1954), p. 51.

[10]Columbia LP 33.

Network programming using Afro-Americans was seemingly widespread by the early 1930's, mainly when radio was basically programming music. Black orchestras and singing groups were broadcast regularly including a religious group called the Southernairs who came on every Sunday morning. When drama became popular and took over, blacks were ostracized. The sustaining thrust of black radio, appears to have taken an initial form of local weekly programming on Sunday by gospel quartets. In 1941 Time Magazine carried an article on the famous Golden Gate Quartet which indicated they were broadcasting before 1935:

> Tenors Willie Langford and Henry Owen, Baritone Willie Johnson and Basso Orlandus Wilson began singing together in Norfolk, Virginia's Booker T. Washington High School, got on local radio programs even before they graduated in 1935.[11]

The Swan Silvertones, another famous gospel quartet also trace their roots to radio back in the 1930's. Moving from West Virginia in 1939 to Knoxville, Tennessee, they obtained a weekly Sunday morning radio show.[12]

Radio station WLAC, a 50,000 watt company in Nashville, Tennessee, began carrying religious recordings by black artists back in early 1946, sponsored by Randy Wood of Gallitin, Tennessee. The program became so popular among blacks, and has carried over so strongly, until even today many older Afro-Americans tend to refer to WLAC radio as Randy's.

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[11]Time, January 29, 1941, p. 50.

[12]Exodus LP 58, Spiritual Series.

Development of Afro-American Radio

Segmented local programing for blacks during the late thirties and early forties seems to have been widespread throughout the Southern part of the United States. However, not until 1948 did fulltime broadcasting to Afro-Americans come into being. Radio WDIA in Memphis, Tennessee, went on the air in 1947. The first year it aimed its programing toward whites and wound up in the red. The following year WDIA took full advantage of the king-pin position Memphis held as a Rhythm and Blues center and swung its 50,000 watts toward the 1.5 million blacks in Tennessee, Arkansas, Missouri, and Mississippi. Howlin Wolf, a famous blues singer, had for several years been a disc jockey on WKUM. Arnold Shaw in his book The World of Soul revealed that

> Elmore James was a WOKI (Jackson, Mississippi) disc jockey. From 1938 intermittenly for almost 3 decades the second Sonny Boy Williamson broadcast daily on 'King Biscuit Time' over KFFA of Helena, Arkansas, and WROX of Clarksdale, Mississippi.[13]

Needless to say WDIA has remained in the black more ways than one over the years. But even more important is the trend toward fulltime black radio the station started. Radio stations aiming their programing toward blacks rapidly began springing up all across the Southland and in some cases up North. WJLD, Birmingham; WERD, Atlanta;

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[13]Shaw, loc. cit., p. x.

KXLW, St. Louis; WMRY, New Orleans. By 1951 most large Southern cities had black oriented radio stations, and the potential Rhythm and Blues explosion could not be halted.

As witnessed by the 1948 decision of WDIA which has remained white owned, development of black radio programing was not so much the result of love of Afro-American culture, but rather a source from which businessmen in radio could make money. In February, 1953, Variety expounded upon the circumstances surrounding the widespread birth of black radio stations.

> Strong upsurge in r and b market in recent years has now put the Negro disc jockey into one of the key positions in the overall music business. Over 500 r and b jocks are now spotted on stations in every city where there is a sizable colored population.
>
> The Negro jocks have come into their own in the key cities since the advent of video. TV has been forcing the indie radio outlet into specialized programing projects and the pitch to the vast Negro market is proving easiest via the platter spinning route.
>
> The Negro disk jockey has a much stronger standing in the colored community, particularly in the South, than the ofay platter pilots have generally due to the social situation. This influence over their listeners is proportionately stronger and that explains why their shows are solid commercial stanzas.
>
> Their accent on r and b platters stems from that music's wide spread and almost unique acceptance by Negro audiences.[14]

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[14]Variety, Vol. 189 (February 25, 1953), p. 39.

The South had long preceded the North in opening up broadcasting to blacks and by 1953 the nation could point to black dee jays spread throughout the nation.

> New York metropolitan area has one of the largest concentrations of Negro jocks in the country with 12 now on the air. These are: Jack Walker WOU, Joe Bostic WBNX, Willie Bryant WHOM-WOR, Hal Jackson WMCA, Phil Gordon WLIB, Tommy Small WWRL, Howard Bowser and Sarah Lou WLIB, Lucky Millinder WNEW, Doc Wheeler WWRL, Larry Fuller WLIB, and Bill Cook WAAT, Newark. Most of these jocks are on foreign language stations but have developed a strong enough hold to get their listeners to tune in at specific hours.
>
> In Chicago Al Benson, on WGES and WJJD, is influential while in the South there are numerous important deejays, including Vernon Winslow and Jack L. Cooper, in New Orleans; Sugar Daddy in Birmingham; Bruce Miller in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Nat D. Williams in Memphis; Jacqueline De Shazar in Durham, North Carolina, and Jan Massey in Washington, D. C.
>
> Paradoxically, one of the most potent of the r and b deejays is Gene Nobles, a white jock who operates out of Gallatin, Tennessee. Nobles has developed a nationwide following via his WLAC stanzas for Randy Wood's platter mail-order operation and his r and b label, Dot Records.[15] [Nobles is still broadcasting.]

Much debate has gone into tracing down the exact record which is supposed to have started the rock revolution. Such a search could theoretically lead back to the 19th Century days of Daddy Rice and the minstrel show for white Americans have always kept a finger on the pulse of black entertainment. It should be clear by now that "really" no such record exists. The explosion of Rhythm and Blues did

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[15] Variety, Vol. 189 (February 25, 1953), p. 46.

not rest on one record, but rather an impact of radio and the Rhythm and Blues disc jockey were the major causes of the music's widespread popularity outburst in the late forties and early fifties.

Through radio, Elvis Presley, obtained a valuable portion of his background in Rhythm and Blues. WDIA became a friend to Presley, according to writer Robert Blair Kaiser, whenever self-doubts troubled the Memphian.

> He would go off by himself to thrum a $2.50 guitar and sing the songs of the people--the soul music of the hills--or just listen to the blues being aired then on the black station in Memphis, WDIA. That music was too earthy, too sexy for nice white folks. But Elvis listened, to Arthur (Big Boy) Crudup and Kokomo Arnold and Arthur Gunter and Little Junior Parker and Chuck Willis, and later, when he started recording--mainly "country" stuff at first--for Sam Phillips at Sun Records, he cut his idols' music on the flip sides.[16]

Presley was a microcosm of other white youths who learned to appreciate the sound of Rhythm and Blues via the medium of radio broadcasting. "Once records were on the air, everybody could hear them, . . . And it is certainly true that the current rage for r and b followed the exposure of the music on the radio.[17]

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[16]Robert Kaiser, "The Rediscovery of Elvis," New York Times Magazine (October 11, 1970), p. 47.

[17]Lindsay Patterson (Ed.), International Library of Negro Life and History, The Negro in Music and Art (New York: Publishers Company Inc.).

Allen Freed Discovers Rhythm and Blues

By the time Allen Freed got into the wonderful world of color, Rhythm and Blues was well developed and black disc jockeys such as Nat Dee and Rufus Thomas of WDIA had well-established their rhythmic rhyming delivery, slipping tid-bits in between swinging lyrics and talking back to records or artists as they performed their song. Freed who stumbled upon r and b by chance found an exciting culture to draw from.

> It was in 1951. I had a program on WJW, a Cleveland station. The program music, believe it or not, was classical. A friend who owned a record shop suggested that I visit the store. He said I might see something unusual. I accepted the invitation and had one of the most thrilling experiences of my life. There were dozens of kids having a wonderful time listening to records of some of the people who were destined to become the very top performers in the idiom. . . .
>
> I listened. I heard the songs of such artists as La Verne Baker and Della Reese, two girls with real contralto voices who know how to tell a story. I heard the tenor saxophones of Red Prysock and Big Al Sears. I heard the blues-singing, piano-playing Ivory Joe Hunter. I wondered.
>
> I WONDERED for about a week. Then I went to the station manager and talked him into permitting me to follow my classical program with a rock 'n' roll party.[18]

Like WDIA and other stations in the South, the northern black community was swept by the delight of their own musical culture being aired on radio. But in the north a different

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[18]Allen Freed, "I Told You So," Downbeat, Vol. 23 (September 19, 1956), p. 44.

element entered the radio picture. Young whites were not discouraged from listening. Freed was white and there was no previous taboo reference to the music. Freed decided to bring in some Rhythm and Blues stars for a small dance. To his amazement 25,000 people showed. Available data indicates his promotion was mainly via his radio program. People in the music business began to take a more serious look at the already emerging popularity of Rhythm and Blues.

Throughout the country record stores at the request of young white buyers had already started selling Rhythm and Blues where none had been sold before. Juke box operators began reporting requests for Rhythm and Blues tunes from Pop locations which heretofore detested the music as low-down and noisy. Because Pop record stores began including Rhythm and Blues in their sales, the tunes began showing up on local Pop charts, and many Pop radio stations, which would by today's references be called middle of the road, began playing a Rhythm and Blues song here and there. Jerry Flatts, owner of Boston Record Distributors related the phenomenon to Variety in February of 1954 in the wake of a big hit by the late Roy Hamilton called "You'll Never Walk Alone":

> Rhythm and blues currently comprise about 10% of his sales--mostly to juke boxes--compared to less than 2% a year ago. His overall sales (in this category) show a jump of about 80%, and continue to build as juke box operators install the disks in locations that previously catered to strictly pop trade.
>
> Credit for awakened interest in this type disk is three-fold--the airshows of D.J.'s Symphony Sid and

> Art Tocker, the all out peddling job of rhythm and blues labels, and Flatts' staff, who plug the records to juke box operators.[19]

Rhythm and Blues record company owners took advantage of the potential expansion of their business and carefully aimed some of their artists for the Pop markets via radio.

> More of rhythm and blues output into the pop market is continuing to gain momentum. . . . Additional reports also point to an upbeat in the use of rhythm and blues platters by various D.J.'s who've been devoting their spins to pop releases.
>
> Several recording groups that were previously confined to the rhythm and blues market have broken out with tunes that have made both the rhythm and blues and pop listings. Among these are the Orioles and the Four Tunes. Former groups expanded into the pop field with their etching of 'Crying in the Chapel,' and have since been selling in the pop and rhythm and blues markets, while the latter combo is currently riding high pop-wise with Maire.
>
> Another outfit marking a strong bid for pop market acdeptance is the Dominos, who've recorded several standards including 'These Foolish Things' and 'Till the Real Thing Comes Along.' Also falling in line with rhythm and blues in roads to pop field was Buddy Morris' recent acquisition of the tune, 'Gee.' The number was picked up by the pubbery following its recording by the Crows on the Rama label.[20]

The Pop field was controlled almost exclusively by major record companies like Capitol, Columbia, and Decca. The Rhythm and Blues companies were in most cases small independent labels such as Aladdin, Black and White, Atlantic, Duke, and Jubilee. The larger companies began to combat what they felt was an intrusion into the Pop field money patch

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[19] Variety, Vol. 193 (February 10, 1954), p. 58.

[20] Ibid., p. 51.

by the smaller companies with black artists. As soon as a Rhythm and Blues record started to take off, the larger companies would release a white artist singing the same song with the nearest arrangement possible of the Rhythm and Blues recording. Covering was an old trick used by large record companies dating back at least to 1947 with the Rhythm and Blues song "Open the Door Richard" which was based on an old black vaudeville act by the late Dusty Fletcher. Time magazine carried a story on it back in 1947:

> Last week another one of those catchy tunes and goofy phrases fairly leapt across the nation. Every radio blared Open the Door, Richard! Five record versions were on sale, and 13 more (by Louis Jordan, Dick Haymes, the Pied Pipers, etc.) were being rushed to market. A quartet known as The Yokels sang it in Yiddish. Bing Crosby (an accessory after the fact), Bob Hope, Fred Allen and Bea Lillie had only to mention the word Richard on the air to put their studio audiences in stitches.[21]

Again in early 1953 Variety noted that the Pop field was covering Rhythm and Blues songs. Variety identified the musical source and unobtrusively pinpointed the Rhythm and Blues covering practice in its very early stages.

