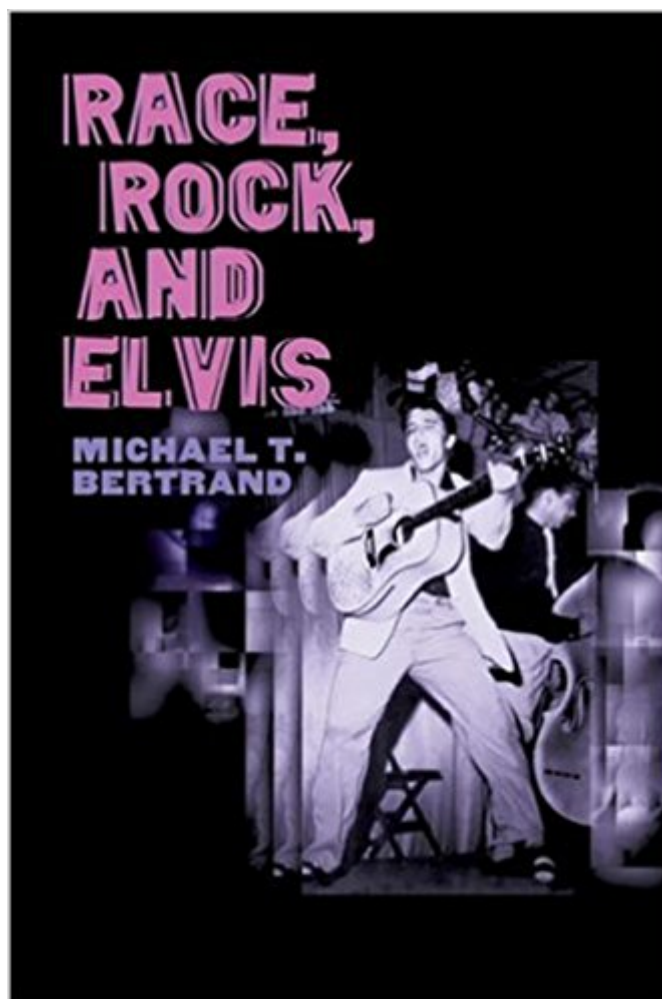




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# Race, Rock, And Elvis (Music In American Life)



## Synopsis

Examines the emergence of rock 'n' roll in a social and regional context. This book connects the music to the larger transformations that were unsettling the post-World War II southern landscape.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Michael T. Bertrand has managed to argue more cogently and with more evidential authority than any previous commentator that the music that Elvis Presley and his rockabilly cousins fashioned in the South in the 1950s represented a serious threat to various national and regional social conventions, particularly those relating to race, class, and gender." Brian Ward, *Journal of American History* "With his meticulous research and elegant, concise prose, Bertrand explains the class and racial origins of rock 'n' roll, situates the music within the larger context of the turbulent 1950s South, and explores the firestorm of debate that swirled around the music and its chief promoter, the hip-swiveling Elvis." Patrick Huber, *History: Reviews of New Books* "His arguments are always persuasive and his lines of reasoning are clear... A thoroughly absorbing piece of work." Keith Briggs, *Blues & Rhythm Magazine* "Convincingly argues that the black-and-white character of the sound, as well as Elvis's own persona, helped to relax the rigid color line and thereby fed the fires of the civil rights movement." Karal Ann Marling, *American Historical Review* "A major contribution to our knowledge of the cultural importance of early rock and roll." Craig Morrison, *Journal of American Folklore*

In *Race, Rock, and Elvis*, Michael T. Bertrand contends that popular music, specifically Elvis Presley's brand of rock 'n' roll, helped revise racial attitudes after World War II. Observing that youthful fans of rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll, and other black-inspired music seemed more inclined than their segregationist elders to ignore the color line, Bertrand links popular music with a more general relaxation, led by white youths, of the historical denigration of blacks in the South. The tradition of southern racism, successfully communicated to previous generations, failed for the first time when confronted with the demand for rock 'n' roll by a new, national, commercialized youth culture. In a narrative peppered with the colorful observations of ordinary southerners, Bertrand argues that appreciating black music made possible a new recognition of blacks as fellow human beings. Bertrand documents black enthusiasm for Elvis Presley and cites the racially mixed audiences that flocked to the new music at a time when adults expected separate performances for black audiences and white. He describes the critical role of radio and recordings in blurring the color line and notes that these media made black culture available to appreciative whites on an unprecedented scale. He also shows how music was used to define and express the values of a southern working-class youth culture in transition, as young whites, many of them trying to orient themselves in an unfamiliar urban setting, embraced black music and culture as a means of identifying themselves. By adding rock 'n' roll to the mix of factors that fed into civil rights advances in the South, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* shows how the music, with its rituals and vehicles, symbolized the vast potential for racial accord inherent in postwar society.

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I never knew something dealing with Elvis could be so boring. I never would have read it if it had not been assigned for a class.

Fantastic book. Gets to the core of so many issues in American history--and they happen to meet in the life of Elvis. Super interesting, very well put together.

This book intelligently delves into the impact Elvis had on the world of culture, music and sociology around. Like all artists Elvis was compelled by many artists from every musical genre. His style was a compilation of all of them. "That's All Right Mama" may have sounded like a Black artist to people in 1954, but they'd never heard anything like it. It was unique and it didn't sound like anybody else.

His early Sun sides were as hillbilly as they were race and its crossover style was met with racial bias from both Black and White deejays that refused to play his records on the grounds they would offend their race conscious listeners. Elvis made his fame on stage creating mass hysteria like he was an icon. No one thought he was Black. As Thorne Peters wrote in his book *AROUND ELVIS*, without Elvis and Sam Phillips opening the door for crossover audiences, Motown would've only been distributed regionally and like all other Black labels pandering to the poorly networked Black market their music would've never been heard in the commercial White mainstream. Elvis was the trailblazer that created that portal and he deserves better than to have his estate picketed by angry protesters on the anniversary of his death. E.P.E employs many Black people and gives to many Black causes and programs in the predominately Black city of Memphis. Lisa Marie Presley sponsors Presley Place for wayward drug addicted mothers and fans raise money in his name worldwide for people of all ethnicities and denominations who are in need. His family was sharecropping alongside Black people since before the civil War right until Elvis was a teen and then they came to Memphis and lived in the federal housing projects until Elvis hit it big. He certainly in no way benefitted and gained wealth based on slave labor. It's good to see Elvis Presley finally being written about in a proper social context to highlight how powerful he remains.

This is a very interesting look at rock'n'roll's positive influence on race relations in the South after World War II. Michael Bertrand has done a great job in thoroughly researching the facts and presenting his argument throughout the book. I highly recommend "Race, Rock And Elvis."

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