**THE HISTORY OF ROCK**

It was September 9, 1956. Sixty million people gathered around their black and white TVs to watch Elvis Presley sing a shortened version of “Hound Dog.”

It was the largest TV audience ever, and the world would never be the same. But rock music had been preparing to go mainstream for a few years before that. Two years earlier, “Sh-Boom,” by the Crew Cuts, and “Shake, Rattle, and Roll,” by Bill Haley and the Comets were among the top thirty records of the year.

Rock music was a key ingredient of—both contributing to and reflecting—the social change from the repressed fifties, through the counterculture of the sixties, to the present day.

Rock ‘n’ roll has been the pop music of America, and then the world, from its birth in the mid-fifties until quite recently. Although it began as a synthesis of black blues and white country, there have been several different strains in the evolution of rock.

This ten week course will be broken down as follows:

Week 1 - **Rock-a-billy**. The artists were Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Gene Vincent, and, of course, Elvis Presley. Rock-a-billy came mostly from Memphis.

Week 2 - **Rhythm and blues** (R & B) music, repurposed (or unaltered) to make what was a minority genre acceptable to the general public. Artists were Little Richard and Fats Domino (New Orleans), Ray Charles (New York), and Chuck Berry (Chicago), Chuck Berry wrote lyrics specifically aimed at white teenagers: “School Days,” “Sweet Little Sixteen.”

Week 3 - **Doo-wop**, an idiom that used an entirely different set of chord changes [I-vi-ii-V] rather than the blues chords used in most early rock. Almost every record featured a vocal quartet. Doo-wop was largely promoted by one New York DJ, Alan Freed. A couple of the many artists involved are The Cadillacs and The Moonglows.

**Schlock-rock**, which happened when record company executives discovered the music and found (temporarily) the key to making hits with less than stellar talent. Artists include Frankie Avalon, Fabian, Annette Funicello, Connie Francis and Chubby Checker. Many of these artists came from Philadelphia.

Week 4 - **Folk rock**, inspired by people like Bob Dylan and even The Kingston Trio, this was a movement led by Dylan himself (New York), as well as The Byrds (Los Angeles) and, later, Crosby, Stills, and Nash, and Poco.

Week 5 - **The British invasion**, which brushed aside the schlock artists and reinvented rock music. Artists include, most notably, The Beatles and the Rolling Stones, but include also many groups like the Yardbirds and the Animals. This music was initially recorded in London, but later, anyplace the artists felt like recording.

Week 6 - **Woodstock music**, also known as the San Francisco sound. Artists were Big Brother, and then Janis Joplin, Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish, and Palo Alto’s own Grateful Dead.

**Mid-seventies**: Led Zeppelin (London), Aerosmith (Boston).

Week 7 - **Punk**, late seventies and early eighties, including The Ramones, The Sex Pistols, The New York Dolls, Iggy and the Stooges, and too many other groups to mention. Mostly in New York but also in Detroit (Iggy Pop) and London (The Sex Pistols).

Week 8 - **The eighties**, which means both New Wave, featuring Elvis Costello, Blondie, Devo, and others, and the glam hair bands, like Poison, Cinderella, and Twisted Sister. New Wave was largely a New York phenomenon.

Week 9 - **Grunge**, also known as “The Seattle Sound,” which was most iconically represented by Nirvana, but was also embodied by Alice in Chains, Pearl Jam and Soundgarden.

Week 10 - **The death of rock ‘n’ roll**, carried out by rap, of course, but also by pop stars like Britney Spears, Katy Perry, Madonna, Lady Gaga, Bruno Mars and many others.

We will also talk about a few other important figures in the history of rock who don’t fit comfortably in one of the above categories, like The Beach Boys, AC/DC, and survivors like Tom Petty who have transitioned from one idiom to another.

Examples of each of these musical styles will be played in class.