> The music stems from the jazz blues and the idiom of the lyrics uses the specialized jargon of the restricted Negro community. As a result, the 100% rhythm and blues platters sell only in the colored market although diluted interpretations have been seeping into the pop field with increasing frequency.[22]

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[21] Time, Vol. 49 (February 10, 1947), p. 42.

[22] Variety, Vol. 189 (February 25, 1953), p. 46.

A year and a half later the trade magazine did another article on the widening practice of covering Rhythm and Blues records. Although several covers of Rhythm and Blues appeared on the charts in 1954, one song carried almost the fervor as "Open the Door Richard." It was from the Atlantic record company production staff. Rhythm and Blues radio stations played the original "Sha-boom" by the Cords and Pop stations picked up the cover which was done by the Crew-Cuts. Rhythm and Blues hit yet another plateau.

> Since the click of 'Sha-boom' a flock of tunes have hit the market with nonsense titles. . . . All of these tunes have originated from the rhythm and blues field and the titles are based on vocal phrases used by singing combos.
>
> Current trend also spotlights once again the strength of rhythm and blues tunes into the general pop market. 'Sha-boom' was originally written and sliced by a rhythm and blues outfit, the Chords, for the Cat label and was turned into a pop hit by the Crew-Cuts for Mercury.
>
> Patti Page, also on Mercury followed Ruth Brown's 'O' What a Dream' side for Atlantic and the McGuire Sisters picked up a rhythm and blues number, 'Goodnight, Sweetheart, Goodnight,' and turned it into a pop hit. To a large extent the invasion of the rhythm and blues tunes has virtually driven the hillbilly numbers out of the pop field.[23]

The latter statement becomes significantly important later in this chapter when Rhythm and Blues lyrics are discussed.

In most instances the cover concept worked, and white oriented stations began playing the Pop artists singing

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[23] Variety, Vol. 196 (September 22, 1954), p. 43.

Rhythm and Blues songs which in many cases zoomed to the top of the Pop charts ahead of original Rhythm and Blues recordings.

Covers kept most Rhythm and Blues artists at bay for a while. Pop artists had found a new thing and since blacks, then as now, influenced very little control of radio or record companies, all they could do was check out the action. Rhythm and blues popularity however, continued to spread and mushroom. And out in the mid-west Allen Freed continued to increase Rhythm and Blues action with more successful package "star" shows.

In 1954 WINS radio station became interested in bringing Freed to New York as a fulltime jock to do his thing. Contrary to popular beliefs, Freed did not instantly begin referring to Rhythm and Blues as Rock and Roll once he got it on WJW in Cleveland. In the style of black D.J.'s he gave himself a nickname--Moondog. King of the Moondoggers, he called himself. The Rhythm and Blues shows were known as Moondog shows, and his audience as Moondoggers. However, according to Downbeat when Freed arrived in New York, another Moondog was already on the case, and he took Freed to court.

> 'The first Moondog' the Blind Broadway street musician who plays complex rhythmic percussion compositions in doorways and on recordings [Coral and Epic LP: Real name Louis Hardin].
>
> The second is a rhythm and blues disc jockey from Cleveland who will soon move onto WINS, New York. He not only calls himself Moondog but produces

> successful Moondog Balls starring rhythm and blues artists. His real name is Allen Freed.
>
> The suit asks that the disc jockey be injoined from further use of the name and asks for damages.[24]

Hardin won the court case and Freed was left without the gimmick name which had helped to attract so many black people back in Ohio. Freed had a trump card, he rationalized that if he called the music Rock and Roll, a reoccurring phrase in Rhythm and Blues songs, it would broaden the popularity of the music by making it even more acceptable to young whites.

Downbeat captured the birth of the r and b dichotomy radio and Allen Freed created:

> Moondog [Hardin, L.] has won the court fight to prevent rhythm and blues disc jockey Allen Freed [WINS] from using the 'Moondog' title. Freed, complying with the injunction, now calls his program the Rock and Roll Show.
>
> Freed meanwhile has achieved major audience impact in the New York area and will present his first rhythm and blues dance here January 14 and 15 at the St. Nicholas Arena. Freed's radio show is also growing in the number of cities it reaches. The syndicated program has been set for Kansas City, St. Louis, New Orleans, Jackson, Mississippi, and Flint, Michigan, with five other Southern markets in the offing.[25]

The power and impact of radio upon the growth and development of rhythm and blues flexed its strongest muscles when Freed took over the prime times slot at WINS. Leroy Carr said it best in the 30's with a song entitled

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[24]Ruth Cage, "Rhythm and Blues," Downbeat, Vol. 21 (August 25, 1954), p. 17.

[25]Downbeat, Vol. 22 (January 12, 1955), p. 2.

"The Night Time Is the Right Time." Freed turned New York upside down with his evening Rhythm and Blues program. Though no less than twelve Afro-Americans had shows, young whites were free to identify with Freed who was also white even though the music was black.

When Freed called Rhythm and Blues Rock and Roll, to whites, who had never before heard Rhythm and Blues, it was as if Rock and Roll had no past, only a present reference, and for most of them indeed they were hearing Rhythm and Blues for the first time. Just as Africans brought to America were renamed Negroes and thus cut off from a glorious heritage, the reference to Rhythm and Blues as Rock and Roll created a similarly confusing parallel. As both Africans and Negroes existed separately in the mind of America, Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll was also divided.

It must be remembered that New York City in 1954, was as it is today, the show business capital of the nation and whatever happened in the "city" became the vogue elsewhere in the country. Therefore, if New York said Rhythm and Blues is now changing its name to Rock and Roll, the rest of the nation agreed because New York was vogue and Allen Freed controlled the music popularity scene in New York. According to Hermon Schoenfield:

> The big beat in the pop music biz these days is rhythm and blues and the top name in the rhythm and blues field today is Allen Freed, the rock 'n' roll disk jockey who recently moved from Cleveland to WINS in New York, where he has become a major factor in metropolitan night time radio. Once

> limited to the Negro market, the rhythm and blues influence has now crossed all color lines into the general pop market.[26]

It was Christmas out of season for Rhythm and Blues; everybody seemed to embrace the Afro-American music. Freed was an important part of a total picture. Booking dates for Rhythm and Blues artists began increasing significantly. Billboard carried a story which indicated radio was majorly involved in the new plateau of Rhythm and Blues.

> The big news in the rhythm and blues personal appearance field for 1955 was the emergence of the deejay as a powerhouse promoter. At the same time, agencies happily noted an increase of niteries booking rhythm and blues talent, and prosperity continued in the one-night field.[27]

Freed was, however, only a part of a much larger Rhythm and Blues picture. As far back as the late forties when Nat Dee, Rufus Thomas and others were making WDIA a successful black-oriented broadcasting station, they used the "package show" idea with the charity Star-Lite Revue in the summer and Goodwill Revue in the fall. And in New York, prior to Freed's arrival Tommy Small, WWRL, had brought package Rhythm and Blues shows into Harlem's Appollo Theatre. Freed's side of the society was, however, much larger and with shrewd promotion and mass attention being given Rhythm and Blues, the package shows, as a sign of Rhythm and Blues popularity, became bigger than ever.

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[26]Hermon Schoenfield, Variety, Vol. 197 (January 19, 1955), p. 49.

[27]Billboard, Vol. 66 (February 4, 1956), p. 48.

> His first show last spring at the Brooklyn Paramount grossed the all-time house record of $125,000, while his second show at the same theatre later that year piled up another record breaking gross of $155,000, and his Christmas weekend bill at the Academy Theatre, New York, pulled in another $125,000.[28]

Whether a Rhythm and Blues fan caught an Allen Freed show or Tommy "Mr. Jive" Small show, the excitement was always genuine. The stars, pioneers of music revolution, were a who's who of now forgotten but great contributors to the now sound of the what's happening generation of today. Roy Hamilton shook the music scene with "You'll Never Walk Alone" and later with a follow-up "Unchained Melody". Bo Diddly was working with "I'm a Man"; Fats Domino who had been on the Rhythm and Blues charts since 1950 rocked everybody with "Ain't It A Shame". Joe Turner, the man from Kansas who started male vocal Blues swinging in front of heavy rhythmic jazz bands, gained tremendous success with "Shake, Rattle, and Roll". The Clovers made the charts with unforgetable "Lovey Dovey", and the sweet tender sound of the Spaniels' "Goodnight Sweetheart" echoed across auditoriums and shacks unprepared for the Rhythm and Blues explosion. The Five Royals pleaded "Help Me Somebody"; Faye Adams had a solution with her big hit "Shake a Hand"; and the Cardinals lamented "The Door Is Still Open".

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[28] Ibid., p. 48.

Rhythm and Blues, influenced by powerful radio network programming and WINS with Allen Freed, was now being referred to by many as Rock and Roll. Despite the semantic differential, Rhythm and Blues artists met the challenge of increased popularity demand, and Ruth Cage writing for Downbeat captured every movement of the Rhythm and Blues explosion.

> Working 32 days straight may be viewed as a harrowing experience even under sedentary conditions. --Despite such a schedule though, a bunch of rhythm and blues stars seem not too unhappy these days-- the reasons probably are loot and fantastic public acceptance.[29]

The tremendous popularity spread of the music was not to be denied very long among any faction in the music or broadcasting industry. When the dust finally settled on 1954, Billboard discovered that Rhythm and Blues songs and artists had captured 8 of the top 25 best selling positions in the Pop market. The 1955 picture was even better:

> But for an overall look at the phenomenon, illuminating insight is provided by a rundown of tunes, which won awards from Broadcast Music, Inc., for heavy action during 1955. Of the 28 awards given out by the licensing organization, no less than 16 were rhythm and blues derived.
>
> Arc Music, a publishing operation involving the principals of Chess and Checker Records, had 'Maybellene' and 'Sincerely'; Lois Music, an affiliate of Kind and De Luxe, won with 'Rock Love' and 'Seventeen'; Progressive Music, the publishing arm of Atlantic Records, placed with 'Tweedle Dee'; Savoy Music, an affiliate of the diskery bearing the same name, had 'Don't Be Angry' in partnership with Republic Music.

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[29]Ruth Cage, Downbeat, Vol. 22 (March 9, 1954), p. 9.

> Also, Lion Publishing (Peacock and Duke Records) won an award with 'Pledging My Love,' Dootsie Williams Publications (Dootone Records) with 'Earth Angel,' Tollie Music (Vee Jay Records) with 'At My Front Door,' Commodore Music (Imperial Records) with 'Ain't That a Shame?' and 'I Hear You Knockin'' and Modern Music (Modern and RPM Records) with 'Dance with Me Henry.'[30]

From a social perspective the breakthrough of Rhythm and Blues into the Pop market represented a most significant precedent in the American society. The record industry segregated the music in the 1920's by clearly labeling it "Race" music. That racist tradition was being reversed and young white Americans of the 1950's turned the tide in America. Radio was the vehicle through which most of them discovered the Afro-American music.

After 1955 it became apparent to the power structure of the music world that Rhythm and Blues was not going to retreat from its newly conquered territory. In February of 1956 Billboard, in an editorial, officially welcomed Rhythm and Blues into the mainstream of American heritage:

> One of the most meaningful developments in years on the music-record scene has been the mass acceptance of rhythm and blues--its emergence from narrow confines and its impact on the broad field of pop music. The past year has been crucial in this development. During 1955 it became apparent that notwithstanding the opposition of entrenched facets of the music business, this exciting form of musical expression, together with its notable body of artists, could no longer be relegated to a relatively unimportant niche.

