THE MUSIC OF THE COLORBLIND: HOW INTEGRATED MUSIC WAS CREATED IN A REGION OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SEGREGATION

by

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ABSTRACT

The Music of the Colorblind: How Integrated Music was Created in a Region of Political and Social Segregation

Damon A. Brooks

The importance of Memphis, Tennessee in the history of popular American music cannot be overstated. If Memphis had produced just the Sun recordings of Elvis Presley in the fifties alone, its status as a city rich in musical tradition would be secure. But there is so much more music that came from Memphis: Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Howlin’ Wolf, Roy Orbison, Booker T. and the M.G.s, Otis Redding, Rufus and Carla Thomas, Isaac Hayes, Albert King, Sam and Dave, and Al Green to list just a few.

Memphis helped shape almost all subsequent rock and roll. The synthesis of black and white musical styles that occurred there in the fifties was unique. The Stax recordings of sixties soul music and seventies funk continued Memphis’ history of mixing black and white music together. Perched on the banks of the Mississippi River, the city also deserves credit as a historical locale for blues music, the predecessor of rock and roll. Gospel music helped to define the sound of the music that came from Memphis as well.

This project will attempt to detail the geographic and cultural origins of the different types of music that blended together to become the “Memphis sound.” The project will also explore the elements of Memphis that made it such a unique musical petri dish. Why was it that in a city afflicted with racial tension, and in a region stricken
with racism, that the musical worlds of black and whites could be fused into new art forms? The presence of gospel, blues, rhythm and blues, rockabilly, country, funk and soul music in Memphis, and its location as a river trading port are important factors that will be explored as well. The importance of Memphis radio, and the individuals who spoke over those airwaves are also vitally important and will be discussed. An entrepreneurial spirit that exists in Memphis and Sam Phillips’s unique vision of racial harmony are also factors that shaped the music, and are parts of the story that will be told. The project will also illustrate the evolution and synthesis of black and white musical styles in Memphis.

A classroom lesson plan is included that explores the importance of not only Memphis, but also other cities that have made important contributions to American musical history. These materials could be used by teachers during their study of the civil rights era, (state standard 11.10, Students analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights). Teachers might also find it useful when teaching the culture of the fifties, sixties or seventies (state standard 11.9, Students analyze the economic boom and social transformation of post World War II America in terms of: forms of popular culture with emphasis on their origins and geographic diffusion).

Using both primary and secondary documents, as well as the wealth of recordings from Sun, Stax and Atlantic studios, conclusions about Memphis’ cultural uniqueness and contributions to the history of American music will be made.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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HISTORIC MEMPHIS: THE ROOTS OF THE CULTURAL COLLISION

Music fans might argue that America’s greatest gift to the world has been the rich heritage of American music created during the twentieth century. Out of the system of American slavery, African musical traditions emerged to lay the foundation for the explosion of indigenous music that would become jazz, gospel, blues, rhythm and blues, rock and roll and southern soul music. New Orleans, Macon, Muscle Shoals, Chicago, New York and even Los Angeles all contributed greatly to the evolution of American music, but Memphis, Tennessee may have played the greatest role in the development of America’s musical legacy. Shockingly, Memphis’ musical synthesis of white and black musical idioms occurred in a politically and socially segregated region. This racial collision was the very core of the change that was occurring in American music. Critical elements existed in Memphis that allowed a small cadre of trailblazers to change the history of not only American music, but to alter the history of popular music worldwide.

Memphis possessed a large population of African Americans, a ubiquitous love of music (both black and white), formal musical education and family music traditions, a history of musical innovation, and the entrepreneurial spirit to overcome the social and political segregation that affected almost all facets of life in the South in the twentieth century; first with Sam Phillips and the Sun Studio, and later in the 1960s with the Stax studio.
The history of nineteenth century Memphis explains a great deal about the musical and cultural innovations that would come later. Incorporated in 1826 on the banks of the Mississippi River, Memphis soon became a vital trading and social center. It was a rough, hard-drinking, hard-working city and even in those days there was the music of Memphis. “The earliest ‘Memphis sound’ was provided by itinerant fiddlers and banjo players…The regional differences that would later develop in American fiddle music had yet to take shape, but the African influence with its greater emphasis on supple, syncopated rhythms was already beginning to enter the music.”\(^1\) Minstrel shows soon became popular and were some of the earliest black-white musical collaborations that occurred in Memphis.

Many of the minstrels’ jigs, hornpipes, and reels had roots in the Celtic traditions of Ireland, Scotland, and England, but the unique changes in rhythm found in their American versions may well have come from slave musicians, whose more sophisticated sense of syncopation came from the polyrhythmic traditions of West Africa, where most American slaves had originated. \(^2\)

Memphis has always been more liberal regarding racial issues than Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama, the states that border it to the south. It was one of the last southern states to secede from the union, and the relative racial tolerance that existed there partially explains the creation of the musical hybrids that would emerge in the twentieth century.

Historic Memphis was even home to some free blacks. “By 1850 there were 318 free Negroes in the Beale Street neighborhood. They were allowed to vote in all the

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 10.
elections, and were handicapped by few of the restrictions that confronted free Negroes in other slave sections.”³ As early as 1824 “Free Joe” established a colony for free blacks on a tract of land deeded him by his master some twelve or fourteen miles from the Memphis suburbs. “He and his people lived there out of reach of slavery and enjoyed freedom within a stone’s throw of one of the largest slave marts in the world.”⁴ Mrs. Frances Wright, a Scots woman, established another colony named Nashoba in 1825 that included the first industrial school for Negroes ever established in the United States.⁵

“This school had a decided influence in liberalizing the attitude toward emancipation; to such an extent, in fact, that delegates elected to the Tennessee Constitutional Convention in 1838 favored emancipation of the slaves in that state.”⁶

Despite these examples of racial tolerance, Memphis was still the site of the South’s first major race riot. On April 30, 1866, there was an altercation between two young wagon drivers, one white and one black resulting in the death of the Irish wagon driver.

The fight escalated into a battle between black federal soldiers and local Irish cops bristling under their new, lower status. However it began, white Memphians rioted for three days, burning, looting and raping their way through the black section of town. When it was over, forty-six black Memphians were dead. No whites were reported killed.⁷

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⁴Ibid., p. 16.
⁵Ibid.
⁶Ibid.
⁷Nager, Memphis Beat, p. 15.
While relatively tolerant, Tennessee was still a product of the South. Nathan Bedford Forrest, the distinguished Confederate general, was a leading slave trader in Memphis before the war and the Ku Klux Klan was formed in Pulaski, Tennessee in 1866.

The yellow fever epidemics of the 1870s forever changed the cultural life of Memphis. The swampy land and frequent flooding of the Mississippi River made Memphis a breeding ground for mosquitoes and a prime target for mass infection. Following outbreaks of the fever in the 1860s, the fever returned in 1873 killing two thousand Memphians. By 1878 and 1879 Memphis became a nightmarish plague city and almost six thousand residents died. Many others fled the city. In September 1878, twenty-five thousand people fled in one two-week period. Many black Memphians remained in the city, often protecting the holdings of their white employers. The consequence of this was a large concentration of blacks. The Irish and Germans fled the city and did not return.

Even when the fever subsided, many who had fled refused to return. Of the 7,000 whites who had remained in the city, 6,800 were hit with the fever. Three out of four of them died. Among Memphis’s black population of 14,000, the odds for recovery were far greater. Descended from West Africans who were resistant to the disease and who had been hardy enough to survive the incredible ordeal of transportation in festering slave ships, these black Memphians had already withstood generations of exposure to the South’s germ pool. Of 10,800 yellow fever cases among the city’s African American population, only 800 were fatal.

One of the survivors was a man who would change the face of Memphis forever, Robert Church.

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9Ibid., p. 20.
In the wake of the yellow fever epidemics, Church began buying up land in Memphis. He became one of the first black saloonkeepers there, built Church Park and Auditorium on Beale Street, opened the Dixie Park amusement facility and became the South’s first African American millionaire. “It was largely due to Church’s efforts that, around this time, Beale Street became the center for African American business and social activities in Memphis.”

Beale Street, of course, would later become the birthplace of the recorded blues, and was home to the nightclubs and saloons where Memphis blues and rhythm and blues would evolve. Beale Street also became the home of the Beale Street Baptist Church where members began performing what would later become gospel music. “The daylight hours saw Beale growing into a thriving center of black commerce, boasting dentist offices, dry goods stores, and most notably, Church’s Solvent Savings Bank and Trust, which opened in 1906.”

The importance of Memphis as a regional hub of commerce and labor, and its geographical setting are other ingredients that help explain how Memphis was able to become the center for musical race integration in the segregated South.

Memphis is the capital of the large rural region that surrounds it. You can drive two hundred miles in any direction before hitting another city of size. There are small towns and smaller ones. The Ozark Mountains are to the west; the distant Appalachian range cascades eastward from across the state, flattening into farmland before spilling into Memphis and the river; the Mississippi Delta sprawls south in the shape of a chicken leg, and the conversion of crops to cash has always taken place in Memphis. As a natural crossroads, the city has been influenced by many cultures, but its insulation has deterred European sophistication.

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10 Ibid., p. 21.
11 Ibid.
The isolation spoken of in Robert Gordon’s *It Came From Memphis* fostered a unique regional music that evolved from minstrel shows, spiritual songs, folk traditions, jug bands and the culture of African Americans in the Delta to become the blues. As the center of work in the Delta, Memphis drew hordes of workers who not only worked around Memphis in the rail yards, local fields, and cotton factories, but also packed Beale Street on their nights off. Not just a work center, Memphis also drew a tremendous number of musicians to record and play in the saloons there. “Memphis was the big time, the Hollywood, Paris and Manhattan of the blues all rolled into one, a place to record, get photographs taken, book gigs, and get drunk, stoned and laid.”\(^{13}\) W.C. Handy capitalized on this abundance of local sounds and was without doubt, one of the most important musicians to ever record and play in Memphis.

