

**History 105:
Elvis Presley and America
11:00 AM-12:15 PM, Tuesday/Thursday
302 Barret Library**

Prof. Charles L. Hughes
Office: 221 Buckman Hall
Office Hours: 2:00-4:00 PM, Monday and Wednesday (or by appointment)
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Few figures in U.S. history have been as compelling and controversial as Elvis Presley. Even 35 years after his death, fans still purchase his recordings and come to Memphis to visit Graceland, Sun Studios and other landmarks. At the same time, from the pages of historical scholarship to the stages of American Idol, his legacy remains a potent subject of discussion and debate. In this course, we'll examine Elvis Presley's life and career and try to understand what they can tell us about the broader history of the United States in the 20th and 21st centuries.

“Baby, What You Want Me To Do?”: Course Requirements

Your final grade consists of 5 components:

Attendance/Participation (including Response Posts) – 25%
Short Essay #1: Newspaper Analysis – 15%
Short Essay #2: Film Review – 15%
Short Essay #3: Graceland Paper – 15%
Final Project: Historical Soundtrack – 30%

I use the following grading scale for the Short Essays and Final Project, as well as in calculating your final grade:

99-100 – A+	89-90 – B+	79-80 – C+	69-70 – D+	0-60 – F
93-98 – A	83-88 – B	73-78 – C	63-68 – D	
91-92 – A-	81-82 – B-	71-72 – C-	61-62 – D-	

I will provide further details on the Short Essays and Final Project in the weeks to come. I assess a lateness penalty of **10 percentage points** for each day an assignment is late.

Your Attendance/Participation grade is determined by 3 things:

1) Attendance – You will be allowed **three** unexcused absences. All absences after the third one must be excused. Each unexcused absence after the third will cost you 5% of your **final** grade. If you miss three weeks' worth of classes, you can be dropped from the class or flunked. Valid excuses for missing class include religious observances, college-sanctioned academic or athletic travel, personal illness/injury or family emergency. Excuses must be documented by a note from a doctor, the Dean's office, or a relevant faculty member. **This attendance policy includes field trips.** If you can't attend one of the required class trips, it is your responsibility to visit these sites on your own time.

2) Participation – Please come to class prepared – with all reading, listening and assignments completed beforehand – and ready to discuss the material. A failure to do this will negatively impact your Attendance/Participation grade.

3) Response Posts – As you’ll see in the course schedule, most weeks are accompanied by two “Response Questions.” **Three** times during the semester, you’ll be required to e-mail me with a one-page response to **one** of the questions listed for that particular week. These posts should be well-written and based in the course material. **All Response Posts are due by the beginning of class on Thursday of that week.** If I haven’t received three Response Posts from you by the end of the semester, you will lose 10% of your Attendance/Participation grade for each Post that you’re missing.

“This Is The Story”: Readings

William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 7th edition)

Erika Lee Doss, *Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith and Image* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2004)

Bobbie Ann Mason, *Elvis Presley: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007)

Additionally, there will be other readings that will be available on Moodle and at various web addresses. See the course schedule for specific details.

“I Can Help”: Abilities and Accessibility

I'm committed to making sure that this course is accessible to all students. Anyone who receives accommodations through the Office of Disability Services should contact me as soon as possible.

“I’m Counting On You”: Academic Conduct

All work for this course is to be completed in accordance with Rhodes' Honor Code. You are expected to be familiar with the requirements of the Code and to act accordingly in all classroom matters. To demonstrate your commitment, you must write “pledged” and sign your name on every written assignment.

I take academic misconduct very seriously, but I'm also aware that it can be difficult to understand what qualifies as plagiarism. If you have any questions, please contact me and/or consult the “Guide To Effective Paper Writing” published by the Rhodes College Writing Center. **It is your responsibility to understand the specifics of what constitutes misconduct and what does not.**

“A Little Less Conversation”: Classroom Atmosphere

Everyone is a crucial part of making this class successful. So, for the sake of those around you (including me!), please refrain from sleeping, reading the newspaper, talking, text messaging, or using a laptop for non-academic purposes.

“Don’t Be Cruel”: Controversy

We're going to be discussing some complex and contentious topics this semester, and I hope that we can create an environment in which everyone feels free to speak openly and honestly. Disagreements will – and perhaps should – occur, and I hope that all of us are willing to use these moments of controversy to better understand the larger themes of the course. However, we must all make sure to keep our discussions constructive and avoid personal attacks. If I sense a discussion going astray, I reserve the right to redirect it or shut it down completely. If anybody feels uncomfortable at any point this semester, please come to see me.

“Help Me”: Writing Center

One of Rhodes' best resources is the Writing Center, located in 122 Barret Library. I encourage you to utilize the Center's services as you prepare your written assignments. Get more info at <http://www.rhodes.edu/writingcenter>

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

Thursday, January 10th – “Who Are You (Who Am I?)”: Introduction

Week 2

Chafe, Chapters 1-3

Tuesday, January 15th – “My Happiness”: Who Were Gladys and Vernon Presley?