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[30]"Rhythm and Blues Spreads Wing," Billboard, Vol. 68 (February 4, 1956), p. 55.

> In the last analysis, it was, of course, the kid with the 89 cents in his pocket who cast the deciding vote. He considered the repertoire, listened to the imaginative arrangements of the artists and repertoire men, critically weighed the merits of the artists--and found them all good.
>
> We have, in the singles business, a mass of repertoire and artists, writers and arrangers whose output is a constant spur to virtually the entire field. Recapitulations of the top tunes of the year, the top records of the year, the top publishers of the year--all of them carried recently in The Billboard --bear out the one theme: Namely, this is rhythm and blues' greatest era. The idiom has come along with such overwhelming force as to leave no doubt of its validity as a major contribution to the American musical scene.
>
> The record business thrives on excitement, on action. It is our earnest hope that rhythm and blues shall never lose its brightness; may the well-spring of talent never dry up; may the aggressive labels, distributors and dealers never lose their magic touch since many benefits have accrued from rhythm and blues' coming of age. For the artists in the field it has meant artistic fulfillment and economic well-being. Much the same may be said of the a & r men, arrangers, distributors and dealers--all of whom never lost faith. For the pop field, or let us say for those in the pop field who were sharp enough to recognize the full significance of the impact, it meant an infusion of brightness and excitement which did the singles business much good at the consumer and artistic levels.
>
> The horizons for rhythm and blues have never been broader, the aspect never sunnier. From the mass point of view, it is no longer in the category of the unproved. It is impossible to forecast all the vagaries of public taste, but it would seem to us that talent coupled with belief in one's product is a well-nigh unbeatable combination. Let the field go forward on this basis. And, of course, let us not forget the kid with the 89 cents.[31]

Whatever will eventually be written about Allen Freed, he was prophetic in 1954 concerning the broad acceptance

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[31] Ibid., p. 54.

of rhythm and blues on his show by referring to the music as Rock and Roll. It is doubtful that Freed was attempting to create a dicotomy within the music or that he anticipated the tremendous impact New York City radio would have upon the rest of the nation. Certainly other important variables such as record company promotion impacted upon the music of black America, but the phrase Rock and Roll, taken from Rhythm and Blues song lyrics certainly had a magic attraction to young white Americans in the mid-fifties, and it all started on radio.

Rhythm and Blues Criticism

The popularity of Rhythm and Blues was not, of course, welcomed pervasively in America. In some instances it was not so much a dislike for Rhythm and Blues music as a protection of vested interests. Broadcast Music Incorporated licensed most Rhythm and Blues music which was taking the country by storm, and the Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers may have been stablizing their hit songs by raising some questions about Rhythm and Blues lyrics.

This also appears to be somewhat the situation surrounding Rhythm and Blues and Country and Western music. Country and Western music emerged onto the Pop market scene in the late forties and very early fifties and maintained a steady increase of popularity until Rhythm and Blues seemingly overshadowed it in the mid fifties. Not only did

Rhythm and Blues impact the pop market but Ben Grevatt, writing for Billboard, indicated that black music also caused considerable influence again in the Country and Western field:

> While this acceptance in the pop field shows no signs of diminishing it is also noteworthy that rhythm and blues is having an increasing impact on the country and western field. Here, an increasing amount of sides are being cut using rhythm and blues-flavored material. Much of it is in the blues category and in a sense this goes back to an older country and western era when much of the repertoire was in the nature of folk blues. Jimmie Rogers was typical of this period, and country singers have never lost the touch.[32]

It can not be accurately determined whether ASCAP or any Country and Western persons initiated the crusade against Rhythm and Blues. However, there is evidence which suggests some people in Country and Western music felt threatened by the emergence of Rhythm and Blues popularity which had overshadowed the popularity Country and Western music had increasingly attained since 1950.

Randy Blake, a Chicago disc jockey on WJJD in 1955, did not appreciate the new influence of Rock and Roll upon Country and Western music. In January of that year Downbeat printed an article written by Blake who warned Country and Western radio to keep their business pure and stop the panic to Rhythm and Blues music:

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[32]Ben Grevatt, Billboard, Vol. 68 (February 4, 1956), p. 54.

> True, there had been an increase in sales in the rhythm and blues field. But the same things had happened before, only in other fields--for instance, in the country music field following the advent of Tennessee Waltz. When that happened, did the rhythm and blues people attempt to turn out a bevy of Hank Williamses? No. Why? Simply because they had better sense.
>
> All the time country music enjoyed its greatest period of prosperity, those in the rhythm and blues field went right along in their own department, catering to their own audience, attempting to increase their own benefits by turning out a better product for persons who wanted rhythm and blues. A sound policy that paid off.
>
> But when the recent rhythm and blues increase came, all too many in the country music business readily abandoned their own field in an attempt to jump on the other fellow's bandwagon. Suddenly we were deluged with records by country music artists that were not country music--gosh-awful, brazen attempts at something these artists can't do and never will be able to do.[33]

The increase of this trend continued, however, and although the majority of Country and Western jocks did not want to play Rhythm and Blues flavored songs by Country artists they responded to them if they were requested. This widespread Rhythm and Blues characteristic in Country and Western music coupled with Rhythm and Blues euphanism--Rock and Roll led many people to inaccurately conclude that Rock and Roll was formed with a combination of Pop, Rhythm and Blues, and Country and Western. It simply was not true. Country and Western artists were more capable of performing Rhythm and Blues due to the strong influence of Country Blues upon Country and Western music.

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[33]Randy Blake, "Disc Jockey Urges Return to Spinning Only Country Music," Downbeat, Vol. 22 (January 26, 1955) p. 19.

The Country and Western reaction to lyrics which first appeared during the 1954 Country and Western D.J.'s convention, was only a foreshadow to the fact that the honeymoon popularity novelty of Rock and Roll was over. The lyrics of Rhythm and Blues songs were challenged as unfit for air play. This initially appeared to be the death of Rock and Roll, but the campaign only helped Rhythm and Blues check its questionable cultural expressions and broaden its toehold.

The number one Rhythm and Blues song in June, 1954 was "Work with Me Annie" by the Midnighters. It left Rock and Roll wide open for criticism:

> Work with me Annie and get it
> While the gettin' is good, so good.

The group, led by Hank Ballard who later wrote "The Twist," used, as all black groups did, the African work-song method of call and response between the leader and the workers. As the leader pleaded with Annie to work, the group pretended to respond as Annie.

> Leader--Work with me Annie
>
> Group--Uh ummm, uh ummm
>
> Leader--Work with me Annie
>
> Group--Uh ummm, uh ummm
>
> Leader--Work with me Annie
> And get while the gettin' is good
>
> Group--So good, so good, so good

As one black historian once said: "Everything went on in that cabin; life, death, and all that's in between."

Whether the reader agrees or not--"Work with Me Annie" is valid. Radio, however, did not consider the song valid or at least acceptable. Though it is unfair to say the Midnighters caused the attack on Rhythm and Blues lyrics, it is safe to conclude they did not help the situation at all. And if "Work with Me Annie" did not serve as a target, "Sexy Ways" by the Five Royals is a sure winner. No lyrics are essential to demonstrate the waves of panic even the title must have caused back in the winter of 1954-55.

By March of 1955 the attack of Rhythm and Blues lyrics was in high gear. Once again radio was at the center of the situation. Variety, and other trade magazines, carried articles which operated on Rhythm and Blues:

> The most astonishing thing about the current craze for rhythm and blues records and their accompaning leer-ics is that it was ever permitted to happen.
>
> Their leerical concoctions belong in the more dimlit honkytonks and should never be heard on the air.
>
> The responsibility for this state of affairs must fall on the recording company which permits its business to be fouled by marketing filth. It also falls equally heavily on the D.J. who is actually the liasion or link between the record company and the public.[34]
>
> Between 40% and 50% of rhythm and blues disks submitted make the trash basket. That's according to two of Mobile's leading disk jocks. 'Filth in both title and words makes their destruction a must,' say Happy Wainwright, Night Prowler on station WARG.[35]

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[34]Jimmy Kennedy, Variety, Vol. 22 (March 9, 1955), p. 49.

[35]Variety, Vol. 198 (March 30, 1955), p. 54.

> A war between N. Y. radio indie WINS and Bob Haymes, songwriter and WCBS deejay, has ended in the 'unofficial' banning of Haymes' composition on WINS. WINS' Chieftain Bob Leder accused Haymes of making wanton and capricious attacks about teenagers who listen to rhythm and blues which is a favored brand of music on the radio indie.
>
> Haymes also stated he received about 100 of what he called drop dead letters from listeners of Alon [sic] Rock n' Roll Freed, Chief WINS rhythm and blues exponent.[36]

The letter was written to Nick Kenny of the New York Daily Mirror and called rhythm and blues:

> . . . poor music, badly recorded, with lyrics that are at best in poor taste . . . and at worst obscene . . . this trend in music (and I apologize for calling it music) is affecting the ideas and the lives of our children.[37]

Freed read the letter over the air. The attack on rhythm and blues was nationwide and on the west coast the action was just as hot and intense:

> Zeke Manners, KFWB, Hollywood disc jockey who broke into print recently, after taking a verbal swing at Peter Potter's anti-stand on rhythm and blues records, is being shunned in the same issue by the 70 other deejays working this area.
>
> 'Manners send out letters to fellow jocks: 'It is my idea that the poor material can be weeded out and discarded, thus leaving a place for good rhythm and blues records which could be broadcast for the pleasure of those who enjoy this type of music.'[38]

The KFWB DT received no replies.

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[36] Variety, March 9, 1955, p. 44.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Variety, March 30, 1955, p. 54.

Rhythm and Blues lyrics via radio were ahead of their time by at least a decade. Today the lyrics of the questionable Rhythm and Blues songs would probably not be noticed as unusual. Sex in the mid-fifties simply was expressed as Afro-Americans chose to tell it. Afro-American culture simply overwhelmed many white Americans of the larger society.

There were some people in the music business, however, who made objective observations about the over publicized lyrics. Rhythm and Blues was, of course, the initial target of raw lyrics, but once the finger was pointed at Rhythm and Blues lyrics, the entire music industry found itself looking seriously at lyrics radio had been broadcasting for years within the dominant culture.

> If nothing else is accomplished, at least the music business has been made aware of the leer-ics.
>
> Actually, the object of all leer-ists . . . has always been to get as close to the Main Object as possible, without stating it and or cleaning it up by marrying 'em off in the last line. The current crop of rock n' rollers is not beating around the bush, but without condoning 'em, it's at least a less hypocritical approach.
>
> Maybe it is coincidence that Cole Porter's 'All of You' plug song, out of his new smash 'Silk Stockings' is now heard over the radio as 'the sweet and pure of you' instead of its original 'I'd like to take a tour of you (the north and south of you, etc.). Even as ethereal an ode as Hammerstein's 'All the Things You Are' ('that moment devine when all the things you are, are mine') is refined 'All of you.'[39]

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[39] Variety, March 9, 1955, p. 49.

In retrospect, perhaps the funniest outgrowth of Rhythm and Blues (Rock and Roll) criticism was the banning action proposed by the white Citizens Council in 1956:

> Asa E. (Ace) Carter, self appointed leader of the North Alabama Citizens Council, said last week that 'bebop', 'rock and roll', and all 'Negro music' are designed to force 'Negro culture' on the South. 'Individual councils have formed action committees to call on owners of establishments with rock and roll music on their juke boxes,' he said. 'We also intend to see the people who sponsor the music, and the people who promote Negro bands for teenagers.' Rock and roll music, he said, 'is the basic heavy beat of Negroes. It appeals to the very base of man, brings out the base in man, brings out the animalism and vulgarity.'[40]

The attention drawn to Rhythm and Blues lyrics, being broadcast over radio, and initiated as an instrument of death to Rhythm and Blues, actually served to compromise that small area of Afro-American expression which the larger society found unacceptable at the time and made the music universally compatible. As far back as 1954 the late Chuck Willis, a brilliant African-American song writer, stated cleaner lyrics as one of the key reasons for the rise in the popularity of Rhythm and Blues: "With popularity has naturally come profit, and reputable companies don't have to trade on off-beat sex to pay the rent."[41]

Virtually every radio station playing Rhythm and Blues (Rock and Roll) records made efforts to ease the heat of

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[40]Newsweek, April 23, 1956, p. 32.

