Sister Rosetta Tharpe

“Up Above My Head” - 1948

- Blends electric blues and gospel
- Electric guitar style is precursor to rock n roll
- Gibson Les Paul guitar
Post WWII

- Economic Boom
- Teens have disposable income
- Generation Gap
- Teen culture identity
  - Rock n Roll and Rhythm & Blues epitomize new attitude
Alan Freed

- Most important DJ in R&R era
  - First used term “rock ‘n’ roll” commercially
  - References to “rockin’ and rollin’” in many R&B songs

- Promoted black musicians and their concerts to mixed audiences
Bill Haley and the Comets

- “Rock Around the Clock” - 1954
  - First No. 1 pop hit as rock n roll record
  - Featured in film *Blackboard Jungle*
    - Inner city teens and juvenile delinquents
  - Music for and about teens - not parents!
Chuck Berry

“Architect of Rock and Roll”

Crafted the style that would lead to rock

“Johnny B. Goode” – 1958
- Music captured teen spirit
- Cars, romance, dancing
- Amazing showmanship, “duck walk”
Little Richard
Little Richard

- Over the top sound and persona
- Gender performance scared White America
  - Cross dressing, drag
  - Makeup, hair, sexuality
- Brown v. Board of Education- 1954
- Cold War era context
  - Patriarchal society
  - Strict rules/boundaries
  - “Leave it to Beaver” households
Little Richard

“Long Tall Sally” – 1956
- Built on 12 bar blues
- Fast lyrics to avoid cover

“Tutti Frutti” – 1955
- Nonsense lyrics
- Showmanship
- Pat Boone covers
Pat Boone
Rockabilly

- Rock + Hillbilly

- Home in Memphis at Sun Records
  - Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Elvis

- The “white take” on a black style
  - “Rockabilly was a country man’s song with a black man’s rhythm” – Carl Perkins
Elvis Presley

- Symbol of Rock n Roll
  - Uninhibited moves
  - Tough teen dress
  - Greased hair
  - Energetic singing
  - Rebellious attitude

- “I don’t sound like nobody”
Elvis Presley

- King of Rock n Roll
- “That’s All Right” – 1955
  - First song at Sun Records with Sam Phillips
  - Played on country & western radio
  - Some wouldn’t play because “too black”
  - Blues and country vocals
TV appearances

Colonel Tom Parker influence
- Arranged RCA contract for Elvis
- Bought out Sun Records contract for $35K
- Arranged TV appearances

Ed Sullivan show - 1956
- “Hound Dog”
- National exposure
- “Vulgar” dance moves
The Girls
The Parents
Buddy Holly
Buddy Holly

- Opposite image of Elvis
  - Clean cut, lanky, glasses
  - Safer, but still R&R
  - Formed band *The Crickets*

- “That’ll Be the Day” - 1957
  - Country, R&B, pop
  - 12 bar blues
  - Twangy vocals
  - Signature hiccup
Latin Side of R&R

- Ritchie Valens
  - Born Richard Valenzuela in Los Angeles
  - Mexican American

- “La Bamba” - 1958
  - 3 chord sequence heard later in many rock songs
    - One of most enduring riffs in popular music history
  - Woodblock!
The Day the Music Died

By 1959...

- Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, the Big Bopper die in plane crash
- Little Richard left music for ministry
- Jerry Lee Lewis married 13 year old cousin
- Elvis drafted into the army
- Chuck Berry incarcerated