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ZOOM

in on america

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Andy Warhol's portrait of Elvis Presley depicted as a cowboy. (AP Photo)

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In this issue: Elvis Presley

Zoom in on America

The Elvis Presley Phenomenon

Elvis Presley is not only the most popular rock 'n' roll singer of all time. He was also one of the first global celebrities made possible in the second half of the 20th century by the development of mass media.

Tupelo, a city of 35,000 inhabitants located in Mississippi, between Memphis, Tennessee and Birmingham, Alabama, is best known for being the birthplace of Elvis Presley. The King of Rock 'n' Roll was born here on January 8, 1935. Even though his adult life was associated with Memphis, where his family moved when he was 13, Presley did not forget about Tupelo. In 1956, when he was 21 and already famous, he came to Tupelo to perform at the Mississippi-Alabama State Fair & Dairy Show. He had performed at the same fair when he was 10 years old. Upon arrival, Elvis was greeted with a large banner that said "Tupelo Welcomes Elvis Presley Home," and presented with a guitar-shaped key to the city. One of the local restaurants offered "Elvis Presley Specials with 'Don't Be Cruel' prices." A documentary film, *The Homecoming: Tupelo Welcomes Elvis Home*, made in 2006, recalls the occasion.

Elvis was very close to his parents, Gladys and Vernon Presley. His mom gave him his first guitar when he was 12 years old. An often told story is that Elvis owes his career to a recording he made privately for his mother in the local Sun Records studio: it was then that people first took notice of his voice. Gladys Presley died at the age of 46 while Elvis was serving in the army. Her death was a terrible blow to him. He never really came to terms with this loss. His 1970 hit song, "Mama Liked the Roses," was about her.

Rockabilly, an early style of rock and roll music that was especially popular in the American South, fascinated Presley. Rockabilly blends American folk and western musical styles (such as bluegrass and country) with rhythm and blues. The term "rockabilly" was a combination of "rock" (from "rock 'n' roll") and "hillbilly," a slang term for people living in the rural south. Western swing and boogie woogie music also influenced rockabilly.

After graduating from L.C. Humes High School in Memphis, Elvis took a number of jobs, including work as a movie theater usher and a truck driver. He also continued to play music and, before long, Sam Phillips, owner of Sun Record, invited him to rehearse with guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black. Their first recording session on July 5, 1954 was unsuccessful and the musicians were about to go home when Presley took his guitar and started playing Arthur Crudup's "That's All Right." Moore recalled:

All of a sudden, Elvis just started singing this song, jumping around and acting the fool, and then Bill picked up his bass, and he started acting the fool, too, and I started playing with them. Sam, I think, had the door to the control booth open ... he stuck his head out and said, 'What are you doing?' And we said, 'We don't know.' 'Well, back up,' he said, 'try to find a place to start, and do it again.'

(from : *Rock and Roll is Here to Stay: An Anthology*, ed. William McKeen)

Phillips recorded them and soon after that "That's All Right" appeared on a popular local radio show, Red, Hot, and Blue. Listeners phoned in curious to find out who sang the song. The recording became a local hit. Presley then reached the top of the country music charts in 1955 with the song "Mystery Train." In 1956 he scored his first number one song on the so-called "Hot 100" with "Heartbreak Hotel."

Presley's rise to fame was due in part from his ability to combine country singing with rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll music, which was just beginning to reach great popularity. But Presley's fame also was due to his personality and stage presence. Put simply, he dressed and moved on stage in a way that was completely new to American audiences. While older audiences had mixed opinions about Presley, younger audiences - especially girls - loved this new style.



(left) A historical marker denotes the childhood home of Elvis Presley in Tupelo, Mississippi. (right): Fans tour the dining room at Graceland, Elvis Presley's Memphis home. (AP Photo)

After the success of his early songs, RCA Victor signed Elvis Presley to a recording contract in a deal arranged by Colonel Tom Parker. Parker became the singer's manager for over two decades. During his lifetime, Elvis earned an estimated \$4.3 billion. He was not, however, a good manager of his finances.