[41]"Blues Getting Cleaner," Downbeat, Vol. 21 (November 3, 1954), p. 21.

bad publicity. Many stations banned the music. More important, however, was the result of broadcastings pressure on record companies and publishers to regulate themselves and eventually set codes for music intended for air use.

In Boston, Sherm Feller of WVDA headed a group of area deejays to draw up a code to regulate the airing of records aimed at eliminating the lyric problem and widespread unfavorable publicity.

Critic Abel Green discovered that BMI was "undertaking a screening process," as close to the source as possible in an attempt to halt unfavorable lyrics via a team of three representative-intra company groups of five, or fifteen in all. As Abel saw it, some very important questions needed answering:

> Whose responsibility is what? Where shall there be control in the rhythm and blues stuff. What yardstick of measurement should apply? If recorded, allegedly for some consumption does it perforce mean it shouldn't be broadcast? Is a daytime deejay's programming uniform with the type of stuff a post-midnight deejay broadcasts?[42]

Though it may appear through historical records that trade magazines were attacking Rhythm and Blues lyrics, Afro-American D.J.'s apparently appreciated the public airing of the issue. Downbeat covered their historic meeting of August 1956.

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[42]Abel Green, Variety, March 9, 1955, p. 49.

> National Jazz Rhythm and Blues D.J.'s Association convened at Smalls Paradise in Harlem in August. Tommy Smalls in WWRL as host. D.J.'s adopted a code of operation and 'went on record with a vote of thanks to the trade publications for helping counteract the bad publicity received by Rhythm and Blues music. . . .'[43]

Radio brought Rhythm and Blues in reach of a greater segment of the public than ever dreamed possible by those who pioneered the music. Though radio exposed and helped prepare Rhythm and Blues as the music conqueror of the free world under the euphemism of Rock and Roll, two other media also significantly impacted upon the music: motion pictures and television.

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[43] Downbeat, September 19, 1956, p. 20.

CHAPTER III

MOTION PICTURES

Louis Jordan and Early Rhythm and Blues Films

World War II brought many black musicians together and the music they played overseas attracted the attention of some important people. One group of black soldiers fighting in the South Pacific formed a group called the Jungle Band. They were so popular the mayor of San Francisco turned the entire city out to help greet their arrival home following the war, and for a brief period a fad existed for camouflaged "jungle suits." Few bands, if any, however, surpassed the popularity of the stateside band of Louis Jordan and the Tympany Five. In the mid-1940's Jordan, a saxophonist was perhaps the most popular black entertainer in America. Not only did he toot a mean sax, he danced, sang, and cracked jokes. All of this lead to immortality on the silver screen, Jordan made movies.

For twenty-five years a few small independent motion picture producers had attempted to corner off the Afro-American market with studios in New York, Chicago, and Dallas, Texas. Far removed from Hollywood their shoe string production budgets ranging from $40,000 to $60,000

per picture, mostly musicals, captured the new rhythmic blues music of the 1940's. Their movies played to slightly over 600 theaters, most of which were located throughout the south. By 1946 Louis Jordan had become the best guarantee to pack those houses:

> Last week, the Negro film industry reached a new high-water mark with the release of 'Beware,' an Astor Pictures production starring Louis Jordan, one of Decca's most lucrative recorders, Valerie Black, former leading lady of the stage hit 'Anna Lucasta,' and Milton Woods, the 'colored Basil Rathbone.' The picture cinches Jordan's reputation as a great melody maker, but catchy tunes aside, 'Beware' adds up to 55 minutes of heavy-handed melodrama inexpertly directed.
>
> The presence of Jordan, who has just made his third personal appearance at the Paramount Theater in New York, assures 'Beware's' box-office success. The most successful Negro film to date was 'Caldonia,' another Astor production with Jordan and his Tympany Five. Whether Jordan will confine his talents to all-Negro movies or follow the golden trail to Hollywood remains to be seen. Sultry Lena Horne's rapid rise to riches was furthered by her performances in 'Boogie-Woogie Dream,' a musical produced by Jack Goldberg, sometimes tagged the 'Abe Lincoln of Harlem.'
>
> Goldberg, who has put out 25 Negro films in as many years, owns Hollywood Pictures Corp., an Astor rival in the Negro feature world. Both Astor and Hollywood studios are in New York. So are the studios of Quigley and Leonard and Toddy Pictures. Jack's brother Bert operates Harlemwood Pictures in Dallas.
>
> The sixth of the largest Negro film producers is All American News of Chicago, which since 1942 has ground out more than 185 newsreels stressing Negro activities. Its 24-hour coverage now compares with that of Pathé, Movietone, and Paramount. Its latest venture is the 'Negro Achievement Series'--documentaries combining news shots and reenactments in the style of 'The March of Time.'[1]

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[1] Newsweek, Vol. 28 (July 8, 1946), p. 85.

Many of the independent Rhythm and Blues record companies were formed after the Kansas City happenin', World War II, and the initial spread of Rhythm and Blues music. Jubilee Records which recorded the Orioles was not founded until 1948; Atlantic, 1948; Herald/Ember which recorded the Nutmegs and Joe Morris with Faye Adams, 1952; Chess, 1947; Vee Jay, 1953; Imperial which recorded Fats Domino, 1947; Peacock which eventually brought Duke, 1949; Dot, 1951; and Excello in Nashville, 1953; and not to be overlooked are those companies founded during or just after World War II: Appollo, 1942; Savoy, 1942; King, 1945; Aladdin, 1945; Modern, 1945; and several other small independent companies of earlier formation such as Swing Time.

Charlie Gillett points out that there was definitely a period when few large companies recorded music aimed at the black communities:

> By the end of the thirties, the major companies had a solid hold on the complete market for records, but during the war they yielded the specialist 'race' and 'hillbilly' markets when forced to make economy cuts by the government ruling that customers must trade in an old record every time they bought a new one (so that the material could be melted down and used again). By the time the war ended and the majors could turn their attention back to the small markets, the independents had established a firm hold on both 'race' and 'hillbilly'.[2]

It therefore seems highly probable that film was very instrumental in spreading the popularity of Rhythm and Blues.

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[2]Charlie Gillett, The Sound of the City (New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1970), pp. 7-8.

During the recording lull the most popular recording personality was Louis Jordan and the music he played was rhythmic blues. Few people had television sets in 1946 and fulltime radio programming for black people was not begun until 1948. In addition to records, motion pictures impacted heavily upon the early spread of Rhythm and Blues music, and the music existed in motion pictures as a primary source of entertainment for Afro-Americans, but certainly for any theater that wished to rent the films.

As late as 1954, before the release of the movie Blackboard Jungle, Jack Goldberg was still producing musicals for motion pictures. Unlike the dramas Astor produced with Louis Jordan, Studio Films produced a series of variety films which captured the top Rhythm and Blues and Jazz performers of the day.

> Studio Films is now marketing a new series of 3 half hour musical shows which are being emceed by Willie Bryant, the self-styled 'Mayor of Harlem.' The variety show features some of the top Negro entertainers doing their singing and dancing specialties. Among the variety talent are Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Count Basie, Sarah Vaughn, Ruth Brown, Amos Millium, the Orioles, Coles, and Atkins, and many other such top Negro artists. A great deal of interest has already been manifested in the series.[3]

When Rhythm and Blues began to explode on a national basis in 1955, Studio Films released two pictures with the expressed purpose of assisting the growing interest in the music. The releases coincided perfectly with the bomb

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[3]Billboard, Vol. 66 (September 4, 1954), p. 6.

radio station WINS dropped on New York City in the person of Allen Freed.

> Rock and roll music and talent is getting a tremendous national build-up via the feature film, 'Rock 'n' Roll Revue,' produced by Studio Films, Inc., and already booked into more than 1,000 houses. Featuring top talent, such as Nat Cole, Lionel Hampton, Duke Ellington, the Clovers, Ruth Brown, Larry Darnell, Dinah Washington, Joe Turner, Willie Bryant, the Delta Rhythm Boys and Martha Davis, the film opens in New York October 24 in approximately 70 theaters. These include 28 RKO houses, 10 Skouras houses, eight Brandt theaters, three houses of the J & J Circuit and three of the Randforce chain. The film was released in April. . . .
>
> Studio Films is already booking another similar film, even more heavily flavored with rhythn and blues talent than the 'Rock 'n' Roll Revue.' This is called the "Rhythm and Blues Revue' and includes Count Basie, Joe Turner, Sarah Vaughan, Faye Adams, Lionel Hampton, Amos Milburn, Nat Cole, Ruth Brown, the Larks, the Delta Rhythm Boys, Martha Davis, Paul (Hucklebuck) Williams, Willie Bryant and others.[4]

The impact of motion pictures can also be traced back to the present boom of Country and Western music. Originally captured and further popularized in western movies by Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, and other Country Western singers in the 30's, the music in the early fifties was overshadowed by Rhythm and Blues. In the mid-50's Country and Western forces organized and attempted a comeback through the screen according to a story appearing in Billboard in 1955 entitled "Country and Western Renaissance Due Via Screen Push."

> Country and western music may be due for a remaissance judging by the bigtime Hollywood country and western musicals in the works for this year. MGM's long delayed film bio on the late Hank Williams'

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[4]"Rock and Roll Revue," Billboard, Vol. 67 (October 8, 1955), p. 17.

> life is finally underway, with Jeff Richards reportedly tagged for the lead, while Paramount is looking for properties suitable, to showcase Elvis Presley, who was signed by the studio a couple of months ago.[5]

Similarly, though there was widespread interest in Rhythm and Blues, the music did not become powerfully popular among members of the larger society until it was captured in film aimed primarily at white audiences.

Blackboard Jungle and Rock Around the Clock

In 1950 Jerry Wexler, now an executive producer for Atlantic Records, wrote an article for Saturday Review describing five areas of musical expressions and categories comprising the world of vocal Rhythm and Blues.

> Vocal blues are subdivided into the saccharine blues ballad (Charles Brown, The Orioles); the insinuating double-entendre blues (Little Esther, Amos Milburn); the shout blues (Wynonie Harris, Roy Brown); the primitive Southern blues (John Lee Looker, Smokey Hogg); the torch blues (Dinah Washington, Ruth Brown), and still other subtypes.[6]

The shout category is a perfect description of Bill Haley who, as Carl Belz said in his work The Story of Rock, tended to shout his lyrics rather than cleanly vocalize them.

The shout category is also descriptive of Joe Turner, affectionately called "the boss of the blues."

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[5]"Rock and Roll Country Talent," Billboard, Vol. 68 (May 12, 1956), p. 12.

[6]Jerry Wexler, "Rhythm and Blues in 1950," Saturday Review, Vol. 38 (June 24, 1950), p. 49.

> Turner, born in Kansas City, Missouri, May 18, 1911, was the first important blues band vocalist associated with swing bands of the Southwest territories. A bartender in various speakeasies in his hometown, Turner got into the habit of singing with the musicians who played in the spots where he worked, and became well known as a result of his association with one of them, pianist Pete Johnson, with whom he appeared at the famous 1938 Carnegie Hall 'Spirituals to Swing' concert. After a period of several years away from the limelight, Turner reasserted his mastery of the urban blues approach with a strong series of recordings in the early 1950's, scoring a great success with his 1954 hit 'Shake, Rattle and Roll,'[7]

Bill Haley, originally from Detroit, led a Country and Western group which covered "Shake, Rattle and Roll" for the Pop market. Initially known as the Saddlemen, they changed their name to Bill Haley and the Comets when they began performing Rhythm and Blues material around 1953. Like the wailing bands of blacks such as Lionel Hampton, Haley's band employed movement and body action. They imitated to the extent of playing saxophone while lying on the stage. More important, however, Haley and the Comets were successful with their imitations. Their 1954 cover of Turner's "Shake, Rattle and Roll" sold into the millions. It is not surprising that publishers were sometimes deeply involved in covers.