Born in 1873, Handy knew at an early age he wanted to be a musician. By age ten he could read music by sight, and set out to obtain an education in music. He bounced around in Missouri, Indiana, Mexico, Cuba, Canada and even attempted to play the World’s Fair in Chicago with a saloon quartet that traveled to the fair in a caboose, paying their fare with their music. It wasn’t until later in Clarksdale, Mississippi where the Delta Blues Museum now exists, that he stumbled onto an idea that changed not only his life, but the history of music. He was playing a dance, and as musical director he selected the songs the band would play. The white audience became bored with his choices until finally a local colored band was sent for to satisfy the would-be dancers. Familiar, and even enamored with this type of music he’d grown up with, Handy had not

\(^{13}\)Nager, *Memphis Beat*, p. 74.
fully considered its cross-over appeal until that night. “He returned to Beale Street and set his pen to music paper. Memphis woke up one morning with the blues.”

Credited by some as being the father of the blues, Handy helped popularize both the term and the musical style with songs like “The Memphis Blues,” “The St. Louis Blues,” “The Mississippi Blues,” “Hesitation Blues,” and others. Thus began the journey of black American music into the hearts and minds of white America.

Apart from Handy’s emergence, other events took place that provided the framework upon which Sam Phillips would build his rhythm and blues and rock and roll empires. Following the blues craze of the 1920s, popularized by female singers like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, the critical ingredient of improvisation appeared, traveling north on the Mississippi with jazz musicians from New Orleans. Innovations in recording equipment allowed musicians to record higher quality renditions of their most popular tunes and the radio emerged as the entertainment for the masses allowing whites to listen to popular black music in the privacy of their southern homes. As the 1950s began in Memphis, the city was poised to make a cultural and musical breakthrough. The convergence of black and white music that had existed there for over a hundred years was finally ready to be sold en-masse to white America. Sam Phillips, and the Sun Sound, would capitalize on the idea that had struck W.C. Handy so many years earlier.

Historians, rock critics and writers, and those who played vital roles in the evolution of the “Memphis Sound” during the 1950s and 1960s basically agree on the different elements, personalities, traditions, and events that combined to shape the music.

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14 Lee, *Beale Street*, p. 133.
that emerged during those years. First and foremost, these people are music fans, looking less for historical controversy and revisionism, and more for the stories of those who were there. The books that chronicle the history of Memphis music during those revolutionary decades agree upon the importance of the unique radio stations and personalities in Memphis; agree that the geography, history, and demographics of Memphis helped form the music; agree that a few groundbreaking entrepreneurial Memphians capitalized on the rich collection of musicians who walked the Memphis streets; and agree that Memphis was able to somehow overcome the stifling social and political segregation and integrate musically until the bullet that killed Martin Luther King Jr. shattered the fragile musical alliance of whites and blacks. It is the degree to which each of these separate forces determined the ultimate outcome that separates the historians, rock critics and first hand accounts.
THE BLUES & THEIR IMPORTANCE IN SHAPING THE MEMPHIS SOUND

A common thread that binds the historiography of the “Memphis Sound” is the importance of the blues. The Mississippi Delta is of course the birthplace of the blues, but it is the blues as it was played and recorded in Memphis that is central to this study. Memphis has always served as a musical and cultural magnet drawing the very best musicians north from the Delta. Following the success of W.C. Handy’s blues compositions a new music titled rhythm and blues flourished in Memphis in the late 1940s and early 1950s and began to open small cracks in the walls of segregation that pervaded Memphis society.

Charles Keil, in his 1966 treatise on the blues, Urban Blues, discusses the migratory nature of the blues and pinpoints Memphis as one of the three critical regions and cities that stylistically shaped the blues. Along with “the Delta, the Territories-Texas and the adjoining sections of Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma have produced a wealth of bluesmen most of whom have migrated north to Chicago, often via Memphis.”\(^{15}\) He sees Memphis as a regional meeting place for bluesmen and a center of blues activity. He also refers to the evolution of blues there as the genesis of rhythm and blues, a music that when played by whites was later called rock and roll. Citing B.B. King, Bobby Bland and J.R. Parker as musical archetypes, he explains how the emergence of new accompaniment elements in their bands laid the foundation for the R & B boom that took place in Memphis. The new electric bass and guitar allowed

band-leaders to rely less on horns as rhythmic underpinnings and use them with greater
discretion instead. A white studio owner would soon begin recording this new form of
the blues preparing the South, and America, for racially integrated music.

In *The Land Where the Blues Began*, Alan Lomax reveals how the blues and
African American culture overflowed its repressive banks and influenced R & B, soul
and rock and roll music. A comprehensive study of the musical roots of the blues; the
working environments that shaped the music created by men laying rail lines and
laboring in levee camps; as well as a collection of biographical sketches, Lomax’s history
pinpoints Muddy Waters’s band as a prime example of the transformation that occurred
as blues became rhythm and blues. Describing a performance he witnessed, Lomax
comments on this evolution:

> This was America’s newest orchestra, rich with unconventional harmonies and
polyrhythms, far more African than any jazz band— an orchestra built around
singing, highly rhythmic yet subtly supporting and amplifying the vocal part,
going back through Son House to the one-stringed diddley bow, to the very roots
of African-American music in Mississippi. The audience, folks from the ghettos
of the Midwest and Deep South, knew this sound. It was theirs. They had danced
it into being on a thousand thousand nights in barrooms and house parties. Now
the old Delta music, rechristened rhythm and blues was on stage.¹⁶

While Peter Guralnick, widely regarded as the nation’s preeminent writer on
twentieth-century American vernacular music, sees the blues recorded in Memphis as less
important than the sides that would be cut later in Chicago at the Chess Studio, he still
emphasizes the importance of Sam Phillips’ Memphis Recording Studio. In *Feel Like
Going Home* he states “for our purposes I think it is enough to say that the blues came out
of Mississippi, sniffed around Memphis and then settled in Chicago where it is most likely it will peacefully live out the rest of its days.”

He later explains the importance of Sam Phillips as the prophet who recognized the potentiality of a new music synthesizing white and black blues sounds. “It was a natural enough connection, especially after the fact, but Sam Phillips was the only man to sense the nature of that connection and, perhaps because of his extensive background in blues and “race” music, the only man to exploit it to its fullest.” Rhythm and blues then was the link between blues and rock and roll.

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18 Ibid., p. 172.
SAM PHILLIPS AND SUN RECORDS

In *Good Rockin’ Tonight* by Colin Escott and Martin Hawkins, Sam Phillips explains the importance of the blues and displays a rare racial sensitivity and tolerance not often expressed by whites in the South in the 1950s.

I opened the Memphis Recording Service with the intention of recording singers and musicians from Memphis and the locality who I felt had something people should be able to hear. I’m talking about blues- both the country style and the rhythm style- and also about gospel or spiritual music and about White country music. I always felt that people who played this type of music had not been given the opportunity to reach an audience. I feel strongly that a lot of the blues was a real story. Unadulterated life as it was. My aim was to prove whether I was right or wrong about this music. I knew, or I felt I knew that there was a bigger audience for the blues than just the Black man of the mid-South. There were city markets to be reached, and I knew that Whites listened to the blues surreptitiously.19

His oft-quoted statement “If I could find a white singer with the Negro sound and the Negro feel I could make a million dollars”20 recognizes that his motives weren’t solely philanthropic, however.

*Good Rockin’ Tonight* also focuses on Phillips’s intention of creating a unique sound that reflected the black culture that he found so vital. “He recognized the primacy of the blues and looked for the raw blues feel in virtually all the artists he recorded.”21

Escott and Hawkins see the relaxed and informal nature of the Sun Studio as critical to

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the sound of the records that were created there. Sam was a novice when he started, and he took chances not only in the artists he chose to record, but in his production techniques as well. *Good Rockin’ Tonight* explains this experimentation, and shows how Phillips took advantage of low operating costs to produce his groundbreaking body of work.

Robert Palmer, in *Deep Blues*, sees in Phillips a revolutionary who shared the same interests in black culture that many other white southerners did. Palmer describes Phillips as unique however, because he alone possessed the willingness to express that fondness. “Phillips’s interest in black people and their music wasn’t particularly unusual for a white man of his age and background. What Palmer finds unusual is that he did something about it and, in doing so, revolutionized American popular music.”

As a result of his associations Phillips often encountered angry whites who couldn’t understand why a white man with a good job (he was working in radio when he began his recording service) would record black music. “You smell O.K. today. Must not’ve been recording those niggers,” is one way Phillips recalls their reaction in *Deep Blues*.

Palmer also explains the influence black culture had on Phillips, and how that fueled Phillips desire to provide a voice for black southerners.

I thought it was vital music…and although my first love was radio, my second was the freedom we tried to give the people, black and white, to express their very complex personalities, personalities these people didn’t know existed in the fifties. I just hope I was a part of giving the influence to the people to be free in their expression.

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23Ibid.
24Ibid.
Phillips most important contribution to breaking down racial barriers though was his discovery of Elvis Presley. Larry Nager, in his history of Memphis music *Memphis Beat*, echoes the importance of Phillips as an engineer of blues recordings, but sees his ability to blend white and black together on the Presley recordings as equally important. Phillips acumen for recognizing, recording and publicizing the blues in and around Memphis illustrate the connections that already existed between white and black in Memphis; the product of years of social and musical associations. “All that was needed to complete the budding musical revolution was a charismatic young white singer. And there was one man recognized that fact: Sam Phillips.”

It was Phillips background in the blues, a music that had matured in Memphis that made him the perfect instrument to facilitate the cultural collision of musical integration. In Elvis, Nager states, “Phillips had found what he was looking for– a modern essence distilled from the Memphis mojo of black-white cultural integration.”

Sam Phillips was both a product of the environment in which he grew up, and a social radical with visions of racial harmony created via music. His exposure to the music of southern African Americans gave him an appreciation of the culture that had developed, and an empathy for the plight of southern blacks.

I saw – I don’t remember when, but I saw as a child – I thought to myself: suppose that I would have been born *black*. Suppose that I would have been born a little bit more down on the economic ladder. I think from I felt from the beginning the total inequity of man’s inhumanity to his brother. And it didn’t take its place with me of getting up in the pulpit and preaching. It took on the

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26 Ibid., p. 150.
aspect with me that someday I would act on my feelings, I would show them on an individual, one-to-one basis.\(^27\)

Carl Perkins, author of “Blue Suede Shoes,” and Elvis shared those views and help explain why visionaries in Memphis were able to overcome political and social segregation to create black music for white America. Perkins learned how to play guitar from an older black man who picked cotton in the same fields that he did. Elvis made forays into black churches to hear gospel music and voraciously consumed the blues and rhythm and blues played on Memphis radio. A shared feeling of hardship, and even discrimination was one that bound many southerners, black and white. Socially, of course, this kinship was frowned upon. But through music those walls could be kicked down.