Presley's most popular albums during the 1950s, which earned him the status of a "living legend," include: "Hound Dog" (1956), "Don't Be Cruel" (1956), "Blue Suede Shoes" (1956), "Love Me Tender" (1956), "All Shook Up" (1957), and "Jailhouse Rock" (1957).

Presley also remained the top recording artist in the 1960s. He began the decade with hit songs "It's Now or Never" and "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" In total, Presley released a remarkable 136 gold records and ten platinum records.

Presley's fans wanted to see him as much as they wanted to hear him sing. Millions of viewers tuned in to watch his television appearances. Elvis Presley's movies are a separate phenomenon. His first film was *Love Me Tender* in 1956. It was met with such enthusiasm from fans that when it played in theaters, it was impossible to hear the film's dialogue over the screaming voices of fans. In all Elvis appeared in 33 movies and was a top box office draw for two decades. His films were popular in spite of the fact that most received bad reviews from movie critics and were criticized for their weak story lines. The 1962 movie *Girls! Girls! Girls!* was the only Presley film to be nominated for a Golden Globe award.

One good thing about Presley's movies is that they showcased his music and featured new songs. Presley recorded the soundtrack for all but one of his films - 1965's *Tickle Me*. All the songs on that film had been recorded previously. Elvis himself had mixed feelings about many of his movies. His least favorite film was *Clambake* (1967), while his favorite film was *King Creole* (1958). At times Presley had to accept a movie role to

pay off his debts. In 1957 he bought a ranch in Memphis: to pay off his debt he agreed to play in *Clambake*, for which he was paid one million dollars.

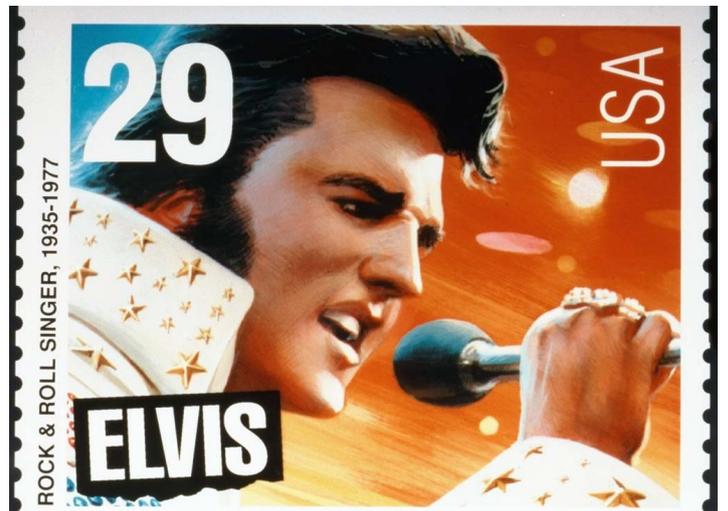
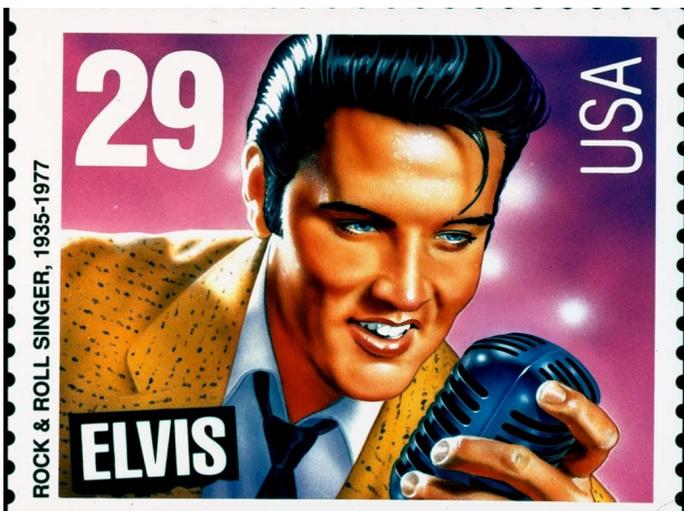
Elvis's fame meant sacrifices in his private life. His marriage with Priscilla Beaulieu did not withstand the hardships dictated by his career. Their long relationship sealed by marriage in 1967 ended with a divorce in 1973. From this marriage Elvis had his only child, Lisa Marie Presley, born in 1968. Life as a celebrity can bring with it a lot of stress. To cope with the pressure and stress, Elvis resorted to taking prescription medications, which had a negative effect on his health. Weight was another health problem for Presley. Elvis put on a lot of weight over the years. His stage appearance changed greatly. Even though he lost the boyish looks that characterized his two decades as a film star, Presley still had a powerful stage presence. His one-piece jumpsuits with tall collars and puffy sleeves; his embroidered velvet shirts; and his glimmering gold belts have come to symbolize 1970s fashion style and are the costume of choice of most Elvis Presley impersonators.

