

## Rock n' Roll and Civil Rights

Rock n' roll is more than just a music genre. Its history is closely intertwined with the Civil Rights Movement. At its core, Rock n' Roll is a mixture of Blues, Gospel, and Country music of the early 20th century. Background hymns and beats came from Gospel. Guitars and simple lyrics were taken from Country. Percussion and melodies rooted in Blues. In doing so, Rock n' roll brought together Black and White, young and old, and urban and rural.

When Africans were first taken away from their homeland and enslaved in European colonies, they brought African culture with them. These African styles blended with Western music, and slaves created work songs about freedom at last. This mixture of African music and Western music created a whole genre of music that is later known as Rhythm and Blues.

After the Civil War, slaves were free. Even so, segregation persisted. In the south, Jim Crow laws made blacks seem like second-class citizens. Then, in the 1920s, Jazz started the musical saga of African-Americans. These silky tunes were easy to listen to. Jazz introduced African-American culture to a lot of white citizens. While Jazz was very popular, it didn't have as much of an impact on Civil Rights as Rock n' Roll did.

Many people have heard of Elvis Presley. He is often referred to as the "King of Rock n' Roll." As a young boy, Elvis dreamed of producing records. When he was only 18, he recorded "That's All Right" at Sun Records and it became an instant hit. Elvis mixed styles of Black music and White music, Blues, Gospel, and Country. He created a whole new sound nobody has heard before. Elvis's fame skyrocketed in the 1950s and 60s. His brand-new music and dance moves were so distinct that parents didn't allow their kids to watch him perform or listen to his music. Even so, teens around the country began to idolize Elvis and other rock stars.

During the "British Invasion" the Beatles became the world's biggest band. When they came to America, they were disgusted by the segregated audiences. They demanded to have them mixed, and stage owners had to give in. The Beatles were too famous!

By the mid-1960s, the Civil Rights movement was at its peak. Protests to end racial injustice were everywhere. Black bands like the Supremes, the Temptations, and the Marvelltettes became megastars. These bands and artists were in the spotlight of the Civil Rights movement. With its simple tunes and new instruments, Rock n' Roll songs were infectious and hard to resist.

Even though there are still more steps to take to reach racial harmony, we couldn't have gotten this far without Rock n' Roll and its impact on Civil Rights. Through music, Rock n' Roll taught people kindness, tolerance and inclusion. In the end, Rock n' Roll took the young people of the 1950s and created a whole new generation of peace-lovers, music, and fresh ideas.