In Peter Guralnick’s *Last Train to Memphis, The Rise of Elvis Presley*, the first volume of his definitive two-part biography of Elvis, he describes an unspoken bond shared by Phillips and Elvis that made them critical players in the evolution of Memphis music as it began to bridge cultural divides.

Sam couldn’t be sure, he thought he sensed in Elvis a kindred spirit, some who shared with him a secret, almost subversive attraction not just to black music but to black culture, to an inchoate striving, a belief in the equality of man. This was something that Sam felt could never be articulated; each man was doomed to stumble in his own darkness, if only because the stakes were so high... The lack of prejudice on the part of Elvis Presley had to be one of the biggest things that ever happened to us, though. It was almost subversive, sneaking around through the music— but we hit things a little bit, don’t you think? I went out into this no-man’s— land, and I knocked the shit out the color line.\(^28\)

\(^{27}\)Peter Guralnick, *Feel Like Going Home*, p. 60.

Phillips paid the price for his trailblazing efforts though. He had two mental breakdowns and had to be temporarily institutionalized.

Wheelin’ on Beale, Louis Cantor’s history of radio station WDIA, America’s first black radio station, provides an informative description of segregated Memphis during these years which highlights just how revolutionary the actions of Sam Phillips were. It was a time only a year removed from the integration of major league baseball, yet still six years before the landmark Brown v. Board of education case integrated southern schools. Ernest C. Withers was the first black police officer in Memphis and was hired in 1948. But Memphis, as always, was both typical of the South as well as replete with its own perspective on racial matters. Focusing on the Memphis stage Cantor describes the dances known as Midnight Rambles that were held weekly on Beale:

Performers – both pop and gospel – complained frequently that local ordinances would not allow blacks and whites to be under the same roof for a black show, but Rufus Thomas, black singer, premier entertainer, and one of the early WDIA disc jockeys, frequently performed in Memphis nightclubs to white-only audiences. Beale Street’s famous Midnight Rambles featured an all-black show on Thursday nights exclusively for white patrons. Of all segregation’s peculiar manifestations, this has to be one of the most bizarre.29

This is just one example of the strange accommodations that existed in a place in history foreign to most us today.

Cantor also sees the Memphis Cotton Carnival as illustrative of segregated Memphis. A celebration of cotton and southern heritage the Cotton Carnival was the highlight of the Memphis social season and featured an all-white parade. Blacks who participated were relegated to pulling floats, confined to menial tasks or used as negative
caricatures. By 1948, a separate black festival was created in the form of the Cotton Makers’ Jubilee by a black dentist who viewed black participation in the Cotton Carnival with disdain. The Jubilee became quite popular with whites and blacks alike, even integrating briefly on Beale Street, an area often avoided by whites during the Jubilee parade. Cantor sees this as important because it “reveals profound truth about race relations in Memphis just prior to the civil rights revolution: complete separate, segregated facilities frequently represented positive accomplishments for blacks only because the available substitute at the time was not a racially integrated facility but no facility at all!”

It was in this environment that music overcame such rigid social constraints and began to provide a avenue for whites and blacks to collaborate. Even before W.C. Handy, in Memphis music had always been a bridge between the races.

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30 Cantor, Wheelin’ On Beale, p. 11.
MEMPHIS RADIO: SEGREGATION IN THE AIR

Memphis radio can be seen as the keystone in the bridge between black and white. A symbiotic relationship evolved between the blues, rhythm and blues and the growing importance and popularity of radio and radio personalities that benefited both Phillips and Elvis, and helped integrate the Memphis airwaves. Fortunately for Memphians of the late 1940s and the 1950s they could tune in pioneering wild-man DJ Dewey Phillips on WHBQ’s *Red Hot and Blue* program after dark, or listen to America’s first all-black station WDIA during the daylight hours. In each case the radio airwaves were blurring the lines between popular white and black music, democratically disseminating the sound that was shaped by the Delta and the Tennessee hills and fields. Historians and scholars have much to say about the essential role Memphis radio played in the story of integrated Memphis music.

*Wheelin’ on Beale* stresses the importance of what became known as “The Goodwill Station,” emphasizing how black Memphians were able to “transfer the peculiar institution of racial segregation into a positive contribution to both the black and white culture of Memphis and the Mid-South.”\(^\text{31}\) Cantor focuses on WDIA’s ground-breaking role in forever changing the history of American radio, but also describes WDIA as an instrument to celebrate the previously unacknowledged accomplishments of blacks. Among the station’s accomplishments Cantor states that “this tiny, unobtrusive,

\(^{31}\) Cantor, *Wheelin’ On Beale*, p. 4.
hardly recognizable 250-watt station would ultimately revolutionize radio listening habits across the entire nation, create strong black role models in the Deep South, help legitimize black music over the air, and even inspire Elvis Presley. "32

Initially, a white station, WDIA was the first to capitalize on the vast listening audience that existed in and around Memphis when it switched to an all-black format in 1948 to avoid going out of business. The black population represented a staggering 46.9 percent of the total listening audience during those years. 33 Amazingly enough, WDIA did not have many records to play for a black audience that clamored for “race” music after their initial broadcast. Fortunately independent labels like Sun in Memphis, Chess and Vee-Jay in Chicago, Atlantic and Apollo from New York, Duke also in Memphis and King in Cincinnati began providing scores of recordings in the late 1940s and early 1950s which specialized in rhythm and blues. The shift from ASCAP’s (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) control of licensing recorded music for play to BMI (Broadcast Music Incorporated) was also important in the growth of independent record labels. ASCAP focused on the sale of sheet music, while BMI concentrated on radio music and gave smaller labels more freedom to record than they’d previously enjoyed. Cantor sees this development, as well as the success of WDIA as critical in the popularity of blues and rhythm and blues records that Elvis and others would later emulate.

Radio stations throughout the South would soon learn just how popular the blues were, not only with blacks but with whites as well. Before Elvis, whites were starved for something fresh. Long-time Memphis DJ George Klein sums up the

32 Cantor, Wheelin’ On Beale, p. 3.
33 Ibid., p. 20.
feeling of a generation of teenagers when he laments: “We were so tired of playing Doris Day, Eddie Fisher, and Perry Como.”

In *Last Train to Memphis*, Guralnick likens Memphis radio at this time to “an education of a sort, and of a quality, virtually unimaginable today and, in an age and a place that were strictly segregated in every respect, an education that was colorblind.”

DJ Dewey Phillips is a pivotal character in the interracial drama that was occurring in Memphis. Along with Sam Phillips, Dewey (no relation) played a vital role in the dissemination of black music to white Memphis teens, and was a catalyst of musical integration. Beginning in 1949, Dewey capitalized on the success of WDIA and began playing similar music after WDIA went off the air at dusk. Sam Phillips explains Dewey’s importance in Larry Nager’s *Memphis Beat* “Dewey was the most popular disc jockey that ever hit the city of Memphis...Dewey Phillips played as important a part as anybody in the history of the record and music industry toward the acceptance of black music crossing the barrier of races.”

Broadcasting on WHBQ from 10:00 P.M. to midnight weekdays and until 1:00 A.M. on Saturday nights Dewey played some of the finest vernacular music ever recorded, regardless of the race of the performer. Rufus Thomas says flatly, “He was playing rhythm and blues when whites playing rhythm and blues wasn’t cool.” Stanley Booth, in his journey through the music of the American

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34 Cantor, Wheelin’ On Beale, p 53.
35 Guralnick, Last Train, p. 39.
36 Nager, Memphis Beat, p. 129.
37 Ibid., p. 130.
South, *Rhythm Oil*, also quotes Thomas “Dewey was not white, Dewey had no color.”

But Phillips’ infectious, rapid-fire, countrified, down-home style soon made it not only cool, but almost habitual for young Memphians to listen to the new type of music that was now readily available. A one-man freak show, Phillips even led WHBQ’s management to build him a separate radio booth after he destroyed more than one with his antics on the air. Who could have predicted that the cultural revolution Phillips was spinning on his turntables would change the future of American music forever?

*It Came From Memphis*, Robert Gordon’s chronicle of Memphis rock music and the impact Memphis culture had on shaping generations of Memphis musicians, describes the impact of Dewey Phillips on Memphis teens and provides evidence of the link between Memphis’ first white-black collaboration at Sun Records and the subsequent one that occurred in the Stax studio in the 1960s.

“I was fourteen and I didn’t realize that Dewey wasn’t being heard all over America,” says Don Nix, who along with his schoolmates, would capture the Dewey energy in the Mar-Keys, a band of white boys who broke racial barriers playing the black circuit in 1961. “I thought everyone in every town had a disc jockey that in one night, three hours, you could hear anything you wanted to hear. I wasn’t allowed to listen to the radio at night, so my brother and I used to sneak the radio under the covers, and listen after my parents went to bed. He played Little Walter and Johnny Ace, but also Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole and Jimmy Reed. I listened to WDIA too, but not as much, because WDIA played only one kind of music. Dewey played it all.”

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It’s here then, at the convergence of Sam and Dewey Phillips with Elvis Presley in Memphis that one finds the first of the two great musical integrations in Memphis music history. Guralnick elaborates on the race cross-over of Dewey Phillips radio show in Last Train to Memphis, it was “black music on a white radio station with a strong Negro audience and a growing, if for the most part unacknowledged, core of young white listeners with a growing, if for the most part unexamined buying power.” Furthermore, Dewey Phillips was already playing the music that Sam was recording. Dewey became an unpaid promoter of Sun recordings, popularizing them first in Memphis leading to their greater appeal regionally, and later nationally. The record, and epochal event that finally brought black music to a white audience via a white singer, was Elvis’s landmark recording of “That’s All Right” in the summer of 1954, the very same year the Supreme Court struck down separate but equal. It took Sam Phillips to record it, and Dewey Phillips to play it.