In spite of his declining health in the 1970s, Elvis continued to give concert performances in sold-out arenas. In fact he died in his Graceland Mansion on August 16, 1977, one day before he was supposed to start a new concert tour.

Presley's premature death at the age of 42 caused scenes of unparalleled mourning. Elvis's legend lives on as much in his death as it did in his life. Graceland Mansion, which Presley purchased in 1957, is the top tourist attraction in Memphis and continues to be visited every year by tens of thousands of fans from America and around the world.

Presley was the first-ever inductee into three music halls of fame: the Gospel Music Hall of Fame, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Country Hall of Fame.

(below) Two stamps depicting Elvis Presley. (AP Photo)





Elvis Presley is shown at the piano in the rec hall, Headquarters Company, Third Armored Division, in Friedberg, Hesse, West Germany in the Spring of 1959. (AP Photo)



Elvis Presley is seen in 1957. (AP Photo)



Priscilla Beaulieu Presley, left, and Elvis Presley cut the six-tiered cake shortly after their wedding at the Aladdin Hotel-Casino in Las Vegas on May 1, 1967. (AP Photo/Las Vegas Review-Journal)



Elvis Presley is shown on February 5, 1968 with his wife Priscilla and their newly born daughter, Lisa Marie (AP Photo)



*Elvis Presley's guitar and Grammy Award at the Newseum.
(AP Photo)*



A gold belt owned by Elvis Presley. (AP Photo)



A Mercedes-Benz 600 car, once owned by Elvis Presley. Presley kept the car, which was one of two 600 Mercedes he owned, for two years before giving it to a friend. (AP Photo)



Filipino Elvis Presley impersonators pose prior to a performance to pay tribute to the King of Rock 'n Roll. (AP Photo)



The grave of Elvis Presley is decorated with tributes left by fans at Graceland, his Memphis, Tennessee home. (AP Photo)

Elvis Presley Quiz

Take the quiz. Choose the correct answer a.b or c. Sometimes more than one answer is correct.

