The medium of sound recording has had an immense impact on our culture. The music that helps to shape our identities and comfort us during the transition from childhood to adulthood resonates throughout our lives. It stirs debate among parents and teenagers, teachers and students, politicians and performers.

Throughout its history, popular music has been banned by parents, business outlets, radio stations, school officials, and even governments seeking to protect young people from the raw language and corrupting excesses of the music world.

"If people knew what this stuff was about, we'd probably all get arrested." — Bob Dylan, 1966, talking about rock and roll

From Wax Cylinders to Flat Disks: Sound Recording Becomes a Mass Medium

- A key breakthrough came from Emile Berliner, a German engineer who had immigrated to America. In the late 1880s, he began using a flat spinning five-inch disk to trace voices. Through a photo-engraving process, he recorded the sounds onto disks made of metal and shellac. These disks became the first records.

- Berliner also developed a technique that enabled him to stamp and mass-produce his round records. Previously, using Edison's cylinder, performers had to play or sing into the speaker for each separate recording. Berliner's technique featured a master recording from which copies could be easily duplicated in mass quantities.
In 1948, CBS Records introduced the 33 1/3-revolutions-per-minute (rpm) long-playing record (LP), with about twenty minutes of music on each side. This was an improvement over the three to four minutes of music contained on the existing 78-rpm records. The next year, RCA developed a competing 45-rpm record, featuring a quarter-size hole (best suited for jukebox use).

From Audiotape to CDs and DVDs: Analog Goes Digital

- *Audiotape:* Lightweight magnetized strands of ribbon that make possible sound editing and multitrack mixing; instrumentals or vocals can be recorded at one location and later mixed onto a master recording in another studio.

- In 1958, engineers developed stereophonic sound, or *stereo*, which eventually made monophonic (one-track) records obsolete.

- The biggest recording advancement came in the 1970s, when electrical engineer Thomas Stockham developed digital recording, in which music is played back by laser beam rather than by needle or magnetic tape.

- This technique began replacing Edison’s analog recording technique, which merely captured the fluctuations of the original sound waves and stored those signals on records or cassettes as a continuous stream of magnetization—analogue to the actual sound. Incorporating purer, more precise digital techniques (which do not add noise during recording and editing sessions), **compact discs**, or CDs, hit the market in 1983.
Records and Radio: First Hate, Then Love, Then Component Marriages

• To the alarm of the sound recording industry, radio stations had begun broadcasting recorded music, but without any compensation to the music industry. The American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP), founded in 1914 to collect copyright fees for publishers and writers, charged that radio was contributing to plummeting sales of records and sheet music. So, by 1925, music rights fees were established, charging stations between $250 and $2,500 a week and causing many stations to leave the air. But other stations started their own live, in-house orchestras, disseminating "free" music to listeners and giving radio an edge over the recording industry.

U.S. Popular Music and the Formation of Rock

• In general, pop music appeals either to a wide cross section of the public or to sizable subdivisions within the larger public based on age, region, or ethnic background (for example, teenagers, southerners, Mexican Americans). U.S. popular music today encompasses styles as diverse as blues, country, Tejano, salsa, jazz, rock, reggae, punk, hip-hop, and electronica.

• "Music should never be harmless." -Robbie Robertson, The Band

• Jazz developed in New Orleans. An improvisational and mostly instrumental musical form, jazz absorbed and integrated a diverse body of musical styles, including African rhythms, blues, and gospel. Jazz influenced many bandleaders throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Groups led by Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, and Glenn Miller were among the most popular of the "jazz" or "swing" bandleaders and dominated radio and recording in their day.
“Frank Sinatra was categorized in 1943 as ‘the glorification of ignorance and musical illiteracy.’” –Dick Clark, The First 25 Years of Rock & Roll

- Also in the 1930s, Bing Crosby pioneered a relaxed, intimate style called crooning; he popularized Irving Berlin's "White Christmas," one of the most covered songs in recording history. (A song recorded or performed by another artist is known as cover music.) In one of the first mutually beneficial alliances between sound recording and radio, many early pop vocalists had network or regional radio programs, which vastly increased their exposure. Ironically, their record sales, promoted on radio, boosted sound recording at a time when the record industry was threatened by the growing popularity of radio.

Rock and Roll Is Here to Stay

- The cultural storm called rock and roll hit in the 1950s. (Like the early meaning of jazz, rock and roll was a blues slang term that sometimes meant "sex.") It combined the vocal and instrumental traditions of popular music with the rhythm-and-blues sounds of Memphis and the country beat of Nashville. Many social, cultural, economic, and political factors contributed to the growth of rock and roll around the 1940s and 1950s. The migration of southern blacks to northern cities in search of better jobs during the first half of the twentieth century had helped spread different popular music styles.