In 1954 Elvis was paired with guitarist Scotty Moore, and bassist Bill Black by Sam Phillips. Following rehearsals and some unsuccessful attempts at recording something they all deemed worthwhile, Elvis broke into an Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup song titled “That’s All Right.” The event has since been declared the birth date of rock and roll by many. The recording is a synthesis of many of the cultural forces that made Memphis unique. Sam Phillips’s success as an engineer of rhythm and blues records led

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40Guralnick, Last Train, p. 6.
Elvis to his door, and Memphis’ racially integrated airwaves nurtured Elvis’s musical tastes allowing him to know such a song. The metamorphosis of Delta blues music into rhythm and blues, of which “That’s All Right” was a prime example, then further evolved here into rock and roll. Gordon explains in *It Came From Memphis*: “Rock and roll was white rednecks trying to play black music. Their country music background hampered them and they couldn’t do it. That’s why we don’t call made they play rhythm and blues.”

Greil Marcus, in *Mystery Train, Images of America in Rock ‘N’ Roll Music*, sees this recording as less of a celebration of black music and more of a white response to the popularization of black music.

Most important the image was white…they could be as strange, as exciting, as scary, and as free as the black men who were suddenly walking America’s airwaves as if they owned them. There were two kinds of white counterattack on the black invasion of white popular culture that was rock ‘n’ roll: the attempt to soften the black music or freeze it out, and the rockabilly lust to beat the black man at his own game.

Guralnick, as always, provides insights into this session and the appeal of the record to white Memphians. Sam Phillips “knew from his experience recording blues, and from his fascination with black culture, that there was something intrinsic to the music that could translate, that *did* translate.” In Elvis, Phillips had found someone to translate this music and make it okay for white teenagers to enjoy. Elvis allowed whites to overcome their resistance to buying rhythm and blues records.

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41 Gordon, *It Came From Memphis*, p. 5.
Dewey Phillips was just as critical as Elvis and Sam Phillips in the success of *That’s All Right*. Sam played the tape for Dewey the very night that it was cut. Dewey who knew the song because he’d played the original many times sat back and listened intently as Sam played the tape over and over in the WHBQ studio. Dewey liked it, but Sam wondered “where are you going to go with this, it’s not black, it’s not white it’s not pop, it’s not country, and I think Dewey was the same way. He was fascinated by it – there was not question about that – I mean he loved the damn record, but it was a question of where do we go from here?”

Dewey played the freshly pressed acetates the very next night. Some say seven times in a row, others say eleven, but the response to this new amalgamation of black and white was instantaneous. Telegrams and phone calls poured in requesting information about the artist singing. A nervous Elvis was whisked from the movie theater where he’d isolated himself to avoid hearing the song’s debut to the WHBQ studios. Dewey called Elvis’ mother Gladys and told her “you get that cotton-picking son of yours down to the station. I played that record of his, and them bird-brained phones haven’t stopped ringing since.” Unbeknownst to Elvis, Dewey’s informal conversation in the studio was actually Elvis’ first on-air interview. After their talk, Elvis said “Aren’t you going to interview me? ‘I already have, the mike’s been open the whole time’,” replied Phillips.

After the initial success of Elvis’s Sun recordings, and his growing regional and national fame, Sam Phillips would sell Elvis’ contract to RCA records for $35,000.00

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dollars and go on to focus on other white artists at Sun Records like Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash and Charlie Rich. Some black artists like Rufus Thomas felt he abandoned the very artists who helped him attain the status that he had. Phillips still did record black records, but felt that he had to capitalize on the booming white rock and roll market while he could. Still, through his experiences recording blues, and rhythm and blues, and bringing it to whites as rock and roll he was ultimately able to realize his dream of celebrating black culture. On NPR’s morning edition in 1993 Sam spoke of being a voice for those who previously hadn’t been heard:

People at that time—and no disrespect for any human being on this Earth—but people didn’t look upon this as real artistry. So I just felt that knowing these people, just based on hardships and things that I had been through as a child coming through the 1930s Depression, and I knew my life wasn’t nearly as bad as theirs. And these people had something to say, something real. And I kind of liked that.46

Nager views Elvis as a culmination of the “tension between social circumstances and emotional expression”47 that makes Memphis music unique. Elvis broke down the barriers of social segregation and combined it with cultural integration. White Memphis had always been attracted to the cut-loose abandon they viewed in the juke joints and Sunday morning church services, but had created a strict knot of social standards that prevented them from being equal participants. Beale Street had provided an outlet since the 1800s for adventurous whites, but now Elvis provided a similar avenue for not just Memphians, but teens nationwide. He was the first product of that environment to be

sold nationally to that huge market of white kids. He became a symbol and a standard-bearer for a generation of rebellious teens who were able to express their subversive desires, if only for the duration of a rock and roll record. For white Memphis, the forbidden pleasures of Beale Street had always come wrapped in the pulsing rhythms of the blues. That experience was now being exported to the rest of America. Elvis had taken the southern blues and made part of the identity of just about every white teenager. The success of Elvis and Sun Studio, propelled by the manic ramblings of Dewey Phillips was a culmination of the first great era of musical integration in Memphis. Half a decade later the second period of Memphis musical integration would occur, built on the heritages that had always shaped Memphis culture and music.
The Stax studio added a new twist to the musical integration that had begun with whites playing and popularizing black music. At Stax they combined white and black musicians who created a new music called soul. Soul music, the product of many of the same influences that had shaped rock and roll, added the element of gospel and drew upon the rich tradition of formal musical education that had always thrived in Memphis. Stax was also the result of the maverick, entrepreneurial spirit that had motivated Robert Church, W.C. Handy, and Sam Phillips.

The origins of Stax records began in 1957 and provide a direct connection to the influential success of Sam Phillips’s Sun Studio. Jim Stewart, a banker and fiddle player in country bands created the Satellite label in an attempt to be the next engineer to capture the lightning in a bottle that had made Sam Phillips Memphis’ first recording mogul. The name Satellite records was short-lived, another record company was using it in California, and it took a loan from Stewart’s older sister Estelle Axton to keep Stewart’s recording dream alive. Combining letters from each of their names, the siblings dropped the name Satellite and the Stax label was born. Further illustrating the inter-connectedness of the Memphis music scene, Stewart recorded Rufus and Carla Thomas’ “Cause I Love You” scoring his first regional hit. Rufus Thomas had also provided Sam Phillips with one of his earliest hits “Bear Cat,” a response to Big Mama Thorton’s original “Hound Dog.” Released in 1960, the follow up to “’Cause I Love
You” was Carla’s solo debut “GeeWhiz” which attracted the attention of Atlantic Records co-owner Jerry Wexler and began the relationship between Atlantic and Stax records. From these humble beginnings the second chapter of Memphis’ musical integration was launched. Unlike Sam Phillips, Stewart had not set out to record black music, but the success of “‘Cause I Love You” irrevocably changed his life.

“Prior to that I had no knowledge of what black music was about. Never heard black music and never even had an inkling of what it was all about. It was like a blind man who suddenly gained his sight. You don’t want to go back, you don’t even look back. It just never occurred to me [to keep recording country or pop].”

From then on Stewart began producing the rhythm and blues records that would later become known as soul music.

While Stax is in many ways the continuation of the story that has always set Memphis music apart; the influence of the blues, black and white integration, the celebration of black culture, and the evolutionary nature of music itself, there were important new elements that shaped the Stax story. Stax drew heavily from the gospel traditions, the legacy of musical education in Memphis schools, and the ghetto in which the studio was ultimately relocated.

The principles of Gospel music helped define what the world would later call soul music, and much of the world would later call soul music came from Memphis. Rock and roll was whites playing black rhythm and blues, soul music was rhythm and blues paired with the “churchy” harmonies and chord progressions of gospel songs. And, of course, many of the same tendencies that define gospel music have at their roots slave
and African musical influences. Lucie E. Campbell, and Rev. Herbert Brewster, two of the most important gospel composers of all time both came from Memphis and paved the way for soul music. “Campbell wrote several of the most popular gospel songs of all time. “In the Upper Room” was a major success for Mahalia Jackson, who recorded it twice, while her “Jesus Gave Me Water” was recorded on March 1, 1951, by one of the most important and influential gospel quartets of all time, the Soul Stirrers.”

Lead singer for the Soul Stirrers was one of the two men most responsible for the evolution of gospel music into soul, Sam Cooke. Cooke, along with Ray Charles evoked the wrath of gospel purists by taking many of gospel’s most sacred tunes and popularizing them among a secular audience. Charles often did so by writing new lyrics to gospel songs, or simply by removing “lord” and replacing it with “baby.” Unlike Charles, Cooke had established himself as a gospel star first, and his crossover to secular music drew tremendous criticism from his religious audience. The popularity of gospel music led many black rhythm and blues artists to incorporate gospel elements into their music long before the moniker “soul” was born. James Brown, the Isley Brothers, and Bobby “Blue” Bland all began folding gospel elements into their music. Importantly for Stax, many of the hit-makers recruited by Jim Stewart had begun their singing careers in Memphis church choirs.

The location of the Stax studio also plays a decisive role in the story of the music the label created. After cutting initial recordings in garages and outbuildings the label

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relocated to the dilapidated Capitol Theater in the black area of Memphis that was rapidly becoming a ghetto. The theater’s sloping floor, which was never leveled, and the “live” recording environment which resulted from the theater’s large space would help define what later became known as the Stax sound. Estelle Axton suggested opening a record store in what had previously been the candy stand in the theater. The store would become vitally important in both the promotion and test marketing of recordings and the recruitment of many of the musicians who would later record at Stax.

Members of what would become the Stax house band Booker T. and the MGs recall the importance of the Satellite record store. Booker T. Jones remembers in Robert Bowman’s definitive history of Stax, *Soulsville U.S.A.*, “I got to go in there and listen to everything. I’d spend three hours in the evening in there. I maybe bought one record a week, just enough so they’d let me back in. I’d hear music behind the curtain so I just kind of hung around there. It was an important influence.” For bassist Donald “Duck” Dunn the record store was also important although he did not live in the neighborhood. “I used to live out east. We had a little record shop there but if you wanted a rhythm and blues record, you had to special order it and it would take a week. Or, you’d have to get on a bus and go down to Beale Street to the Home of the Blues Record Shop. But they’d run you out if you just wanted to look.” Many future Stax employees became familiar with the label by frequenting the store, and later working behind the counter.