Some publishers attempted to capitalize on covers by feeding a hot song to a Pop artist or company in order to get more money from the larger white market after breaking the song in the Rhythm and Blues market. Not every cover

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[7]Pete Welding, Urban Blues, Vol. 1, Imperial LM 94002.

or Rhythm and Blues songs released with expectations of being a hit recording materialized. One such Rhythm and Blues song was "Rock Around the Clock" recorded by Sonny Dae in 1954, and covered by Bill Haley and his Comets. Haley's recording did not become very popular, but when Loew's filmed the motion picture Blackboard Jungle, they selected Haley's cover as the soundtrack song. The movie which made a star out of Sidney Poitier and starred Ann Francis, Glenn Ford, and Vic Morrow also made a hit out of the song "Rock Around the Clock" and a legend out of Haley.

Some critics claimed that the movie was not painting a true picture of large urban schools. Many said that the movie's Rhythm and Blues theme song "Rock Around the Clock" presented a new kind of music to many people and associated, as Freed called it, "rock and roll," with violence and juvenile delinquency.

In May of 1955, Ebony, documenting the rise to fame of Sidney Poitier probably best described the film.

> To the uninitiated, Blackboard Jungle depicts a school that is almost a house of horrors. A teacher is beaten up and left unconscious in an alley, his pregnant wife receives notes and phone calls hinting that he is running around with another woman, a pupil attempts to rape a young female teacher and another attacks Glenn Ford with a knife.
>
> Actually, producer Pandro S. Berman and Director Richard Brooks (he also directed Take the High Ground and The Last Time I Saw Paris) made an intensive study of juvenile delinquency in various big cities in preparation for making the movie. The events in Blackboard Jungle are similar to many that happen in 'problem' high schools.

> Sidney Poitier has one of the most sympathetic roles in the movie. It is Poitier who finally helps the teacher win out in his attempt to reform his delinquent pupils.[8]

The film, also marketed early in 1955, coincided perfectly with the emerging interest in Rhythm and Blues and acquisition by New York City radio station WINS of Allen Freed from Cleveland who instantly began calling Rhythm and Blues, Rock and Roll. Via New York's vogue setting power and Freed's instant popularity the false name was the description under which critics chose to classify "Rock Around the Clock" which eventually sold a million copies in America, and spread abroad where it sold over 300,000 copies under the name of Rock and Roll. Whereas radio had given Rhythm and Blues national exposure, motion pictures became responsible for the international impact of the Afro-American music traveling under the name Rock and Roll.

Blackboard Jungle also had more of a national or unified impact on America than did radio. Haley's cover of "Rock Around the Clock" was made a giant of a record via the film. By drawing attention to the music through the film production, Rhythm and Blues captured, for the first time, the number one spot on the Pop charts in America as well as England. The motion picture medium, tied the music together on a national scale. Radio failed to accomplish this because stations playing Rhythm and Blues served only regional areas.

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[8]"Blackboard Jungle," Ebony, Vol. 5 (May, 1955) p. 87.

Allen Freed's "Rock and Roll Party" on the CBS radio network was aired after the release of Blackboard Jungle, and Willie (the mayor of Harlem) Bryant's ABC radio network program was aired in May of 1955. Both were half-hour shows.

The exposure of "Rock Around the Clock" in Blackboard Jungle caused uncontrollable emotions in some theaters as witnessed by the disturbance at Princeton University in late spring of 1955. These emotional outbursts only foreshadowed the response this Afro-American music would stimulate almost worldwide. Keeping in mind that these events were occurring in 1955, it becomes comprehensible that most young white Americans had little experience in Afro-American musical culture.

The Rhythm and Blues musicals of the great Louis Jordan which had been filmed during the forties were comedies such as Caldonia and Beware and they never reached most whites even though Jordan is credited with breaking racial barriers when he played the west coast in the late forties and early fifties. Segregation prevented general distribution of his films and they played mostly to neighborhood theaters in the small Afro-American market. But it must be pointed out that the general American public in 1955 regarded Negro identity with about the same attitude as school integration today. Therefore only a white group such as Haley's could have reached the masses of young whites because of race identity despite the fact that the music was still Rhythm and Blues.

In a Playboy interview Ray Charles responded to a similar observation on identity:

> White kids will never feel about Muddy Waters or B. B. King the way they feel about the Rolling Stones or Blood, Sweat and Tears. They've got to have entertainers from their own race to idolize, it seems. Negroes have been singing rhythm and blues, or soul music, as it's called today, since before I was born. But white mothers weren't going to let their daughters swoon over those black cats, so they never got widely known. Then along came Elvis Presley and the white kids had a hero. All that talk about rock 'n' roll began then, but Black musicians started to get a little play, too. When the English boys came on the scene, they admitted where they got their inspiration and that caused even more interest in the real blues. I'm glad to see these youngsters doing our music. It enhances the guys who originated it, the same as one of those symphony orchestras enhances Beethoven.[9]

Without question, however, Bill Haley and the Comets were the most popular white performers of Rhythm and Blues in 1954 and early 1955. Haley stated in Downbeat, 1956, that his group had six hits prior to their "Rock Around the Clock" soundtrack. The song was strictly Rhythm and Blues and the performers were white and sounded white. When young whites began embracing the soundtrack, they were in a sense accepting another culture's music and rejecting their parents' baritone idols. As Charlie Gillett wrote in his book The Sound of the City:

> By late 1955, Tony Bennett, and Perry Como were as obsolete as Bunny Berigan and Will Bradley, so far as the self-consciously youthful adolescents were concerned. The film version of Blackboard Jungle was a large success and much discussed movie. What the

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[9]Playboy Magazine, Vol. 17 (March, 1970), p. 69.

> presence in it of the music of Bill Haley, rather than of Tony Bennett and Perry Como, helped to establish in the minds of both adolescents and adults was the connection between rock and roll and teen-age rebellion.[10]

Allen Freed also had no illusions about the symbolism Rhythm and Blues represented to young whites. In a story he personally wrote for Downbeat in September, 1955, Freed said: "But I think the reason that rock and roll is popular, with kids is that it represents a safe form of rebellion against authority."[11] Whereas "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" was a novelty, restless youth associated with "Rock Around the Clock" became an outright rebellion in the eyes of many white parents.

Partly because of society's ostracism of black American accomplishments and partly due to the identity factor mentioned by Ray Charles, young whites perceived the music in the film by Haley as something new. From the white perspective Haley emerged from Blackboard Jungle as king of a new type of music which from the black perspective, was not valid. Even though blacks bought the well-produced record, Haley was not the best Rhythm and Blues performer. Haley could not surpass other Rhythm and Blues artists such as Joe Turner, Little Richard, the Midnighters, the Clovers, Bo Diddley, Fats Domino, the Drifters, Etta James, or B. B. King; but his side of the world happened to be larger.

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[10]Gillett, loc. cit., p. 20.

[11]Freed, loc. cit., p. 44.

Hollywood ignored a ten year or more legacy of Rhythm and Blues artists and circumvented all of the accomplishments and talent blacks had to offer.

The Sonny Dae cover, however, became so popular via Blackboard Jungle, Sam Katzman contracted Haley to star in a Rhythm and Blues musical released by Columbia Pictures. The picture which billed Bill Haley and his Comets as the main attraction recognized other Rhythm and Blues performers; Freddy and the Bellhops and the now famous Platters as well. "Rock Around the Clock" not only brought money into the pockets of movie makers, it opened wide the modern rhythm box of America's African descendents and unleashed a beat upon European oriented culture which rocked its unemotional foundation.

Eighty per cent of the movie was devoted to music: "See You Later, Alligator" and the "Great Pretender" by Haley and the Platters respectively were big hits. Altogether the movie had 17 songs which left the audience breathless. What time was left to the story line attempted to show how a band worked its way to top popularity.

Rhythm and Blues Films

The motion picture box office in the mid-50's, like radio in the late 40's and very early 50's, was hit hard by television. In late December of 1956 Hollywood was claiming that "Rock Around the Clock" had grossed eight times

its negative cost in the world market. As reported by Variety, Rhythm and Blues musicals became the brief savior of Hollywood box office slump.

> In recent months exhibitors have clamored for film fare that would appeal to teenage audiences whom they regard as their best customers. They called for pictures with built in teen appeal; that is based on subjects that arouse the interest of youngsters. In this category rock 'n' roll figures prominently.
>
> The teen films, many of them obvious 'quickies' and 'cheapies' made to take advantage of the market demand, succeed in fulfilling a theaterman's prime purpose--bringing customers to the box office.[12]

Sam Katzman had his finger resting comfortably on the world money pulse. Authorities employed to keep the peace did not understand the emotions young people were exhibiting in response to African rhythmic beats via the screen. Many theaters showing "Rock Around the Clock" experienced riots and many people in positions of power and authority "knocked the rock." But Katzman was apparently well aware of the old adage, "there's nothing more popular than being banned in Boston."

> In Boston, Roman Catholic leaders urged that the offensive music be boycotted. In Hartford, city officials considered revoking the State Theater's license after several audiences got too rowdy during a musical stage show. In Washington the police chief recommended banning such shows from the National Guard Armory after brawls in which several people were injured. In Minneapolis a theater manager withdrew a film featuring the music after a gang of youngsters left the theater, snake-danced around town and smashed windows. In Birmingham champions of white supremacy

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[12]Variety, Vol. 205 (December 19, 1956), p. 1.

> declared it as a part of Negro plot against whites. At a wild concert in Atlanta's baseball park one night, fists and beer bottles were thrown, four youngsters were arrested.[13]

By late 1956 "Rock Around the Clock" had reached England. Response by audiences there put authorities into frenzies. Whereas radio had exposed Rhythm and Blues in the United States, motion pictures spread the music upon the international scene, and England's teen-agers loved it no less than Americans.

> Despite continued outbreaks of rowdyism, arrests and at times theater property damage, the Rank Organization will continue to play Columbia's 'Rock Around the Clock' in its circuits.
>
> During the previous two weeks when the film was going the rounds in northwest and northeast London, theater managers on several occasions had to call police. Frequently 'Feddy Boys' left their seats to rock and roll in the aisles.[14]

In smaller communities of England authorities felt less comfortable about showing the film. Reports from Manchester, England, indicated "Rock Around the Clock" received the same fashionable welcome as it had in Boston.

> 'Rock Around the Clock' has now been banned in Wegan, South Shields, Bootie, Gateshead, Brighton, and Birmingham.
>
> An Aldeman in Gateshead: 'We think it's undesirable that the film should be shown here, and that the public should have to put up with this sort of hooliganism.'[15]

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[13] Time, Vol. 67 (June 18, 1956), p. 54.

[14] Variety, Vol. 204 (September 12, 1956), p. 2.

[15] "Rock Around the Clock," Variety, Vol. 204 (September 19, 1956), p. 2.

Sam Katzman's second film with Haley had an added attraction, Allen Freed. Freed was popular in New York and his name by 1956 was a nationwide household word. Katzman's aim was to bring the most popular personalities of Rhythm and Blues together in film. The movie which was eventually called Don't Knock the Rock and also featured Little Richard and the Treniers had a brilliant opportunity to place Rock and Roll in the proper perspective, but failed. The movie was to have been originally entitled Rhythm and Blues.