Readings

Mason, “Introduction,” “Marvel” and “Tupelo”

John Shelton Reed, “Elvis as Southerner,” Moodle

Thursday, January 17th – “Follow That Dream”: What Elvis Heard

Listening

Song Set #1

Response Questions

1) Both Mason and Reed suggest that Elvis Presley could only have come from the South. Do you agree? Why or why not?

2) Between them, Mason and Reed list a bunch of factors that contributed to Presley’s development as a person and musician. If you had to pick just *one* factor as the most important, what would it be and why? (By the way, you can choose something that neither author mentions.)

Week 3

Chafe, Chapter 4

Tuesday, January 22nd – “The Promised Land”: How Memphis Made Elvis

Readings

Pete Daniel, “The Rhythms of The Land,” Moodle

Listening

Song Set #2

Thursday, January 24th – “That’s Alright, Mama”: Sun Records and the Breakthrough

Readings

Mason, “The Sun Sessions,” “Creating Elvis,” and “The Colonel”

Listening

Song Set #3

Response Questions

- 1) Was Memphis ready for Elvis Presley? Daniel and Mason offer somewhat differing opinions on the issue. What do you think, and why?
- 2) Mason notes that Presley once described himself by saying “I don’t sound like nobody.” Do you think that’s true? Why or why not? Think about the music we’ve listened to and the readings we’ve done.

Week 4

Tuesday, January 29th – “Mystery Train”: The Other Sides of Sun (Special Guest Star: John Floyd)

Readings

John Floyd, “Introduction” and “Elvis and the Kings of Western Bop,” Moodle

Listening

Song Set #4

Thursday, January 31st – **NO CLASS: PROF. HUGHES OUT OF TOWN**

Response Questions

- 1) How do Floyd’s interviews with “Little” Milton Campbell, Rosco Gordon, and Rufus Thomas complicate our earlier discussions of Sam Phillips and race?
- 2) Imagine someone said that they didn’t know anything about Sun Records except for Elvis Presley. What three songs would you tell them to listen to, and why?

FIELD TRIP TO SUN STUDIOS, SATURDAY FEBRUARY 2nd, 11:00 AM

Week 5

Chafe, Chapter 5

Tuesday, February 5th – “All Shook Up”: Elvis, the South and Civil Rights

Readings

Michael Bertrand, “Dateline Dixie” and “With All Deliberate Speed and Disorder,” Moodle

Listening

Song Set #5

Thursday, February 7th – “Love Me Tender”: Elvis and Sex in 1950s America

Readings

Mason, “The Bigtime,” “Audubon Drive,” “June in July” and “Twister”

Pete Daniel, “A Little Of The Rebel,” Moodle

Listening

Song Set #6

Response Questions

- 1) Mason claims that Presley was fighting for “acceptance” in the 1950s United States. Given the way that Presley challenged the era’s prevailing cultural and social norms, do you believe Mason? Why or why not?
- 2) You could argue that Presley’s physical appearance (both in terms of his body and his personal style) was just as important to his fame (and infamy) as his music. Would you agree? Why or why not?

Week 6

Chafe, Chapters 6 and 7

Tuesday, February 12th – “Hound Dog”: Was Elvis a Racist Thief, a Racial Liberator, or Both?

Readings

Michael Bertrand, “The King of Rock as Hillbilly Cat,” Moodle

Marsha Cusic, “A Black Woman Remembers Elvis,” at

<http://marshamusic.wordpress.com/2008/10/15/a-black-woman-remembers-elvis/>

Eric Zalov, from “*Rebeldismo* in the Revolutionary Family,” 17-20 and 40-51; taken from the book *Refried Elvis*, which is available as an e-book from the Rhodes College library website.

Listening

Song Set #7

Thursday, February 14th – “G.I. Blues”: Elvis in the Army and Back Again

Mason, “Gladys,” “Germany” and “A Lonely Teenager”

Listening

Song Set #8

Response Questions

1) So, after reading and discussing on Tuesday, what’s your opinion? Do you think Elvis Presley was a racist thief, a racial liberator, or both?

2) Imagine you’re a young Elvis fan living in Memphis in 1960. You want to be just like your idol – what would you do, and why?

Week 7

Chafe, Chapters 8-10

Tuesday, February 19th – “Fame and Fortune”: The Movies and the Soundtracks

Readings

Mason, “Hollyweird,” “Quest” and “The Flying Circle G”

Listening

Song Set #9

Thursday, February 21st – “Raised on Rock”: Elvis and The Beatles

Readings

Mason, “The Beatles”

Listening

Song Set #10

SHORT ESSAY #1 DUE AT START OF CLASS, FEBRUARY 21st

Week 8 –

Tuesday, February 26th – Film: “The 1968 Comeback Special”

Readings

Mason, “The Comeback Special”

Thursday, February 28th – “Only The Strong Survive”: The American Studios Sessions (Special Guest Stars: Dan Penn and Bobby Emmons)

Readings

Peter Guralnick, from “A Day at the Races,” Moodle

Listening

Song Set #11

RECOMMENDED EVENING EVENT: Dan Penn & Bobby Emmons performance, McCallum Ballroom (BCLC), 7:30 PM

Response Questions

- 1) How would the “Comeback Special” have been different if it had only included the informal jam session, and none of the other performances? What if it hadn’t included the informal jam session at all?
- 2) Both Mason and Guralnick talk about the worry that “In the Ghetto” would be too politically-charged to be released as a single in early 1969. What were the reasons behind this worry?