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51 Ibid.
Bowman goes as far as seeing the record shops importance as vital to the overall success of the Stax experiment, and describes it as a hidden enclave in segregated Memphis. A place white Memphians who were not drawn to that type of music didn’t even know existed. When white Memphians did become aware of what was happening at 926 E. McClemore the reaction was mostly negative. Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton, raised within a segregated society, insulated themselves within the walls of the Stax studio.

In many respects the company functioned as a world completely removed from the vicissitudes of the society in which it resided. Although there was no forethought to any of it, Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton’s steadily growing mom-and-pop operation provided a case study of how black and white could intersect and interact. And although it might seem disingenuous, I believe Estelle when she asserts, “We never saw color, we saw talent. That was what so great about being over there.”

The location of the theater and the influence of the record shop made Stax, in Bowman’s eyes what it became.

If Jim and Estelle had found another empty movie theater available at the right place in a different neighborhood, maybe the emphasis would have remained on the pop and country product with which they began. Given how important the shop was as a conduit for Jim and Estelle to make connections with singers, instrumentalists, and songwriters, I believe that the grand accident that was Stax simply wouldn’t have happened.

Despite these examples of the disregard for skin color within the Stax family they were still operating in the South. “Although race relations were very good within the walls of Stax, black and white employees tended to go their separate ways after work. In

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52 Ibid., p. 20.
53 Ibid.
fact, the Lorraine Motel was one of the few locales in Memphis where black and white employees of the company could feel comfortable hanging out together.”

Jerry Wexler co-owner of Atlantic Records, the label that distributed the Stax singles, recalls in *Soulsville, U.S.A.* just how segregated Memphis was even in the early 1960s. As Carla Thomas’s “Gee Whiz” broke into the top ten on the record charts Wexler decided to visit Memphis.

While in town he wished to take Jim (Stewart), Rufus (Thomas), Carla and Carla’s mother to dinner. Given the reality and attitude about racial segregation at that time in the mid-South, Jerry thought it best if they ordered room service and dined in his room. Thinking this through in advance, he had taken a suite rather than a regular room at Memphis’ most luxurious hotel, the Peabody. However, in Memphis at that time, blacks were not even allowed into the lobby of a hotel like the Peabody. “Rather than using the front door,” recalls Wexler, “we wound up going into the service entrance into the back of the hotel in an alley lined with garbage cans. It was humiliating and embarrassing to me and even more so to Rufus and the family. I remember on the way up Rufus said, ‘Same old story, back walking through the garbage.’”

Nearly twenty years before the incident at the Peabody, Alan Lomax in 1942 encountered firsthand on Beale Street some of the same resistance to blacks and whites mingling together. Sent by the Library of Congress to record blues songs, Lomax located a singer named Willie B and attempted to hear some of his songs in a vacant lot under starlight when:

A powerful flashlight shot it beam in my eyes and then played over the faces of my friends
“What the hell is goin’ on over there?” said a cracker voice.
“The blues,” I yelled.
“Easy, mister,” Willie B. whispered. “That police is pointin’ his gun over here.”

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54 Ibid., p. 143.
55 Ibid., p. 19.
There were two rather decrepit Memphis policemen on the sidewalk. “Where you from? What’s your name, buddy? What are you doing on Beale Street?” All this with flashlights in my face.

As I was explaining that I was on a mission from Washington to record the blues and had found two good singers…

“Washin’ton. Jis what I thought,” said A.
“‘Sociatin’ with niggers,” said B.
“Whyn’t you take all this nigger crap back where you came from?” said A.
“We don’t like it here in the South,” said B.
“Otter run um in,” said A.
“Git movin, you damn niggers,” punching my friends with his nightstick.
“And you, you nigger lover,” said B., not touching me,” you walk ahead and mind you walk straight.”

The Library of Congress cultural mission to record Delta folk songs made a rather sorry spectacle as it straggled down Beale Street past doorways filled with brown faces, past the Monarch, toward my car.  

But the appeal of creating music was just as strong in the early 1960s as it had been in 1942, and the nurturing environment provided by the Satellite record shop helped create a musical nucleus of white and black that allowed Stax to become a singular integrated record label.

Attracting local musicians, Stax took Sam Phillips vision of articulating black music one step further by recording it with a bi-racial band. Inducting Booker T. and the MGs into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Jim Stewart said “Black and white, working together in Memphis, Tennessee in 1962, you were making more than just music history.” The house band included black members Booker T. Jones on organ, Al Jackson Jr. on drums, and white members Steve Cropper on guitar and Donald “Duck” Dunn on bass. As has always been the case in Memphis, it was the music that allowed for black and white to coexist equally, if for only in the studio.

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An ingredient that bound many of these musicians together were the Memphis traditions of musical tutelage built in part from the education they received from listening to WDIA and Dewey Phillips on WHBQ, but also from strong local high school music programs and family histories of musicianship. The remarkable photographs of Ernest C. Withers, Memphis’ first black policeman, provide evidence of how these skills got passed down through the generations. Images in *The Memphis Blues Again, Six Decades of Memphis Music Photographs* capture Professor Lucky Sharpe, principal of Douglas High, and Professor W.T. McDaniels of Manassas and Booker T. Washington High Schools as integral parts of high profile musical events in Memphis. This illustrates the importance of music among the black community in Memphis and to Withers was an important part of what was happening in the Memphis in the 1950s: “the growing level of training musicians and band players. Those were the seeds of yesterday,” he goes on to say, “that developed into today.”

Daniel Wolff, editor of *The Memphis Blues Again*, emphasizes the importance of this tradition and sees Booker T. and the MGs as the fruit that sprouted from Withers “seeds of tomorrow.” Organist Booker T. Jones, singer William Bell, songwriter David Porter, and Otis Redding’s back-up band The Bar-Kays all came from Booker T. Washington High School. It wasn’t just formal education though that molded the Stax musicians. Drummer Al Jackson Jr.:

“would always be in Withers’s words ‘the son of Al Jackson Sr,’ one of the city’s most prominent big band leaders. The beat that millions boogied to on Sam and

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57 Nager, Memphis Beat, p. 177.
Dave’s “Hold on I’m Comin” worked its way down to the young Jackson through what Withers calls ‘a legacy of James Crawford, with Jimmy Lunceford, who was the world’s greatest drummer’.”

Stax’s first bassist was Lewis Steinberg of the prominent black Steinberg family, one of Memphis’ most musically prominent. Steve Cropper and Duck Dunn also idolized many of these same musicians growing up. “All of us Memphis was not huggin’ people, but we knew of and knew people,” says Withers.

Bowman also comments on the importance of the high school musical experience as an important unifying force among the stable of Stax musicians. “These musicians never fail to mention their high-school music teachers when discussing the development of their skills. In a community where the money for an instrument and/or private lessons was usually out of the question, the skill, drive, encouragement, and largesse of a music teacher, could and often did, make all the difference.” He also cites the importance of WDIA’s Teen-Town Singers as a link between formal musical education in high schools and the positive influence of WDIA in Memphis. The choir sang blues, gospel, jazz and pop during a thirty-minute performance during the Saturday broadcasts on WDIA. Carla Thomas, whose “Gee Whiz,” was one of the first hits on Stax gained valuable training during her years as a Teen-Towner.

Robert Gordon’s It Came From Memphis doesn’t focus on the traditional characters of the Memphis music story. Instead he weaves the stories of lesser known but no less important characters that helped define Memphis music into a volume that

\[^{59}\text{Ibid., p. 15.}\]
\[^{60}\text{Ibid.}\]
examines those caught in the shadows of institutions like Sun Records and Stax. He
delves into the story of the Mar-Keys as a product of the integrated nature of Memphis
music instead of a re-telling of the importance of the better known Stax house band.

Gordon emphasizes the importance of saxophonist Packy Axton, Estelle’s son, in
the creation of Stax integrated sound. Packy wedged himself into the Mar-Keys after
convincing a reluctant Steve Cropper who wasn’t looking for a horn section.

“Somewhere in the conversation he mentioned something about his mother or his uncle
having a recording studio, and I went ‘Oh, really?’ And it sort of ended with, ‘Can you be
at rehearsal this coming Saturday?,’” says Cropper.62 Once in the band Packy helped
bridge the divide that was temporarily closing between black and white. Memphis
musician Jim Dickinson explains:

“Like Dewey Phillips, Packy saw race in a more enlightened way than was typical
in Memphis in the late fifties and early sixties. The community aspect of Stax in
the ghetto, I don’t think any of that would have happened but for the influence of
Packy Axton, and Packy’s friendship with Bongo Johnny Keyes, his black conga-
playing partner who worked at the lobby record store. I don’t think there’s any
doubt about what Packy brought ‘em. Jim Stewart was upstairs in the office
behind the dragon door. Packy was in the street. And that’s where the music is.”

While the Mar-Key’s would eventually splinter in the early 1960s with Cropper’s return
to the Stax studio and the creation of Booker T. and the MGs, Gordon sees them as an
obvious building block for the Stax sound. White kids playing black music to black

62 Gordon, It Came From Memphis, p. 59.
63 Ibid., pp. 60-61.
audiences. “They became one of the earliest, if not the first white band accepted on the black music circuit.”

The integration of the Stax band is in itself a paradox. Soul music is at its very heart black music. What then was the role that whites played in this celebration? Early musical integration in Memphis had taken the form of whites adopting and popularizing black music for white audiences. Stax was different. In *Sweet Soul Music, Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* Peter Guralnick views the soul music created in the South as a musical expression of black solidarity created within a partnership of black and white. He dismisses the old racist story of black workers and white owners and becomes convinced it was a true partnership.

But it was a partnership with a difference: the principals brought to it such divergent outlooks and experiences that even if they had grown up in the same little town, they were as widely separated as if there had been an ocean between them. And when they came together, it may well have been their strangeness to each other, as well as their familiarity, that caused the cultural explosion.

Along with the magnet-like effect of the Satellite record shop, Guralnick also points to the familial nature of the Stax studio as critical to its success. The studio was a place where black and whites could associate in segregated Memphis. “Despite the social revolution struggling to take place, despite Memphis’s reputation as the home of the blues, despite WDIA and the birth of rock and roll at the Sun Studio at 706 Union, there were not a lot of places for black and white to mingle easily.”

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64 Ibid., p. 59.
66 Ibid., p. 110.
He returns to the importance of Memphis radio as the only truly integrating factor in Memphis.