> Haley wound up his second film for Sam Katzman over the weekend and trekked out for more P.A.'s which will help exploit the film which Katzman is rushing into release within the next six weeks. Feature originally was called 'Rhythm and Blues' but final title may be 'Don't Knock and Rock' from a tune of that title by Robert E. Keat and Fred Karger which is prominently featured in the film.[16]

Don't Knock the Rock was distributed with a youth gang war film called Rumble on the Docks. Even though Don't Knock the Rock attempted to disprove the adverse publicity Rhythm and Blues was receiving Rumble on the Docks only seemed to marry violence and rebellion to the music.

By this time, however, late 1956, almost a dozen Rhythm and Blues films were being polished for release, all of which were aimed directly at the teen-age market.

> Following up its successful 'Rock Around the Clock' which is expected to gross eight times its negative cost in the world market, Columbia now

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[16]"Rock and Roll is Getting Bigger All the Time," Variety, Vol. 204 (September 26, 1956), p. 7.

> has 'Don't Knock the Rock' and 'Cha-Cha-Boom.' At 20th 'Love me Tender' is being followed with a semi-rock 'n' roller 'The Girl Can't Help It.'
>
> Universal has 'Rock Pretty Baby' which it's selling as a June romance, and United Artists has Abbott and Costello in 'Dance with Me Henry' this month. Distributors Corp. of America is releasing 'Rock, Rock, Rock,' and American International has delivered 'Shake, Rattle, and Roll' and is planning to put out a followup.
>
> Companies feel that their rock 'n' roll releases serve the very useful purposes of luring the juve audience sector back to the B.O.[17]

The broad exposure of Rhythm and Blues music through film lifted the music to heights never dreamed possible by its early performers. "Rock Around the Clock's" mushroom via Blackboard Jungle was possibly an unexpected success for the music. However, when Haley and the Platters sang "See You Later Alligator" and "The Great Pretender" in the movie Rock Around the Clock, it was no stroke of luck that the records topped popularity charts. Cinama has a long history of significant impact and influence upon our society and it did not take long to discover that such powers also applied to the new musical explosion.

Motion picture appearance and exposure of artist and song had a high correlation with chart appearance. "Be Bop A Lula" by Gene Vincent, "Blue Monday" by Fats Domino, and "You'll Never Know" by the Platters all appeared in the movie The Girl Can't Help It and all of the recordings were hits. The film title song was released by Specialty's Little Richard and it remains a classic. Other motion

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[17]Variety, Vol. 205 (December 5, 1956), p. 5.

picture songs had similar successes. In Rock, Rock, Rock, Chuck Berry, La Vern Barker, the Moonglows, the Teenagers, and the Flamingos all managed hits. In some cases, however, the songs preceded film appearance.

Though most of the movies were filmed in black and white and cheaply produced (The Girl Can't Help It is an exception), their influence was far reaching. Most youngsters saw their idols via the film medium and they studied them well. Wholeheartedly they absorbed the dance routines, hip talk language, and imitated the singers. From motion pictures the casual dress of rock stars began to emerge, and guitar bands held together by a single drummer became popular. Many of the films had integrated casts, black and white performers, but none of the movies ever credited black Americans for having created the music. And young white Americans began cornering off a market all their own.

CHAPTER IV

TELEVISION

Post World War II

After World War II the television industry sought to encourage advertisers to use its new medium. Millions of dollars had been poured into television and very small financial return had been witnessed. There were debates of various small degrees as to whether or not commercial television programming was developed extensively enough for the public to accept. But television had survived World War II and in the final analysis the video medium took its place within the American society.

In 1948, there were only seventeen TV stations on the air, another fifty-five under construction, and sixty-six license applications pending. The Federal Communications Commission had only recently approved A.T.&T.'s $76,000,000 expansion program aimed at extending coaxial cable circuits south to Charlotte and as far west as Chicago and St. Louis, and the National Broadcasting Company felt assured enough to predict a cross-country television network by 1950. Much of the programming during this time was locally originated, and in numerous instances Afro-Americans

made valuable contributions. For those Americans who had sets, mostly whites, the televising of Afro-American artists brought into view a whole new world of comedy, dance, and music.

Afro-Americans and Early Television

The most popular black personality on the west coast was Hadda Brooks who had gained success nationally on the Modern record label. Hadda began recording for Modern in 1945 and had tremendous success with songs such as "Swing the Boogie," "Riding the Boogie," and "Rocking the Boogie." Her recording of "That's My Desire" sold over a million records. Hadda was graduated from the University of Southern California with a degree in music and her husky voice which trickled with sex needed only brief video exposure to propel the Hadda Brooks Show into the hearts of west coast viewers. The Hadda Brooks Show, however, was not primarily aimed at a black audience. Ebony in April of 1951 covered the success of Hadda's video landmark:

> Television fans on the West Coast, stuck with a steady video fare of second-rate ex-vaudeville entertainers and old movies until a coaxial cable is completed back to the East (perhaps not before 1953), are finding a refreshing treat on their sets at least once a week in a live telecast featuring sultry pianist-vocalist Hadda Brooks, longtime recording and night club favorite. First aired as a Sunday night feature from Los Angeles station KLAC-TV, the songs and patter of the charming night club star are now sponsored by Kaiser-Frazer on a half-hour Tuesday night program on San Francisco's KGO-TV.

> Called simply The Hadda Brooks Show, the telecast plays up the kind of nostalgic melodies and folksy chatter that clicks with audiences everywhere, no matter what the medium. Most radio columnists list the show among the best TV bets and surveys show that it draws a big audience of video viewers.
>
> Format used by Hadda on TV is simple. She accompanies herself on piano, projecting her tunes softly and melodiously at a relaxed pitch. Her vocal offerings are mostly old tunes like 'I Hadn't Anyone 'Til You,' 'Don't Take Your Love from Me' and 'You Won't Let Me Go," which she introduces in low, almost whispered tones. She writes the script and selects all the songs for her show.[1]

The first all black television program is said to have taken place in Chicago, which by 1949 was a king pin city for Rhythm and Blues. Under today's classification the show's description would place it in the Jazz vein. In 1949 descriptions of various types of secular black music were relatively unimportant. Black people just did their thing. The Chicago show was aimed directly toward blacks and its audience was identified as such.

> WENR-TV will telecast the first all-Negro television show April 1, titled 'Happy Pappy'. Weekly program will bring top names of Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald, but also maintain search for new talent. Entire cast and studio audience will be all-Negro.
>
> Vagabonds will back musically, while Ray Grant will emcee.[2]

The Nat Cole Trio, having scored big hit recordings of "Straighten Up and Fly Right" and "Route 66" became very popular at this time and influenced many struggling

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[1] "Hadda Brooks," Ebony, Vol. 6 (April, 1951), p. 103.

[2] Variety, Vol. 173 (March 9, 1949), p. 1.

young performers. The great Ray Charles came under Cole's influence and with his own trio landed a television show in 1953.

> He toured for a year with Lowell Fulson's blues band and later formed a combo to back vocalist Ruth Brown. Then he did an unnoticed single at Harlem's Appollo Theatre. Back in Seattle, things began to pick up when the Maxim Trio, a group he put together in 1953, became the first Black act to get its own sponsored television show in the Pacific Northwest.[3]

The real Rhythm and Blues exposure in local television was in the South. Just how pervasive the televising was cannot be documented at this writing, but Ruth Cage in her famous Downbeat series on rhythm and blues indicated Atlanta, Georgia was one Southern city where the music was aired on TV.

> Chuck's [Willis] first national success came in 1952 when he wrote and recorded 'My Story.' In Atlanta there was a year of TV and lots more jobs in clubs there. Deejay Zenis Spears, in the home town, was a Willis fan and presented him often on his 'Blues Caravans.'[4]

Compared to the vastness of today's television programming, early shows with Blacks may seem in retrospect minimal and insignificant. However, the local employment of Blacks on television in the late 40's and early 50's seems to have been influenced by a national guideline or established practice.

Whether the national television industry was responding from the heart or from pressure groups remains in

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[3] Playboy Magazine, Vol. 17 (March, 1970), p. 68.

[4] "Rhythm and Blues," Downbeat, Vol. 21 (August 25, 1954), p. 21.

question. The NAACP has a long history of network vigilance and perseverance for fair exposure for Afro-Anericans. In 1953 the National Broadcasting Company delivered a progress report to the black community assuring its citizens that equality was being achieved.

> NBC booked a total of 218 Negro acts and individual performers in the past two years, with the 1952 figures representing a 200% increase over 1951, veepee Edward D. Madden said in a 'progress report to the Negro community,'
>
> Madden said that counting repeat performances there was a total of 450 performances by Negro Artists, not including the Billy Williams Quartet, Dorothy Dandridge, or Lillian Randolph, each of whom has had regular niches. Including musicians and members of performing groups, there was an estimated 1,540 performances in radio and 913 in TV by Negroes. NBC, V.P. said.[5]

The broad range of entertainment of Afro-Americans in the new medium had by this time (1953) been well-established; if not by effort of the National Broadcasting Company then by CBS. In 1948 the Columbia Broadcasting System hired a former vaudeville producer and syndicated journalist (who had also been cited by the United States government for war work in hospitals and camps), to headline an hour-long variety show on Sunday evenings. The affable gentleman who was as well-received in uptown New York City with blacks as with the power structure moved in a maze of respected circles and contacts. What is now called the Ed Sullivan Show was appropriately christened "The Toast of the Town."

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[5]"NBC-No Color," Variety, Vol. 190 (March 18, 1953) p. 1.

By October of the same year, 1948, the "Toast of the Town" topped television ratings which were conducted in New York City and Philadelphia. Broadcasting printed the Pulse Inc. results: "Toast of the Town Tops TV Ratings."

> The top ten television network programs carried simultaneously by stations in New York and Philadelphia in September, as reported last week in a two-city survey by The Pulse Inc., were (figure given is average rating of highest quarter-hour):
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Toast of the Town WCBS-TV, WCAU-TV Sunday | 38.8 |
> | Texaco Star Theatre WNBT, WPTZ Tuesday | 37.9 |
> | Boxing WCBS-TV, WCAU-TV Monday | 31.1 |
> | Small Fry Club WABD, WFIL-TV Monday through Friday | 25.2 |
> | Original Amateur Hour WABD, WFIL-TV Sunday | 24.8 |
> | Winner Take All WCBS-TV, WCAU-TV Wednesday | 20.7 |
> | We, the People WCBS-TV, WCAU-TV Tuesday | 18.5 |
> | Kraft TV Theatre WNBT, WPTZ Wednesday | 17.6 |
> | Gay Nineties Revue WABD-TV, WFIL-TV Wednesday | 15.9[6] |

Afro-American contributions were an intricate and important part of Sullivan's success in the new video medium. In fact enough blacks had found an outlet through Sullivan's show so that Ebony magazine contracted the

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[6]"Toast of Town Tops TV Ratings," Broadcasting, Vol. 35 (October 18, 1948), p. 32.

columnist to write a story for them which appeared in the 1951 May issue. In the story entitled "Can TV Crack America's Color Line", Sullivan reflected and praised the tremendous contributions blacks had made to early television. He used black performers in practically every one of his shows and openly admitted he could not have gotten along without W. C. Hardy (Father of the Blues), Lena Horne, Ethel Waters, Bill Robinson, Peg-Leg Bates (the great one leg dancer), Jackie Robinson, Billy Eckstine, or Pigmeat Markham. All of them added significantly to Sullivan's success and he withheld no credit or praise.

