

**COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES**

## On Rock and Roll

When rock and roll exploded across the American music scene in the early 1950s, reactions to it were rarely neutral. In general, adults were alarmed by the music and performers and their effects on young audiences. American youth, on the other hand, embraced rock and roll as if the music and the teenagers were meant for one another.

*As you read the passages below, consider what issues, aside from the music itself, were involved in the controversy.*

**AGAINST ROCK AND ROLL**

*A. D. Buchmueller, psychiatric social worker, The New York Times, 1958*

Kids, just like adults, get caught up in a mass kind of hysteria, which is contagious. Some get hurt by it, physically and emotionally.

But it is not helpful and may even be harmful for adults to take a strong and condemning attitude and action toward adolescents in their rock 'n' roll behavior. This behavior is part of their individual as well as collective or group rebellion against the strictness of adult society.

This doesn't mean that I approve of rock 'n' roll. I don't. I think there are many other kinds of music, more beautiful and culturally more valuable, that they might be hearing. And also the suggestiveness of a sexual nature in crude and open exhibitionism used by some singers is to be deplored.

**AGAINST ROCK AND ROLL**

*Frank Sinatra, singer, The New York Times, 1958*

Rock 'n' roll smells phony and false. It is sung, played, and written for the most part by cretinous goons and by means of its almost imbecilic reiteration and sly, lewd, in plain fact, dirty lyrics . . . it manages to be the martial music of every side-burned delinquent on the face of the earth.

**FOR ROCK AND ROLL**

*Robert Shapiro, manager, Paramount Theatre, The New York Times, 1958*

[Teen-agers] swooned, moved and screamed with his [Frank Sinatra] every gesture—and now the daughters of those teen-agers are here. The young people of all generations are only looking for a chance to express their enthusiasm.

**FOR ROCK AND ROLL**

*Alan Freed, radio disc jockey, The New York Times, 1957 and 1958*

I was shocked when I read what Frank said. He has no business knocking show business. It's been good to him. As for charging that this music is "dirty" and making delinquents of children, I think I'm helping to combat juvenile delinquency. If my kids are home at night listening to my radio program, and get interested enough to go out and buy records and have a collection to listen to and dance to, I think I'm fighting delinquency.

Rock and Roll began on the levees and plantations, took in folk songs, and features blues and rhythm. It's the rhythm that gets the kids. They are starved for music they can dance to after all those years of crooners. It's simple to dance to and to clap your hands to and the kids know the words to every song. That's why they come. This is an audience-participation kind of music. They come in and pay to sing louder than the performers.