Who knew, as various White Citizens’ Councils have suggested, what evil lurked in the hearts of adolescents, or what music they were listening to as they tooled around town in their open-top cars? Who knew, in Memphis, how many white kids were being turned on by the savage jungle beat that was retailed on the airwaves … And who would have ever suspected that all these various strands, all these barely discernible connections would somehow come into focus under the banner of Stax (Satellite) Records, that all this raw energy would somehow translate into the bubbling beehive of activity that was rapidly gathering force under the marquee of the old Capitol Theater at 926 East McLemore?⁶⁷

Calling the Stax sound essentially “home-made,” Guralnick sees the success of the early years at Stax as almost accidental, a product of the years of musical cross-pollination that had always occurred in Memphis. In the Stax studio black and white finally existed on an equal playing field. “That is where it all came together. That is where the whole cast of characters, plus or minus one or two, gathered and met on a nearly equal ground- at least for a while.”⁶⁸

Like the experimentation of Sam Phillips that Escott and Hawkins speak of in *Good Rockin’ Tonight*, the recordings at Stax also required the producers to learn as they worked. Estelle Axton called it “a school really. It was a learning process for us all. We had an open door policy at that time. If you wanted to be heard, if you had something unique or different for us to listen to, well then bring it in and we’d take the time to listen.”⁶⁹ Isaac Hayes, one of Stax’s most important artists and song-writers agreed in a 2003 NPR interview, highlighting a unique element that had existed in Memphis all the

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⁶⁸Ibid.
way back to the days of W.C. Handy: “But you know, Stax was southern. It was below the Mason-Dixon Line. It was raw. It was real. You could come out of the cotton field and take your sack off and go in there and record a record in Memphis.”

Unfortunately the brief flowering of integrated music that began in the 1950s with Sam Phillips and matured with Stax was dealt a crippling blow with the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis. In this case the location of the studio would prove to fan the flames of racial tension that heated Memphis in the summer of 1969. Urban centers across America, Memphis included, were set on fire as riots broke out in black neighborhoods. White owned businesses were primary targets of rioters and it speaks volumes for Stax’s role in the community that neither Stax nor the Satellite Record Shop was touched.

Robert Palmer’s sweeping history of rock and roll, *Dancing in the Street*, sees the entire enterprise of soul music that had thrived not only in Memphis, but also in near-by Muscle Shoals, Alabama as dependent on the goodwill that was the foundation of King’s dream, but believes the impact of the assassination is often overstated. The soul movement, larger in scope than simply the Stax studio, was already changing in Palmer’s opinion. James Brown was creating the musical progenitors of funk, the Motown sound was being overhauled, and Sly and the Family Stone were “psychedelicizing” soul music in San Francisco. He cites Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown as illustrative of the divisions within the Civil Rights Movement itself as well.

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69 Ibid.
70 Issac Hayes on NPR Morning Edition, interview excerpt from 5-1-2003
However, the musicians who helped create the integrated sounds of soul certainly remember the change that occurred as a result of the assassination. Rick Hall, producer at the Muscle Shoals recording studio remembers:

The whole mood and atmosphere in the studio suddenly changed, and in fact we called off the session, out of respect to Dr. King and everything. But there was a change from that night on. The rhythm and blues acts slowly stopped coming to work with us, and within a period of a year or so after that, we were cutting almost all pop acts: Paul Simon, Cat Stevens, Rod Stewart. I know that happened quite a bit at a lot of other studios in the south. For the black acts, it was like, no longer cool to work with you anymore; they just quit coming. Prior to that time, we had worked with black acts almost one hundred percent.  

_Sweet Soul Music_ also provides first hand accounts of the changes at the Stax studio as a result of the assassination. “That was the turning point, the turning point for the relations between the races in the South. And it happened in Memphis,” said Booker T. Jones. Black musicians escorted Steve Cropper and Duck Dunn through an angry mob to their cars in the immediate aftermath of the assassination. Duck Dunn had to return for his bass the next day and remembers:

I got out, and June (Duck’s wife) waited in the car while Isaac (Hayes) came over to talk to me. All of a sudden the cop cars pull up, cops jump out and pull out their guns. They thought these black guys were doing something to hurt us because we were white…Well it was our fault because we weren’t supposed to be down there – they had helicopters and shit flying around, this was an area that was off limits, but this was where we lived and worked, we were trying to act like everything was normal.

Stax was undergoing other changes as well. The addition of Al Bell as national sales director for Stax in 1965 had helped the label succeed nationally but had changed the

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71 Bowman, _Soulsville U.S.A._, p. 144.
72 Palmer, _Dancing in the Streets_, p. 96.
73 Guralnick, _Sweet Soul Music_, p. 355.
“home-made” quality that had put Stax on the map in the first place. Al Bell had added a polish where none may have been needed. There were also jealousies within Stax. White guitarist Steve Cropper had established some individual deals with Jim Stewart that rankled others in the studio. Guralnick also lists three other events as critical to the end of the Stax sound of the 1960s:

…At Stax the equally unlikely detente between black and white which had been arrived at with little regard for political or musical theory was about to come unglued. It would probably have taken only one traumatic occurrence to shatter the delicate balance that Memphis music had achieved, but Stax had to endure not only the deaths of Otis Redding and Martin Luther King, two clear symbols of hope, but the almost simultaneous sale of Atlantic Records, an event which proved every bit as traumatic in the life of the record company and very nearly put Stax out of business as well.\(^{75}\)

Music was, of course, the very heart of the delicate balance that had been temporarily struck between white and black in Memphis, a culmination of nearly half a century of music in the city that was at one time called simply “the lights.” Slowly seeping out of the Mississippi Delta, the blues had been transformed into rhythm and blues, and later rock and roll. Recorded by Sam Phillips, and played by Dewey Phillips these records inspired a generation of Memphis musicians who turned a blind eye to the differences in their skin color when it came to music. Divided socially and politically they let the music do the talking, and what they said will last for generations.

\(^{74}\) Ibid.
\(^{75}\) Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music*, p. 355.
CONCLUSIONS

Musicians and producers in Memphis were able to overcome the stifling racial prejudice and social and political segregation to create music in the 1950s and the 1960s for a wide variety of reasons.

The city has always benefited from the cultural traditions of all of those who lived in the region surrounding it, both white and black. Black musicians have been attracted to the city as a place to record and play. As a labor center, there have always been workers who need to let off steam in the nightclubs, and are happy to provide an eager audience for musicians. As a stopping point between the Delta and Chicago, Memphis was always able to remain on the cutting edge of black contemporary music as musicians traveled through, but also played there.

The early recording success of Sam Phillips and his desire to provide a voice for black music and culture also help explain how integrated music occurred in Memphis. Through his recording efforts he created a catalog of music that Dewey Phillips’s first popularized as Memphis rhythm and blues, but that would grow to become rock and roll. Those records provided a template of black and white synthesis that the Stax musicians learned from. The importance of WDIA and Dewey Phillips bi-racial radio show are also critical elements that explain why Memphis could created the music it did.

The protective cocoon of the Stax studio, and the nurturing of Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton also propelled this story. For a time, within those walls black and white did not matter, only the music did. Until the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in
the very town where this integration had taken place shattered the delicate balance that had been created, Memphis was providing the world a vision of racial equality, of a shared celebration of the rich black and white musical heritage that has always existed in the air in Memphis.

Finally, one also has to realize that there may just be something in the southern air itself that helps to shape the music created there. Record producer Jim Dickinson is one of many who believe that segregation itself was one of the factors that gave a distinct edge to Memphis music. “I may not play better in Memphis, but I certainly play differently, and if I stay away too long I start to play funny. Memphis music is about racial collision in both directions. The rednecks who are playing blues still feel funny about it because they’re playing black music.”

In *Good Rockin’ Tonight*, Colin Escott and Martin Hawkins may put it best:

> Later after rock ‘n’ roll exploded, black and white kids from coast to coast and overseas began playing “southern” music, but they were drawing on a culture that they had only experienced vicariously, and the result was that they tried too hard to emulate it. They were too frantic. In fact, singers like Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, and Jerry Lee Lewis rarely rasped and screamed the way their many imitators did. In general, those from outside the southern culture built a style around exaggerations of southern music, and missed the lonesome hillbilly and blues feel that was its core. In the quest for abandon, they also failed to understand that southern music is lazy music – at any tempo.

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77 Ibid., p. 9.
LESSON PLAN

Introduction

Different American cities have contributed a variety of styles and individuals to the overall development of rock and roll and popular American music. While Memphis is the focus of this historiography, and arguably the most important of these cities, other cities have also played important roles in this evolution. During the course of this two-week lesson plan students will learn about the unique contributions of Memphis to the world of music, and create short films that illustrate the important musical innovations that emerged in other specific cities. After students are organized into small groups of no more than three, they will conduct research on the city they have selected, write scripts for a voice over narration, organize the music and images for their film, and record their voice over. Once the preliminary work has been completed students will edit and finalize their films. After all of the films have been completed the class will watch each film and take notes on the importance of each city. A test will complete the two-week unit after all the films have been shown.

Prior Content Knowledge and Skills

This lesson plan is designed for use in two courses: “Rock and Roll in America,” and a standard 11th grade American history class. It could also be used in a music class. This lesson is a culminating project that will come at the end of the “Rock and Roll in America” course. By that point, students will already be familiar with many of the cities
and performers they’ll be researching. While “Rock and Roll in America” is taught in a chronological sequence, this project will view American music through a much wider lens, focusing on the entirety of rock-based music without the constraints of a rigid chronology. Focusing on the contributions of specific cities to the history of American music in the twentieth century will serve as a fantastic review of prior class content in addition to providing the students with an avenue to express themselves through words, music, and powerful images.

Using this lesson in a standard 11th grade American history class will allow students to analyze some of the major social and cultural developments of the twentieth century, most specifically the social transformations that occurred after World War II (see Appendix A).

Computers and other technology play a vital role this lesson, and are incorporated whenever possible. As a result students will possess the word processing and digital media skills to complete this project by the end of the semester. They will also have to be taught how to use iMovie, the computer application that will be used to complete their films.