Youth Culture Cements Rock’s Place

- Another reason for the growth of rock and roll can be found in the repressive and uneasy atmosphere of the 1950s. With the constant concerns over the atomic bomb, the Cold War, and communist witch-hunts, young people were seeking forms of escape from the menacing world created by adults. Perhaps most significant to the growth of rock and roll, the barrier that had separated white and black cultures began to break down. Radio, which saw its network programs converting to television, was seeking inexpensive forms of content. Radio deejays, particularly Alan Freed in Cleveland (and later on WINS in New York), began exposing more white people to black music. Some white teens cruising the radio dial had already discovered black-oriented stations, however, and had adopted the different rhythms as dance music.
In the 1950s, legal integration accompanied a cultural shift, and the industry’s race and pop charts blurred. Black artists like Chuck Berry were performing country songs, and for a time Ray Charles even played in an otherwise all-white country band. Revitalizing record sales and changing the sound of radio, rock and roll exploded old distinctions and tested traditional boundaries in five critical ways.

**Masculine and Feminine**

- Rock and roll was also the first popular music that overtly confuted issues of sexuality. Although early rock largely attracted males as performers, the most fascinating feature of Elvis Presley, according to the Rolling Stones’ Mick Jagger, was his androgynous appearance. During this early period, though, the most sexually outrageous rock-and-roll performer was Little Richard (Penniman), who influenced a generation of extravagant rock stars.

**Black and White**

- Rock and roll also blurred geographic borders between country and city, and between black urban rhythms from Memphis and white country & western music from Nashville. Early white rockers such as Buddy Holly and Carl Perkins combined country or hillbilly music, southern gospel, and Mississippi delta blues to create a sound called *rockabilly*. 
Payola Creates the Hits

- payola: the unethical (but not always illegal) practice of record promoters paying deejays or radio programmers to favor particular songs over others.
- As recorded rock and roll became central to commercial radio in the 1950s, independent promoters hired by record labels used payola to pressure deejays to play songs by the artists whom they represented.

A Changing Industry: Reformations in Popular Music

- The British Are Coming!
- Motor City Music: Detroit Gives America Soul
- Popular Music Reflects the Times
- Alternative Sounds of Punk and Grunge
- Hip-Hop Redraws Musical Lines

The British Are Coming!

- Until 1964, rock and roll recordings had traveled on a one-way ticket to Europe.
- This changed almost overnight. In 1964, the Beatles invaded with their mop-top haircuts and pop reinterpretations of American blues and rock and roll. By the end of the year, more than thirty British hits had landed on American Top 10 lists.
The Beatles led the British invasion of America’s pop charts in 1964 and made several appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show. They championed innovations that are still found in music today, such as thematic albums, multitrack recording, and looping (a forerunner to sampling).

Following on the heels of the Beatles came the Rolling Stones, whose name was inspired by a Muddy Waters song. The blatant sexuality of strutting lead vocalist Mick Jagger helped ensure the “bad boy” reputation of the group, which charted its first No. 1 hit in the summer of 1965 with “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction.” The band was still together and touring over 40 years later.

Motor City Music: Detroit Gives America Soul

- soul: music that mixes gospel, blues, and urban and southern black styles with slower, more emotional, and melancholic lyrics.

- These Motown groups had a more stylized, softer sound than the grittier southern soul (or funk) of Brown and Pickett. Motown producers realized at the outset that by cultivating romance and dance over rebellion and politics, black music could attract a young, white audience.

Popular Music Reflects the Times

- Folk Inspires Protest

- Bob Dylan took his stage name from Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. He led a folk music movement in the early 1960s with engaging, socially provocative lyrics.
Rock Becomes Mainstream
- Following the historic Woodstock concert in August 1969, which drew more than 400,000 fans to a New York farm, the deaths of Joplin and Hendrix in 1970, and the announcement late in 1970 that the Beatles had officially disbanded, rock music reached a crossroads. Considered a major part of the rebel counterculture in the 1960s (despite its profits), rock music in the 1970s was increasingly viewed as the centerpiece of mainstream consumer culture. With major music acts earning huge profits, rock soon became another product line for manufacturers and retailers to promote, package, and sell.

Alternative Sounds of Punk and Grunge
- punk rock: rock music that challenges the orthodoxy and commercialism of the recording business; it is characterized by loud, unpolished qualities, a jackhammer beat, primal vocal screams, crude aggression, and defiant or comic lyrics.
- grunge: rock music that takes the spirit of punk and infuses it with more attention to melody.
- alternative rock: nonmainstream rock music, which includes many types of experimental music and some forms of punk and grunge.

Hip-Hop Redraws Musical Lines
- Hip-hop exploded as a popular genre in 1986 with the commercial successes of groups like Run-DMC, the Fat Boys, and LL Cool J.
- Because most major labels and many black radio stations rejected the rawness of hip-hop, the music spawned hundreds of new independent labels.
Hip-hop, like punk, defies mainstream culture. Some rap has drawn criticism from both the white and black communities for lyrics that degrade women or applaud violence.

Throughout hip-hop's history, artists have occasionally characterized themselves as street reporters who tell alternative stories of city life. Chuck D of Public Enemy has maintained that most hip-hop music offers interpretations of urban experience and the war on drugs that are very different from network news portrayals.