EARLY ROCK ‘N’ ROLL
THE ELECTRIC GUITAR

- Rock ’n’ roll elevated the electric guitar to a central position in American popular music.
- Engineers began to experiment with electronically amplified guitars in the 1920s.
- The solid-body electric guitar
  - Developed after World War II
  - First used in R&B, blues, and country bands
- Came into the mainstream with a somewhat dubious reputation
  - Carryover from the medieval European association of stringed instruments with the Devil
  - Associated with the music of marginalized regions and people
CHICAGO ELECTRIC BLUES

- Urban blues tradition of the postwar era
  - Derived more directly from the Mississippi Delta tradition of Robert Johnson

- The rural blues tradition had almost completely died out as a commercial phenomenon by World War II.

- The old Delta blues emerged in a reinvigorated, electronically amplified form.
MUDDY WATERS (MCKINLEY MORGANFIELD) (1915–83)

- “Discovered” in the Mississippi Delta by Allan Lomax in 1941
- Moved to Chicago in 1943
- Played both acoustic and electric slide guitar
- The single greatest influence on the British blues boom in the 1960s
LISTENING: “HOOTCHIE COOTCHIE MAN”

- Muddy Waters, 1953
- Features Muddy’s lineup in the early 1950s:
  - Two electric guitars
  - Bass, drums
  - Amplified harmonica
- Combines blues form with strophic verse-chorus structure
- Typical Chicago electric/urban blues
The advent of rock 'n' roll during the mid-1950s brought about enormous changes in American popular music. Styles previously considered on the margins of mainstream popular music were infiltrating the center and eventually came to dominate it. R&B and country music recordings were no longer geared toward a specialized market. The target audience for rock 'n' roll during the 1950s consisted of baby boomers, Americans born after World War II. Much younger target audience
Cover versions

- Copies of previously recorded performances; often adaptations of the originals’ style and sensibility, and usually aimed at cashing in on their success
- Often bowdlerized imitations of R&B songs
- Helped fuel the market for rock ’n’ roll
Big Joe Turner (1911–85)

Called a “blues shouter” because of his spirited, sometimes raucous vocal delivery

Born in Kansas City, started out singing with local bands

“Shake Rattle, and Roll” was Turner’s biggest rock ’n’ roll record for Atlantic.

- The lyrics were bowdlerized by producer Milt Gabler to ensure airplay on white radio stations.
- This song was only a minor hit when it was released.
BILL HALEY (1925–81)

- Former DJ and western swing bandleader from Pennsylvania
- Dropped his cowboy image, changed the name of his accompanying group from the Saddlemen to the Comets
- In 1954, the Comets were signed by Decca Records.
- Moved toward the R&B jump band sound
  - Encouraged by A&R man Milt Gabler
Bill Haley and the Comets

- Recorded commercially successful cover versions of R&B hits in the mid-1950s
- Largest success came in 1955 with “Rock around the Clock”, the first record to become a #1 pop hit
- Recorded in 1954 and not a big hit when first released
  - Popularized in 1955’s Blackboard Jungle, a film about inner-city teenagers and juvenile delinquency
- [Rock Around The Clock](#)
EARLY ROCK AND ROLL STARS: THE RHYTHM AND BLUES SIDE
CHARLES EDWARD ANDERSON ("CHUCK") BERRY (B. 1926)

- Born in St. Louis, Missouri
  - Absorbed blues and R&B styles
  - One of the first and most successful black musicians to consciously forge his own version of blues and R&B styles for appeal to the mass market
LISTENING AND ANALYSIS:  
“MAYBELLENE”

- Verse-chorus form based on the twelve-bar blues

- Chorus: “Maybellene, why can’t you be true”—follows twelve-bar blues chord pattern

- Verse—no chord changes—all on the “home” (or tonic) chord

- Verses build enormous tension, so that when the choruses and chord changes return, there is a feeling of release and expansion.
RICHARD WAYNE PENNIMAN ("LITTLE RICHARD") (B. 1932)

- Early career as an R&B performer
  - Hit the pop charts in 1956 with the song “Tutti-Frutti”
  - Delivered in an uninhibited shouting style, complete with falsetto whoops
- Epitomized the abandon celebrated in rock ’n’ roll lyrics and music
  - The sound of his recordings and the visual characteristics of his performances made Little Richard a strong influence on later performers.
LISTENING: “LONG TALL SALLY”

- Built on the twelve-bar blues, adapted to reflect the more traditionally pop-friendly format of verse-chorus
  - The first four bars of each blues stanza are set to changing words—verses—while the remaining eight bars, with unchanging words, function as a repeated chorus.
EARLY ROCK AND ROLL STARS: THE COUNTRY SIDE
ELVIS PRESLEY (1935-77)

- Born in Tupelo, Mississippi
  - Moved to Memphis, Tennessee as a teenager

- The biggest rock ’n’ roll star to come from the country side of the music

- Presley’s extraordinary popularity established rock’n’roll as an unprecedented mass-market phenomenon.

- Known as the “King of Rock and Roll”

- Elvis is the best selling solo artist in the history of popular music
LISTENING: “DON’T BE CRUEL”

- Based on the twelve-bar blues
- Presley’s vocal is heavy with blues-derived and country inflections.
  - Striking regional accent
  - “Hiccupping” effect on “please”
  - Strong backbeat from R&B
  - Opening electric guitar figure from western swing bands
- Imposed on all these diverse and intense stylistic elements is a wash of electronic reverb

*Don't Be Cruel*
BUDDY HOLLY (CHARLES HARDIN HOLLEY) (1936–59)

- Clean-cut, lanky, bespectacled
- Began his career with country music, fell under the influence of Presley’s and formed a rock’n’roll band, the Crickets
- “That’ll Be the Day,” rose to Number One on the pop charts in late 1957 and established his sound.
  - Combined elements of country, R&B, and mainstream pop
Holly’s vocal style exhibits elements of both fine country singing and fine blues singing, full of country twang and hiccups.

Mixture of toughness and vulnerability

The Crickets’ instrumental lineup

- Two electric guitars (lead and rhythm), bass, and drums provided strong support for Holly’s voice.
- During instrumental breaks, Holly’s lead guitar playing was active, riff-based, and hard-edged in a way that reflected the influence of Chuck Berry.
LISTENING: “THAT’LL BE THE DAY”

- **Form**
  - Structured like a typical pop song, alternating verses and choruses of eight bars each
  - At the instrumental break, the Crickets play a twelve-bar blues pattern

- On some later records, like “Oh, Boy!” and “Peggy Sue,” Holly used a twelve-bar blues structure for the song itself

- That'll Be The Day