Content Hook

Students will be asked to address the following question in writing:

“Which American city has made the greatest contribution to the evolution of American popular music in the twentieth century? Explain the rationale for your choice.”
hopefully this question will lead to a class discussion of different american cities, and the styles of music or musical eras for which each city is best known.

the second part of this hook is a musical guessing game. tell students that they’ll be hearing 15 songs from different cities or regions in america. their job is to guess the artist performing each song, and the city most associated with that artist. then distribute the “where the heck is that song from?” handout (see appendix b-1) and review the directions with the class again. then play the songs listed on the teacher key (see appendix c-2). after reviewing the correct responses the student with the most correct answers would be given some sort of relevant prize. this hook will introduce students to the basic idea of the two-week project. after hearing the different styles of music unique to each city, inform the students that they will be creating short films over the next week and a half that explain and illustrate the important contributions of different cities to the evolution of rock and roll, and popular american music.

lesson content

after organizing the students into heterogeneous groups of no more than three project the list of cities that the students will be selecting from (see appendix c-3). after a random determination of the order in which groups will select cities, each group will select a city or region. once each group has selected a city or region pass out the project instructions (see appendix b-2) and review them with the class.
An example film created by the instructor would be quite helpful for student understanding of both lesson content as well as technological usage. A voice-over script for a film about Memphis has been included (see Appendix C-1).

After all student questions have been answered, distribute the research guides to each group (see Appendix B-3), and provide any remaining class time for students to begin researching. The following day will be devoted to further research, either in class or in the school library. By that time, all materials listed on each research guide will be readily available to each group.

By the end of the third day of the project students should have complete responses to the essential questions. Collect them at the end of class and review them for completion.

The fourth day of the project will be devoted to students writing their voice over narrations (see Appendix B-4). Once the narration is approved each group can begin recording their narration. A Sony PCM-M1 DAT recorder and a Sennheiser MD 46 microphone can be used for the recordings, but any recording device with a mini-jack output will work. Pro-Tools audio recording software will work to edit mistakes before importing the final recording into the student iMovie file.

This lesson is one that requires a tremendous amount of pre-planning and organization. Having a capable teaching assistant is extremely beneficial. The instructor must be able to record and import the student narrations, gather and import the appropriate music, as well be able to answer the questions students will have about iMovie. In an ideal world, your teaching assistant could record the student narrations
while the instructor navigates the multitude of issues students will have editing their films.

The subsequent days of the project will be devoted to the final edit of the student film. Students will download .jpeg or .gif images into iMovie for the visual element of the films. Each group needs to complete the film introduction and be prepared to read it before their final project is seen by the class (see Appendix B-5). By this point students should have also obtained appropriate music for their film and incorporated that as well.

After all the films have been completed export them from iMovie onto videotape. The tape is in a video camera that is then connected to a VCR for the final viewing. A digital projector and monitors work best for the sound, but a regular television will work fine.

Evaluation

Each group will introduce their film before it is shown to the class (see Appendix B-5). Students will also fill out the film matrix as they watch the films (see Appendix B-6). As each film is shown I’ll fill out the grading rubric for the film (see Appendix C-4). After all the films have been shown I’ll administer the formal examination (see Appendix C-5).
APPENDIX A

Grade Level Standards
11.5 Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of the 1920s.

11.5.6 Trace the growth and effects of radio and movies and their role in the worldwide diffusion of popular culture.

11.5.7 Discuss the rise of mass production techniques, the growth of cities, the impact of new technologies (e.g., the automobile, electricity), and the resulting prosperity and effect on the American landscape.

11.8 Students analyze the economic boom and social transformation of post-World War II America.

11.8.8 Discuss forms of popular culture, with emphasis on their origins and geographic diffusion (e.g., jazz and other forms of popular music, professional sports, architectural and artistic styles).
APPENDIX B

Student Handouts
Appendix B-1

**Where in heck is that song from?**

As you hear each song, write the artist and the city where the artists/band is from.

Song 1: 

Song 2: 

Song 3: 

Song 4: 

Song 5: 

Song 6: 

Song 7: 

Song 8: 

Song 9: 

Song 10: 

Song 11: 

Song 12: 

Song 13: 

Song 14: 

Song 15: 
Appendix B-2

Rock Across America Film Project: Instructions

Your group will be creating a short film that explains the musical importance and musical contributions of a specific American city to the overall canon of popular American music. You have already chosen a city. Follow the steps below to complete the project. Be sure to check the due dates for each step of the project.

Your film should answer the following essential questions:

1. Why is the city or region you’ve chosen important to the evolution of rock and roll, and other popular American music?
2. What performers, owners, producers and others in the music industry played an important role in the music produced in the city or region you’ve selected?
3. When was the definitive music produced in the city or region you’ve selected?
4. How can you describe the definitive music produced in the city or region you’ve chosen?
5. What is the overall legacy of the definitive music produced in the city or region you’ve chosen?
6. What music influenced the music produced in the city or region you’ve chosen and how did the music produced in the city or region you’ve selected influence other popular music?

Each film must also incorporate primary source information and maps.

Project Steps:

1. Read the “research guide” (appendix B-3) aloud with your group. Determine which group members will be responsible for answering specific essential questions.
2. Using the “research guide” conduct individual research and answer the essential questions you are responsible for. Due on day 3 of project!
3. Write the narration for your voice over (appendix B-4) Due on day 4 of project!
4. Record voice over narration, and begin to gather digital images for your film. Obtain appropriate music to use in your film.
5. Sit through group iMovie tutorial with Mr. Brooks.
6. Import voice over into iMovie. Due on day 6 of project!
7. Edit and complete your film.
8. Films should be “in the can” no later than day 9 of the project.
9. Show films. Each film will be introduced by the film makers (appendix B-5)
10. Fill out student handout #6 as you watch each film.
Appendix B-3

**Rock Across America Film Project**  
**Research Guide: Chicago**

Use this research guide to find the answers to the essential questions. Be sure to follow ALL the guidelines listed.

Guideline #1: Each group member is responsible to answer two essential questions. Your group can divide the questions any way you see fit.

Guideline #2: Be sure to use all of the vocabulary terms and people listed on this guide in the responses to your essential questions and final narrative.

Guideline #3: Use the books, websites, and other resources listed to answer the essential questions and final narrative.

**Books**  

**Web sites**  
www.rockhall.com

**Vocabulary Terms/People:**  
Chess Records  
Leonard Chess  
Muddy Waters  
Howlin’ Wolf  
Butterfield Blues Band  
Willie Dixon  
Sam Lay  
Michael Bloomfield  
Little Walter  
Chuck Berry  
Bo Diddley  
Blues  
Wilco  
Rhythm and Blues
Appendix B-3

Rock Across America Film Project
Research Guide: The Mississippi Delta

Use this research guide to find the answers to the essential questions. Be sure to follow ALL the guidelines listed.

Guideline #1: Each group member is responsible to answer two essential questions. Your group can divide the questions any way you see fit.

Guideline #2: Be sure to use all of the vocabulary terms and people listed on this guide in the responses to your essential questions and final narrative.

Guideline #3: Use the books, websites, and other resources listed to answer the essential questions and final narrative.

Books

Web sites
www.rockhall.com and www.deltabluesmuseum.com/

Vocabulary Terms/People:
Robert Johnson  Son House  Charlie Patton
Blues  Acoustic Guitar  The Crossroads
Eric Clapton  Muddy Waters  Howlin’ Wolf
The Rolling Stones  Mississippi River  Share Cropping
Sonny Boy Williamson
Appendix B-3

Rock Across America Film Project
Research Guide: Detroit

Use this research guide to find the answers to the essential questions. Be sure to follow ALL the guidelines listed.

Guideline #1: Each group member is responsible to answer two essential questions. Your group can divide the questions any way you see fit.

Guideline #2: Be sure to use all of the vocabulary terms and people listed on this guide in the responses to your essential questions and final narrative.

Guideline #3: Use the books, websites, and other resources listed to answer the essential questions and final narrative.

Books

Websites
[www.rockhall.com](http://www.rockhall.com) and [www.motownmuseum.com/mtmpages/index.html](http://www.motownmuseum.com/mtmpages/index.html)

Vocabulary Terms/People
Berry Gordy
The Funk Brothers
Marvin Gaye
The Miracles
Holland-Dozier-Holland
Motown
The Temptations
The Supremes
The MC5
James Jamerson
Smokey Robinson
Hitsville U.S.A.
The Four Tops
Iggy Pop
Martha and the Vandellas
Appendix B-3

**Rock Across America Film Project**

**Research Guide: Los Angeles**

Use this research guide to find the answers to the essential questions. Be sure to follow ALL the guidelines listed.

Guideline #1: Each group member is responsible to answer two essential questions. Your group can divide the questions any way you see fit.

Guideline #2: Be sure to use all of the vocabulary terms and people listed on this guide in the responses to your essential questions and final narrative.

Guideline #3: Use the books, websites, and other resources listed to answer the essential questions and final narrative.

**Books**

**Web sites**
www.rockhall.com

**Vocabulary Terms/People**
The Doors The Eagles Psychedelic
The Whiskey a Go-Go Country Rock The Byrds
The Beach Boys Surf Music Dick Dale
Brian Wilson Jan and Dean Phil Spector
Leiber and Stoller Van Halen Guns and Roses
Black Flag Gangsta Rap Dr. Dre
Snoop Dogg
Appendix B-3

**ROCK ACROSS AMERICA FILM PROJECT**

**RESEARCH GUIDE: NEW ORLEANS**

Use this research guide to find the answers to the essential questions. Be sure to follow ALL the guidelines listed.

Guideline #1: Each group member is responsible to answer two essential questions. Your group can divide the questions any way you see fit.

Guideline #2: Be sure to use all of the vocabulary terms and people listed on this guide in the responses to your essential questions and final narrative.

Guideline #3: Use the books, websites, and other resources listed to answer the essential questions and final narrative.

**Books**


**Web sites**

[www.rockhall.com](http://www.rockhall.com)

[www.history-of-rock.com/specialty.htm](http://www.history-of-rock.com/specialty.htm)

**Vocabulary Terms/People**

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<tr>
<td>Heritage Festival</td>
<td>Clifton Chenier</td>
<td>Professor Longhair</td>
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Appendix B-3

Rock Across America Film Project

Use this research guide to find the answers to the essential questions. Be sure to follow ALL the guidelines listed.

**Guideline #1:** Each group member is responsible to answer two essential questions. Your group can divide the questions any way you see fit.

**Guideline #2:** Be sure to use all of the vocabulary terms and people listed on this guide in the responses to your essential questions and final narrative.