Week 9

Chafe, Chapters 11-13

Tuesday, March 5th – “If I Can Dream”: Could Elvis Have Played Woodstock?

Readings

Rob Kirkpatrick, “Pot, Skinny-Dipping and Freedom Rock,” Parts 1 and 2

Part 1: <http://www.popmatters.com/pm/feature/108469-pot-skinny-dipping-and-freedom-rock-woodstock-and-the-year-of-the-ou>

Part 2: <http://www.popmatters.com/pm/feature/108471-pot-skinny-dipping-and-freedom-rock-woodstock-and-the-year-of-the-ou>

Listening

Song Set #12

Thursday, March 7th – “Suspicious Minds”: Elvis and Nixon

Readings

Mason, “Captain Marvel Goes To Washington”

SHORT ESSAY #2 DUE AT START OF CLASS, MARCH 7th

Week 10

SPRING BREAK

Week 11

Chafe, Chapters 14-15

Tuesday, March 19th – “Viva Las Vegas”: Elvis in Vegas

Readings

Mason, “Las Vegas”

Robert Christgau, “Aging Rock,” at <http://www.robertchristgau.com/xg/bk-aow/presley.php>

Ellen Willis, "Elvis in Las Vegas," Moodle
Listening
Song Set #13

Thursday, March 21st – Film: "Elvis: That's The Way It Is"

Readings

Douglas Brode, "Woodstock West: *That's The Way It Is*," Moodle

Response Questions

- 1) Ellen Willis says that Presley was both "old money and young money" and both "folk hero and sellout" to his Las Vegas audiences in the early 1970s. What does she mean?
- 2) Did Elvis Presley's Las Vegas performances add to his cultural legacy, or take away from it?

Week 12 –

Tuesday, March 26th – Film: "Elvis: That's The Way It Is"

Thursday, March 28th – **NO CLASS: EASTER RECESS**

Week 13 –

Tuesday, April 2nd – "Long Black Limousine": The End

Readings

Mason, "Lost" and "The End Of Lonely Street"

Neil and Janice Gregory, "The President Himself" and "Selected Newspaper Editorials,"

Moodle

Greil Marcus, "Blue Hawaii," originally from Rolling Stone, at

<http://carnageandculture.blogspot.com/2007/08/elvis-presley-1935-1977-blue-hawaii.html>

Thursday, April 4th – **NO CLASS: PROF. HUGHES OUT OF TOWN**

Response Questions

- 1) After Presley's death, music critic Lester Bangs claimed that "we will never again agree on anything as we agreed on Elvis." What do you think he meant, and do you agree with him?
- 2) Find three key sentences in the newspaper editorials compiled by the Gregorys. Briefly explain why they're important and interesting, in the context of the other material we've looked at.

Week 14 –

Tuesday, April 9th – "Stuck On You": The Afterlife of Elvis Presley

Readings

Doss, "Images of Elvis," "Paying Homage to Elvis" and "Sexing Elvis"

Thursday, April 11th – "I'm Comin' Home": Graceland

Readings

Doss, "Saint Elvis"

Karol Ann Marling, "Elvis Presley's Graceland," Moodle

Response Questions

- 1) Doss quotes an Elvis fan and collector who says that Presley offers "a usable past" to the people who love him. What does that mean?
- 2) Do you think there's a contradiction between Elvis Presley being both a saint and a sex symbol to many of his fans? Why or why not?

FIELD TRIP TO GRACELAND, SATURDAY APRIL 13th, 11:00 AM

Week 15

Chafe, Chapters 16-17

Tuesday, April 16th – "U.S. Male": Elvis in the Eighties and Nineties

Readings

Doss, "All-White Elvis"

Craig Werner, "'A Hero To Most': Elvis in the Eighties," Moodle

Listening Selections #14

Thursday, April 18th – **NO CLASS: PROF. HUGHES OUT OF TOWN**

Week 16

Chafe, Chapter 18 and Epilogue

Tuesday, April 23rd – "Stranger In My Own Home Town": The Love/Hate Relationship Between Memphis and Elvis

Readings

Doss, "Who Owns Elvis?"

Thursday, April 25th – "I Was The One": Does Elvis Still Matter?

Readings

Doss, "Elvis is America"

SHORT ESSAY #3 DUE AT START OF CLASS, APRIL 25th

END-OF-SEMESTER PARTY!!! THE PRESLEY HOUSE ON AUDUBON DRIVE, THURSDAY, APRIL 25th, TIME TBA

FINAL PROJECT DUE AT 1:00 PM ON MONDAY, APRIL 29th