> I've never used a Negro act on Toast of the Town, which has failed to enjoy a tremendous success. The new medium is made to order for Negroes and it has been proven on my program by Illinois Jacquet, Ruby Hill, Sarah Vaughan, the Kingdom Choir, Roll and Tapp, Moke and Poke, the magnificant Deep River Boys, Golden Gate Quartet, Tables Davis, Cab Calloway, Ella Fitzgerald, Jouis Jordan, Nat 'King' Cole, Louis Armstrong, Hazel Scott, the Ink Spots, Son and Sonny and Brother Jones. These acts, always great, became greater on television because everyone in the TV audience has a front-row seat.
>
> The Negro performer never abuses the hospitality he finds in American homes. Invariably--and this has been commented upon by all the 70 people who work on our show--The Negro performer's material is clean. Some of the white performers, at dress rehearsals, utter lines that would cancel us off the air and are astonished when told such lines must be deleted. The white transgressor always makes the same statement: 'They let me do it at the Roxy,' or whatever theatres they've played recently. The Negro, perhaps because of the fact that he has forever been on trial, instinctively rejects the dubious line or gesture.
>
> Recognizing the place of the Negro in television is not generosity. It is just common sense and good business. In fact, if there has been generosity, television has received it from the Negro. In the first place, you just can't have great programs unless you

integrate the Negro performer into a show. In the second place, it has never been pointed out that the Negro performer has been a great friend to television. I personally know that, without his generous help, the early TV days would have been a nightmare.

Those were the early, lean days when there wasn't much money in TV for any of us.

'Look, Ed,' said Peg-Leg Bates, 'Why discuss money. I started in vaudeville with you--in your act. Let's talk friendship, not money.'

So Peg-Leg came on the show and panicked them. The same with Billy Kenny and the Ink-Spots.

'You've been for us. We're for you,' they said. They came on those early shows, not once but three times. On one show, the Ink Spots agreed to serve as an opening act, although they are headliners.

'Turn us loose first,' said Billy Kenny. 'People will think you must have a powerful show if you're leading off with us.'

Louis Jordan appeared in those slim days--because he'd been introduced to Broadway on a vaudeville show of mine.

Sarah Vaughan acted the same way--and if I ever tried to express my debt of personal appreciation to Joe Louis, I'd be writing all night long.

'I need help, Joe,' I told him over the phone.

'Just tell me what time to be on hand, Ed,' he said.

That was a few nights after the first Joe Walcott fight and Louis unhesitatingly came up on the stage, took off his sun glasses and exposed his shiner.

They didn't get much money--the Negro performers--very little, in fact, but when I needed help--when the squalling infant industry of television needed help, the Negro star was loyal and considerate. Many white performers were equally kind, but too many of them turned their heads the other way.[7]

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[7]Ed Sullivan, "Can TV Crack America's Color Line," Ebony, Vol. 6 (May, 1951), p. 62.

It is inconceivable that through all of this exposure, rhythmic blues was not viewed throughout America. Somehow, sometime the grass root culture had to come through. Cab Calloway was an exciting hoofer, the Jackie Wilson of his day; Illinois Jacquet could blow the reed off a saxophone, and the fetes of Jouis Jordan have already been covered.

Sam Charters, mentioned in The Country Blues that T-Bone Walker, the top blues performer at that time made appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show in the early fifties. The degree of Rhythm and Blues exposure remained minimal, however, and it is still a rarity for a heavy Rhythm and Blues artist to perform more than one song on most established television shows. Yet television's history is not without a significant thrust and impact upon the development of Rhythm and Blues popularity.

Billy Ward and The Arthur Godfrey Show

In the very late 40's, young multi-talented Billy Ward was working as an artist in an advertising agency operated by Rose Marks. She encouraged Ward to open an arranging and vocal coaching studio, which he did. He had studied music at Juilliard and the Chicago Art Institute. Billy Ward organized some of his students into a singing group. The group was composed of Cliff Givens, Milton Merle, James Van Loan, Jackie Wilson, Clyde McPhatter, and Billy Ward.

They called themselves the Dominos and hired Rose Marks as their manager. In October of 1950 they appeared on the Arthur Godfrey Talent Scout Show and came away as winners.

Later that year the Dominos became the most popular and successful group in Rhythm and Blues history with the recording of "Sixty Minute Man." Another rocker recording entitled "Have Mercy Mercy Baby" solidified their success and Ward groomed his singers to perform a wide range of material while still maintaining the African work-song structure and influence. It was the success of the Dominos along with the Orioles which broke Rhythm and Blues from its ostracized musical bars and onto the Pop charts thus triggering the Rhythm and Blues explosion. Television helped to make the Dominos nationally important and served as an important springboard to perhaps the greatest Rhythm and Blues vocal group of all time.

Television continued to serve blacks but very little exposure for Rhythm and Blues. Lena Horne and the Billy Williams Quartet played the Sid Caesar-Imogene Coca Show, and other blacks such as the Lionel Hampton Quartet guested on various variety shows such as "Shower of Stars." At times there were sparkling instances where television pointed vividly toward the humanitarian tool it seeks to achieve. The Mariners, an integrated quartet composed of two blacks and two whites, were regulars on the Arthur Godfrey Television Show. Although their music was barber shop-middle of the road, the governor of Georgia could not tolerate them.

> In 1952 Godfrey was asked to comment on Georgia Governor Herman Talmodge's denunciation of his show because it included a mixed singing quartet. Coldly angry, Godfrey said, 'Would you kindly tell Governor Talmodge for me that if these four young fellows could fight together through a war in behalf of our United States where bullets didn't bother with segregation, that I'm afraid I can't bother with it either.[8]

Network TV and Afro-American Programming

Rhythm and Blues music represented, as it still does, a highly detectable portion of Afro-American culture. And despite the tremendous recording success of the Dominos, the Orioles, the Clovers, the Drifters, Ruth Brown, or Ray Charles, the video industry apparently did not take rhythmic blues seriously until 1956. In retrospect Ed Sullivan in the midst of extreme criticism of Rock and Roll music made an historic and formidable move. In November of 1955 he presented an hour-long Rhythm and Blues "Toast of the Town Show."

> TV, as well as radio, has played an increasing part in bringing rock and roll and rhythm and blues talent into the home. Dr. Jive, eminent rhythm and blues deejay, was booked on the Ed Sullivan TV show November 20 (1955). Dr. Jive lined up the talent and emceed the show, which featured La Vern Baker, Bo Diddley, the Five Keys and Willis Jackson's work.
>
> Sullivan is putting together another "Toast of the Town" show, scheduled for the summer featuring rhythm and blues, jazz and bop talent.[9]

Studio Films, Inc., however, was way ahead of Sullivan. The degree of success which the firm had in booking is

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[8]Ebony, Vol. 9 (February, 1954), p. 83.

[9]Paul Ackerman, "All Are Getting Hip," Billboard, Vol. 68 (February 4, 1956), p. 1.

unknown, but in August of 1954 twenty-six artists were being filmed for television by the New York firm.

> Studio Films, Inc., is the latest operation to recognize the cash potential of rhythm and blues. The television outfit is filming 26 TV shorts with a top artist from the field headlining each one. The picture makers aren't tampering with the basic rhythm and blues beat, but they are putting some fancy production into the films with veteran performer-producer Leonard Reed acting as director.
>
> Harlem's 'mayor,' Willie Bryant, will emcee all of the series. Most of the names were drawn from the Shaw Artists roster--Faye Adams and Ruth Brown were among the first to be lensed--with other agencies contributing such stars as Roy Hamilton.[10]

By spring of 1956 Rhythm and Blues was too popular nationwide for the rest of television to ignore. The potential of greenbacks finally convinced the networks to cease satirizing the music and recognize its powerful audience potential when presented as straight entertainment. Sullivan had made his point. After all, no one in television could top his current popularity: Best TV MC, 1953; Best TV Variety Program, 1955-55; Best TV Network Program, 1954-55, in Fame-MP Daily Poll; Best TV Network Program, 1954. When Sullivan recognized Rhythm and Blues in such an embraceable manner the rest of television could no longer deny it.

The programming wheels of mass communication's most powerful medium commenced to turn, but it was America 1956, and when the wheels stopped Afro-Americans were denied admittance across the color line. The article Sullivan had written for Ebony five years earlier had been answered. No! Television would not break America's color line.

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[10]Downbeat, August 25, 1954.

Initial activity in early spring of 1956 had indicated a tremendous interest in programming Rhythm and Blues. Allen Freed was negotiating to present a half-hour Rock and Roll television bill on Jackie Gleason's "Stage Show." An hour-long Rhythm and Blues show was being mulled over for Al (Jazzbo) Collins to emcee on Friday nights. At the same time NBC was preparing a Saturday afternoon show for teen-agers to be aired from 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm. If Freed clicked, a chance for permanent emcee on Stage Show awaited him next season. In the final analysis of these considerations, somehow, network Rhythm and Blues shows lost out.

The final decisions on considerations to program network Rhythm and Blues shows left the music without a video showcase. It is inconceivable that the question of race never entered the picture. That element had long impacted upon Rhythm and Blues music. The Alabama white citizens council led the fight in 1956. Also, the music licensing firms, ASCAP and BMI, which television pays millions annually for programming thousands of songs, were at odds with each other because of Rhythm and Blues popularity increase.

Some people in the music business strongly believed that much of the controversy which the Rhythm and Blues music received during the mid-fifties was actually manufactured by (ASCAP) the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers. Allen Freed claimed that ASCAP would not even license Rhythm and Blues at one time:

> The old-timers who formerly controlled the music publishing business wouldn't even license rhythm and blues material until about a year ago. (1955) By that time, a new group of writers and publishers had gotten the inside track on rock and roll and how the newcomers are making the money.[11]

If Rhythm and Blues was regularly programmed on television, undoubtedly ASCAP was going to lose some ground to Broadcast Music Incorp. (BMI). The power of television to make a song was staggering. "The Ballad of Davy Crocket" from Walt Disney's ABC-TV series became the all great recording, and "Let Me Go Lover," exposed by television in early 1955 exploded into prominence after it had been declared a bomb or flop. What then would television do to further popularize a new type music which was already adopted by most young Americans? Rhythm and Blues had already gained strong programming in radio, chart appearance, and this was hurting ASCAP and helping BMI.

The desire by some people to keep Rhythm and Blues from a power position was basically twofold in nature. 'We've suggested," wrote Ruth Cage,

> . . . that the basis for the big battle had something to do with the question of cash; Mr. Freed has suggested it has something to do with a social problem. Chances are that there is something of each of these factors in the whole business.[12]

Freed had the racism angle computed right from the start:

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[11] Look, Vol. 20 (June 26, 1956), p. 48.

[12] Cage, "Rhythm and Blues," Downbeat, Vol. 22 (April, 20, 1955), p. 41.

> To me, this campaign against Rock and Roll smells of discrimination of the worse kind against the great and accomplished Negro song writers, musicians, and singers who are responsible for this outstanding contribution to American music.[13]

Robert Blair Kaiser cut open the real heart of the issue fifteen years later and exposed the truth in retrospect:

> It was Elvis who first dared give the people a music that hit them where they lived, deep in their emotions, yes, even below their belts. Oh, other singers had been doing this for generations, but they were black. They didn't count, at least where records were sold, because little white girls in middle America had a hard time getting any kind of fantasy going with a black man. It was easy, though, with Elvis.[14]

Another factor which seems to bear significantly on the denial of a national Rhythm and Blues show was the absence of an Afro-American program from the networks. Almost any show could have spotlighted Rhythm and Blues performers as the Amos and Andy radio series had worked in the gospel groups such as the Jubilaires and Delta Rhythm Boys. This could have been a beginning.

When Amos and Andy moved to television in 1952 with an all black cast rather than Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll who were both white, an old friend awaited them. Some people believed the show hurt more than helped the black people. A successful campaign was waged to remove

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[13]Freed, "I Told You So," Downbeat, Vol. 23 (September 19, 1956), p. 41.

[14]Robert Kaiser, "The Rediscovery of Elvis," New York Times Magazine (October 11, 1970), p. 47.

the show from network programming and in the process gave television an excuse not to program black shows.