**Guideline #3:** Use the books, websites, and other resources listed to answer the essential questions and final narrative.

**Books**

**Web sites**
[www.rockhall.com](http://www.rockhall.com) and [www.spectropop.com/hbrill.html](http://www.spectropop.com/hbrill.html)

**Vocabulary Terms/People**
The Brill Building Punk Music Andy Warhol
The Velvet Underground The Ramones CBGBs
Lou Reed The Talking Heads Blondie
Richard Hell The Blank Generation Phil Spector
Carole King Gerry Goffin Girl Groups
Pop Malcom McClaren London
Sex Pistols The New York Dolls Rap
Sugar Hill Run DMC Afrika Bambaataa
Appendix B-3

**Rock Across America Film Project**

**Research Guide: Philadelphia**

Use this research guide to find the answers to the essential questions. Be sure to follow ALL the guidelines listed.

Guideline #1: Each group member is responsible to answer two essential questions. Your group can divide the questions any way you see fit.

Guideline #2: Be sure to use all of the vocabulary terms and people listed on this guide in the responses to your essential questions and final narrative.

Guideline #3: Use the books, websites, and other resources listed to answer the essential questions and final narrative.

**Books**


**Web sites**

[www.rockhall.com](http://www.rockhall.com) and [www.phillymusic.org](http://www.phillymusic.org)

**Vocabulary Terms/People**

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<th>Gamble and Huff</th>
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<td>Disco</td>
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<td>Thom Bell</td>
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Appendix B-3

Rock Across America Film Project
Research Guide: San Francisco

Use this research guide to find the answers to the essential questions. Be sure to follow ALL the guidelines listed.

Guideline #1: Each group member is responsible to answer two essential questions. Your group can divide the questions any way you see fit.

Guideline #2: Be sure to use all of the vocabulary terms and people listed on this guide in the responses to your essential questions and final narrative.

Guideline #3: Use the books, websites, and other resources listed to answer the essential questions and final narrative.

Books

Web sites
www.rockhall.com

Vocabulary Terms/People
Bill Graham | Chet Helms | The Acid Test
Acid | Psychedelic | The Grateful Dead
Janis Joplin | The Jefferson Airplane | Monterey Pop
Altamont | The Fillmore | The Avalon Ballroom
Haight-Ashbury | The Human Be-In | Ken Kesey
The Beats | Rolling Stone Magazine | Sly and the Family Stone
Green Day
Appendix B-3

**Rock Across America Film Project**

**Research Guide: Seattle**

Use this research guide to find the answers to the essential questions. Be sure to follow ALL the guidelines listed.

Guideline #1: Each group member is responsible to answer two essential questions. Your group can divide the questions any way you see fit.

Guideline #2: Be sure to use all of the vocabulary terms and people listed on this guide in the responses to your essential questions and final narrative.

Guideline #3: Use the books, websites, and other resources listed to answer the essential questions and final narrative.

**Books**


**Web sites**

www.rockhall.com

**Vocabulary Terms/People**

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<th>Term</th>
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<td>Pearl Jam</td>
<td>Soundgarden</td>
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<td>Indie Rock</td>
<td>Hole</td>
<td>Flannel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Melvins</td>
<td>Alice in Chains</td>
<td>Jimi Hendrix</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Write a 3-4 paragraph narration that includes the following information:

a. An introduction. What is your topic?

b. Answer the essential questions in writing. Provide supportive detail and information in paragraphs 2 and 3. Use your primary source information to include quotations from important musicians, producers, owners etc. Be sure to use transition sentences and phrases to incorporate each group members writing into a consistent final narrative.

c. A conclusion. Reiterate what happened and why it was important.

Remember, you’ll be reading this aloud. So your group may want to do some rehearsal and/or division of the narration. Typing your final narrative is highly recommended! It will be easier to read that way.
Rock Across America Film Project:
Film Introduction

Explain the main points your group tried to illustrate in your film. What are the three most important things the audience should remember after seeing your film?

1.

2.

3.
**City** | **What are the contributions of each city to the evolution of rock and roll and popular American Music?**
---|---
**The Mississippi Delta** | 
**Chicago** | 
**Memphis** | 
**New York** | 
**Seattle** | 
**Los Angeles** |
<table>
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<td>Philadelphia</td>
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APPENDIX C

Teacher Handouts
The importance of Memphis, Tennessee in the history of popular American music cannot be overstated. If Memphis was responsible for the Sun recordings cut by Elvis Presley in the fifties alone, its status as an important city in the history of American music would be secure. But there is so much more music that came from Memphis. Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Howlin’ Wolf, Roy Orbison, Booker T. and the M.G.s, Otis Redding, Rufus and Carla Thomas, Isaac Hayes, Albert King, Sam and Dave, and Al Green to list just a few.

Memphis helped shape rock and roll. The synthesis of black and white musical styles that occurred there in the fifties was unique, and helped create a template for all rock and roll music that followed. The Stax recordings of sixties soul music and seventies funk continued Memphis’ history of mixing black and white music together and laid the groundwork for the soul and funk music that emerged in other cities during the seventies. Perched on the banks of the Mississippi River, the city also deserves credit as a historical locale for blues music, the predecessor of rock and roll. Gospel music helped to define the sound of the music that came from Memphis as well.

While other cities have contributed greatly to the evolution of American music, no other city can rival Memphis in terms of lasting importance. Elvis’s recordings in the fifties inspired scores of other musicians who began to incorporate black musical
traditions into their recordings in the late fifties and early sixties. Sam Phillips’s production techniques were also emulated throughout rock recording. The culmination of this racial crossover occurred in the sixties with the bi-racial recordings of the Stax label which shaped not only southern soul music, but subsequent musical traditions both black and white. That this happened in a region of political and social segregation only makes the story that much more remarkable.
Appendix C-2

Where in heck is that song from?
As you hear each song, write the artist and the city or region where the artists/band is from.

Song 1: “That’s Alright”, Elvis Presley, Memphis

Song 2: “Smells Like Teen Spirit”, Nirvana, Seattle

Song 3: “White Rabbit”, Jefferson Airplane, San Francisco

Song 4: “My Girl”, The Temptations, Detroit

Song 5: “Riders on the Storm”, The Doors, Los Angeles

Song 6: “Green Onions”, Booker T. and the MGs, Memphis

Song 7: “Crossroads”, Robert Johnson, Mississippi Delta

Song 8: “Blueberry Hill”, Fats Domino, New Orleans


Song 10: “Love Train”, The O’Jays, Philadelphia

Song 11: “Spoonman”, Soundgarden, Seattle

Song 12: “Mannish Boy”, Muddy Waters, Chicago


Song 14: “Hotel California”, The Eagles, Los Angeles

Song 15: “Casey Jones”, The Grateful Dead, San Francisco
Each group will select a different city/region from this list. There will be no duplicate projects. Discuss with your group which city you’d like to select. Have an alternate city in mind in case another group chooses your first choice.

New Orleans, Louisiana
Chicago, Illinois
Seattle, Washington
San Francisco, California
New York, New York
Los Angeles, California
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Detroit, Michigan
The Mississippi Delta
**Rock Across America Film Project: Film Assessment Rubric**

Did the Group Answer Each Essential Question?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Essential Question</th>
<th>Adequately Addressed Yes /No</th>
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<td>Why is the city or region you’ve chosen important to the evolution of rock and roll, and other popular American music?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What performers, owners, producers and others in the music industry played an important role in the music produced in the city or region you’ve selected?</td>
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<tr>
<td>When was the definitive music produced in the city or region you’ve chosen?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can you describe the definitive music produced in the city or region you’ve chosen?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the overall legacy of the definitive music produced in the city or region you’ve chosen?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What music influenced the music produced in the city or region you’ve chosen and how did the music produced in the city or region you’ve selected influence other popular music?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C-4 (continued)

Does the Film Include:

Yes   No

Primary Source Information  _____  _____
Maps  _____  _____

Comments on Audio-Visual Content:

Overall Grade (Individual)

Group Member #1: _______________________  _____
Group Member #2: _______________________  _____
Group Member #3: _______________________  _____

Overall Grade (Group)  _____
Rock Across America Film Project: Formal Assessment

Fill-Ins. Fill in the blank with the appropriate name or term. 2 Points Each.

1. ________________ launched ________________ in Memphis in the early 1950s.

2. ________________ is known for his “wall of sound” recording technique.

3. ___________ and ___________ started Philadelphia International Records.

4. The house band for the Motown label was ________________.

5. The house band for the Stax label was ________________.

6. ________________ is the label most associated with the grungy sound of Seattle rock.

7. ________________ was the most important promoter in San Francisco in the 1960s.

8. New York City’s ________________ was known as a hit factory, producing many pop hits in the early 1960s.

9. ________________ is the bassist, songwriter and producer for the Beach Boys.

10. ________________ is the label most associated with Chicago Blues.

11. The radical Memphis DJ who first played Elvis’s “That’s Alright” was named ________________.

12. ________________ is alleged to have sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for hell-spawned guitar lessons.

13. ________________ is the New York bar credited with sparking the Punk music revolution in the 1970s.

14. ____________ refers to a concert that is sometimes described as the “death of the 1960s.”

15. ________________ is the region where the blues originated.
Appendix C-5 (continued)

**Short Answer.** Define four of the eight terms/people below in as much detail as possible. **5 Points Each.**

- Specialty Records
- Afrika Bambaataa
- The Blank Generation
- The Acid Test
- Muddy Waters
- Berry Gordy
- Soulsville
- Leonard Chess

**Essay Questions.** Answer two of the following four essay questions in at least 3 paragraphs. Select one question from category A and one question from category B. **25 Points Each.**

**Category A**

1. How do the Delta blues differ from the blues that was recorded in Chicago and Memphis? Who are the most important figures in this evolution of blues music? What do the two styles of blues have in common and what differentiates them? Why are both forms of blues important in the development of rock and roll?
2. Memphis is arguably the most important city in the history of American music. Why? Explain using specific examples.

**Category B**

3. The history of popular music in New York City can be defined by distinct periods. Describe the different periods that were discussed in the student-produced film you saw. In your opinion, which period was most important to the evolution of rock and roll, or popular American music?
4. San Francisco and Seattle both spawned new styles of rock music. How were they similar, and how were they different? In your opinion, which period was most important to the evolution of rock and roll, or popular American music?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