- At the time of his death, Elvis had sold more than:
 - 600-million singles and albums
 - 100-million singles and albums
 - over a billion singles and albums
- Elvis's debut in the movie industry was the movie:
 - Love Me Tender
 - King Creole
 - Fun in Acapulco
- In all Elvis Presley starred in ... movies:
 - 10
 - 33
 - 44
- Presley's movies did very well at the box-office earning more than:
 - \$ 10 million total
 - \$ 25 million total
 - \$ 150 million total
- Elvis's comeback in the 1970s began with live concerts in:
 - New York
 - San Francisco
 - Las Vegas
- Elvis Presley's Memphis home is:
 - Graceland
 - Manhattan
 - Paradise
- Apart from rock music Elvis sang other musical genres:
 - gospel
 - blues
 - Pop
- The first movie filmed after Presley was discharged from the army on 24th March 1960 was:
 - G.I. Blues
 - King Creole
 - Love Me Tender
- The famous diptych of Elvis Presley as a cowboy made by Andy Warhol came from a film:
 - Wild in the Country
 - Flaming Star
 - It Happened at the World's Fair
- This movie was listed as one of the The 100 Most Enjoyably Bad Movies Ever Made in the book *The Official Razzie Movie Guide*:
 - Harum Scarum
 - Clambake
 - Speedway
- Elvis was a fan of this sport:
 - karate
 - wrestling
 - football
- Elvis's most famous dance in his movies was in this film:
 - King Creole
 - G.I. Blues
 - Jailhouse Rock
- Elvis's favorite car was:
 - Cadillac
 - Chevrolet
 - Pontiac
- Elvis got his first guitar from:
 - his father
 - his mother
 - the owner of Sun Record, Sam Phillips
- King of Thailand and Princess of Denmark, Norway and Sweden visited the studio to meet Presley on the set of this film:
 - G.I. Blues
 - Love Me Tender
 - Blue Hawaii
- In this movie Elvis played himself:
 - Elvis on Tour
 - Elvis: That's the Way It Is
 - Live a Little, Love a Little
- Which of the nicknames below was not given to Elvis Presley:
 - The Pelvis
 - The King of Rock 'n' Roll
 - Guitar Boy

Activity Page

Exercise 1 DO YOU KNOW ELVIS PRESLEY'S SONGS

Read the lines from Elvis Presley's famous songs and match them with the titles of the songs on the right:

1. "You can do anything but lay off of my Blue Suede Shoes"
 2. "May your days be merry and bright, / And may all your Christmases be white".
 3. "Decorations of red on a green Christmas tree / Won't be the same dear, if you're not here with me"
 4. "Let's rock, everybody, let's rock. / Everybody in the whole cell block"
 5. "Well, since my baby left me, / I found a new place to dwell."
 6. "You have made my life complete, / and I love you so."
 7. "My mama, she done told me, papa done told me too / "Son, that gal you're foolin' with / She ain't no good for you"
 8. "Can't buy a house, can't buy a lot / Ain't got a bean, I ain't got a pot"
 9. "I look at you and wham, I'm head over heels / I guess that love is a banana peel"
 10. "Wise men say only fools rush in / but I can't help falling in love with you"
 11. "Ev'rytime you kiss me / I'm still not certain that you love me"
 12. "I gave a letter to the postman, / He put it his sack."
 13. "Now that your near / the time is here at last."
 14. "Do you gaze at your doorstep and picture me there? / Is your heart filled with pain, shall I come back again?"
 15. "She even kisses me like you used to do. / And it's just breaking my heart"
 16. "And anyone can tell / You think you know me well"
 17. "As the snow flies / On a cold and gray Chicago mornin' / A poor little baby child is born"
 18. "The old home town looks the same, / As I step down from the train,"
 19. "Daddy, you've still got me and little Tommy / Together we'll find a brand new mommy"
- a. "Are You Lonesome Tonight?"
 - b. "Love Me Tender"
 - c. "Suspicion"
 - d. "In the Ghetto"
 - e. "Blue Christmas"
 - f. "I Slipped, I Stumbled, I Fell"
 - g. "Return to Sender"
 - h. "She's Not You"
 - i. "That's All Right"
 - j. "Jailhouse Rock"
 - k. "Don't Cry Daddy"
 - l. "White Christmas"
 - m. "It's Now or Never"
 - n. "You Don't Know Me"
 - o. "I Can't Help Falling in Love"
 - p. "Heartbreak Hotel"
 - r. "Blue Suede Shoes"
 - s. "Poor Boy"
 - t. "Green, Green Grass of Home"

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An ice sculpture of Elvis Presley stands in the Polish capital after heavy snow in Warsaw, Poland, Tuesday, January 12, 2010. (AP Photo)