> The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, however, protested the sterotyping alleged to be present in this show, causing confusion in the TV studios. Should they disregard the rising storm, strengthened by the additional opposition of Phi Beta Sigma, one of the leading college fraternities?
>
> These protests occurred at a time when it was rumored the studios were about ready to go forward in the employment of Negro artists in a large way. In this emergency, a Coordinating Council was organized in New York in July 1951, by the Negro Actors Guild in response to public request.
>
> Since the Guild is a welfare organization, the Council became a separate entity. It aims at promoting better understanding in the selection of script material for Negro parts, without caricatures and stereotypes, and at acquainting producers and sponsors with the wealth of available Negro talent. The Council will adopt a positive approach to the solution of differences, looking to mutually beneficial results. It is interracial and includes representatives from the amusement world and the press as well as individuals and representatives of outside organizations.[15]

Black oriented programming by the networks never fully materialized on television. As the years passed, the number of locally produced programs featuring blacks decreased as network programming, without blacks, increased. Network television which decided not to recover from the action against stereotype programming of Afro-Americans found it easier to program very little or none at all. Guest shots of course continued.

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[15]Jessie Guzmzn, ed. The Negro Year Book (New York: Wm. H. Wise and Company, 1952).

Rhythm and Blues was affected because it was a music of the masses; grass root black America, not the middle class decision makers who may have preferred opera or classics in favor of Rhythm and Blues music. Rhythm and Blues was performed by the slick heads and most of the artists performed on what Lou Rawls calls "the 'chittlin' circuit." The most vivid place this author brings to mind is the "State Line," a little wooden dance shack which sat in the middle of a cotton patch just outside of Blythville, Arkansas, and very close to the Missouri state line. The sharecroppers in the area as well as their poor urban counterparts supported the entire spectrum of Rhythm and Blues for years with their nickels and dimes from the soil and bottom of this country's economic scale. Who was involved in the television industry to state their interests when in fact no avenue of African American culture had a network showcase?

Coinciding with the outcome in television programming not to broadcast Rhythm and Blues, was the network appearance of Elvis Presley. His television appearance eventually led to the separation of the musical terms Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll which until then, 1956, had been used synonmously or interchangeably.

The Rise of Elvis Presley

In the fall of 1955 Presley played for the annual Country and Western Disc Jockey Association's fall

convention in Nashville, Tennessee. Two talent scouts from RCA Victor, one of whom was the late Steve Shoals, talked their company into purchasing Presley's recording contract from Sam Phillips' Sun Records of Memphis for $40,000.00. Though small by today's vast record market, in 1955 that sum of money was astronomical for a contract involving an unknown. Shoals for awhile became the laughing stock of many people inside the record industry. Phillips even agreed to the sale because he did not think Elvis, a young white singing Rhythm and Blues, would last.

Recording companies by 1956 knew the importance of artist exposure via television and attempted to establish cooperation with the medium as a means of increasing record sales. This was especially true if megacompany ties existed, according to Variety in mid 1956.

> Diskeries are particularly keen on getting their personalities on the big video shows either via guest shots or regular series. Those labels with network affiliation to promote such appearances and closer liaison, especially between the RCA Victor and NBC web, is being established to keep it 'in the family.'[16]

RCA felt in order to cover their huge investment it had made in purchasing Presley's contract that video exposure was essential. Elvis who had once been denied an opportunity to compete on the Arthur Godfrey Talent Scouts television show when he was an independent, now had RCA

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[16]Variety, Vol. 203 (July 11, 1956), p. 41.

behind him. When Presley visited New York he also visited the Apollo theater in Harlem. Many of the blues men were performing stage routines similar to T-Bone Walker who had once been a dancer. Bo Diddley who was recording for Chess Records, influenced by Walker's routine, was very popular and some of Presley's new image was identical to Bo Biddley's.

Elvis Presley, unlike Bill Haley mentioned in the previous chapter, was not a "Johnny come lately" imitator of Rhythm and Blues. His love for African-American music was genuine and on occasion he visited Rev. H. W. Brewster's church on East Trigg in Memphis. He also had some Rhythm and Blues idols such as Arthur (Big Boy) Crudup, Junior Parker, and Chuck Willis. Some of his first recordings for Sun Records were previously popularized by these men. And when Presley performed on the Country and Western circuit during his pre-fame days he sang Rhythm and Blues songs such as "I Got a Woman" made famous by Ray Charles, and "Long Tall Sally" by Little Richard. This is not to say, however, that he did not sing any Country and Western music.

That spring, 1956, RCA dropped its bomb on television. Jackie Gleason was producing a big band television program called "Stage Show" which featured Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey. One Saturday Presley, making a guest appearance, wiggled across the television screen and mumbled Rhythm and

Blues in a manner most television audiences had never seen before. The Rhythm and Blues style of body movement accompanying the song left adult white America breathless but in rage.

The lover's lament, "Heartbreak Hotel," which Presley sang on "Stage Show" was the hottest record in the nation and his coos, Joe Turner styled mumbles, and cries thrust themselves into the hearts of young girls the country over. For young white Americans they had for the first time an idol of the new music all to themselves, a real live sex idol. Though Presley, through his live appearances, had been pleasing young audiences for nearly a year, to most young white Americans television had brought them their hero, their king of a music known only to them as Rock and Roll.

With the coming of Elvis Presley, Rhythm and Blues, the music Allen Freed called Rock and Roll to spread its popularity among young whites, suddenly took on a new meaning. Under the popularity of Presley, made into a legend through six appearances on "Stage Show," Rock and Roll began to be identified as something different from Rhythm and Blues, and by the end of 1956 white America was claiming Rock and Roll as their own young musical culture:

> Rock and roll, which is now identified virtually as a distinct idiom, produced its own share of new chart artists.[17]

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[17]Billboard, Vol. 68 (January 26, 1957), p. 58.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Black singers and musicians have a long history of developing new trends and styles as a means of flight from white musicians who, while studying the music of blacks, often divert Afro-American recognition. With the technological explosion of the phonograph, motion picture, radio, and television the flight path has become increasingly difficult, but nonetheless it is one of the reasons Rhythm and Blues or Soul music blacks perform today is noticeably different from that made in say 1954. Equally different is the music whites perform today as compared to attempts to imitate Rhythm and Blues in 1954. However, the question as to whether music popular among whites today is the same as that popular among blacks today is only indirectly our concern. The basic conclusion of our research is that Rock and Roll was Rhythm and Blues initially, and that mass communication impacted certain events upon society which resulted in creating a dichotomy between the synonomous musical descriptive terms. It is also important to note that no fundamental musical differences were uncovered between 1951, the year Allen Freed claims to have first heard the music, and 1956 the year and time Rock and Roll

and Rhythm and Blues divided. In addition Rock and Roll became a description of Rhythm and Blues by a desire of Allen Freed to spread Rhythm and Blues music under the name Rock and Roll via radio in hopes of getting young whites back on the dance floor.

Personally, however, my research leads me to view the attitude that some fundamental differences set apart what is called Rock and Roll and Rhythm and Blues as being invalid and without adequate support. Rhythm and Blues has always been a music reflecting a wide variety of styles and allowing for wide individual expression. The African characteristics of antiphonal singing (call and response), sliding around and into notes rather than hitting them straight on, and playing with notes while expanding or contracting a phrase is very much the heart of Rock music; and if the African beat and rhythms were also removed the music would no longer rock. We must never forget that the music Rhythm and Blues was called Rock and Roll because that is what it made people want to do. In that basic sense, the music has not changed, it has only progressed with valuable contributions by many creative and imaginative people from various backgrounds and subcultures.

The difficulty in recognizing that Rock is the cultural product of Afro-America represents the custom in America to weave history without the beauty of color. Mass media only reinforced that custom. There is not enough respect, credit,

or recognition given black Americans to say that Rock is based on Rhythm and Blues. Too many radio directors, television and film producers believe the theory that a combination of Country and Western, Pop, and Rhythm and Blues jelled together to form Rock and Roll. My research does not bear this out. To the contrary, the mass communication media has succeeded in convincing itself, and the general American public, of the melting pot theory. That is only a smooth way of refusing black Americans due respect for their creativity because the society cannot directly accept a product as equal if its creators are considered inferior.

Of course European music has affected the creations of Afro-American music, but somehow the pendulum swinging in the opposite direction has not been positively communicated via mass media. Even if it were true that a combination of Pop, Country and Western, and Rhythm and Blues came together to form Rock, as has so well been conveyed in Rock documentaries, the African impact upon both Pop and Country and Western music is often overlooked and missed. What was called Pop music in the early fifties is partly based on imitations of Africans beginning with the minstrel show which gave part of its tradition to vaudeville. Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Sophie Tucker and the rest were all attempting to imitate portions of Afro-American music. Not to be overlooked are the significant roots of

American Pop music which lead back to Stephen Foster who magnificently worked with a music form highly influenced by blacks.

With all due respect to Country and Western music and its creativity, it too has been affected by the black experience. And it is with a great deal of respect that the honesty of the words of Paul Hemphill are relayed from his work, the Nashville Sound.

> All along, there were other influences working to change the music as the people began moving out of the hills and the tidewaters and the foothills of the South. The Negro, with a music all his own, wrought subtle changes; he taught them how to pick the guitar rather than merely strum it, and even today there is a term, 'nigger-pickin',' denoting the use of the guitar as something much more than an accompanying instrument. The Negro also taught them what is today called 'country blues' and has been commercially successful through Negro performers such as Blind Lemon Jefferson and many folk-pop stars of the Sixties. And still other changes were wrought by early industrialization, migration to the cities, exposure to the traveling medicine shows with their Swiss yodelers and black comedians and Hawaiian bands, and the tent shows with their dancing girls and Irish tenors. Once the country boy went back home--from the city, from a medicine show, from a railroad trip, from a jail, from wherever--he took with him new song ideas and new methods for singing or playing them: the yodel, 'nigger-pickin',' railroad songs, the blues, the evils of the city, a new appreciation of the old homestead, the influences of jazz musicians he had heard on Beale Street in Memphis.[1]

So in essence what we do if we say Pop, Country and Western, and Rhythm and Blues combined to form Rock, is come full circle back to Africa.

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[1]Paul Hemphill, Nashville Sound (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 117.

Hopefully I have made it clear by now that Allen Freed, using the influence of New York City and the power of radio, merely changed the name of Rhythm and Blues, not its musical structure, as a means of spreading the popularity of Rhythm and Blues music to all youngsters. And if Rock is a music different from Rhythm and Blues it is not the music Allen Freed was referring to but something different--not Rock.

(Mass media has not only brainwashed white America into thinking that its youngsters of the 1950's developed a new musical culture, in turn, it has left a desolate imprint upon the lives of Africans in America.) Where it was possible to create positive concepts of black people by emphasizing contributions, broadcasting has permitted that image to drift to the negative in a host of other ways. It is, therefore, the responsibility of broadcasters to correct that condition. The programming of the universal language, music, is an excellent starting point. It is inhumane for network television to perpetuate the absence of Afro-American musical programming from its schedule.

The time is long past due for all Americans to know the contributions of black Americans. Guest appearances only "feed it to us with a teaspoon, throw it at us with a shovel." Only broadcasting can perform this task. It is not a request. The whole free world has rocked and rolled to the Twist, the Monkey, the Dog, the Jerk, the Watusi, and the "Shake a Tail Feather," and failed to realize that

these renown dances are Rhythm and Blues songs and choreography. It is time for white Americans to look at black Americans' contributions to this great nation and identify black America with those contributions, because if this country is to succeed in peace, America must cease incorporating the blackman's creativity into the American fabric and at the same time rejecting the black people.

> Ask yourself now, "What is keeping the recording business a billion dollar industry? The answer is--rock and roll--the beat the Beatles rocked this country with on their way to their first million dollars.
>
> Who created this 'beat?' The answer is--The American Negro because none of the other immigrants brought it with them. The white minstrels who blackened up and imitated the Negro slave didn't do it. What introduced the 'beat' to the world? The answer is Mamie Smith and the Jazz Hounds on OKeh records.
>
> --Perry Bradford

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