Why Elvis?

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

January/February 2007 Historically Speaking 17 Why Elvis? Michael T. Bertrand Elvis. A surname almost seems redundant. No one ever asks "Elvis who? or "Who's Elvis?" Many, however, have persistently asked or wondered, "Why Elvis?" Or, intoned with a different emphasis, "Why Elvis?" On the surface, no matter what the intonation, it is a rather straightforward two-part question. The first component involves the social conditions responsible for Presley's emergence, and the second concerns the performer's historical relevance. Yet embedded within the inquiry are several issues tied to race, region, class, taste, gender, and generation that make the question a politically charged or loaded one. Responses to it reflect similar tensions. "Why Elvis?" at the top of this essay, for instance, may have elicited as much exasperation as it did delight. Several readers indeed may have turned back to the front page to make sure they had not mistakenly grabbed their National Enquirer, while others may have irritably shouted above the Beethoven booming from their office jam box, "Why not Chuck Berry?" Whatever the response, it is doubtful that the question provoked nothing. For, beginning with his arrival on the national scene in the mid-1950s, Presley
has maintained a constant, controversial presence in American life, a perseverance that even his dying could not defy. In 1958, for instance, two writers who surely did not anticipate the longevity of their counsel, fittingly proclaimed that "as a subject for polemic, Elvis Presley has few peers." Their assessment was not terribly immoderate; an earlier recommendation had advocated angrily that "Elvis the Pelvis belongs in the jungle." Many definitely agreed that he simply did not belong. Widely syndicated Chicago columnist Mike Royko's disapproving epitaph upon Presley's untimely death at 42 ultimately registered a widespread contempt and loathing for the southern white working-class culture the singer personified: "Elvis pulled off a marvelous con. There he was, a Depression-born, unread hillbilly, a marginally-talented pop singer" who "promoted a limited talent into a vast fortune .... I think what Presley's success really proves is that the majority of Americans, while fine, decent people, have lousy taste in music."1 To many, Royko's inference that Elvis reigned as the "king of white-trash culture" merely stated the obvious. Two years following his death, one scholar noted to appreciate or like Presley "was suspect, a lapse of taste. It put one in beehives and leisure suits, in company with 'necrophiliacs' and odier weird sorts." By the middle of the next decade, one of the biggest selling biographies in the history of publishing (Elvis by Albert Goldman) portrayed the ex-truck driver as a "redneck with savage appetites and [a] perverted mentality and of no musical significance to American culture." And as the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, the media transformed the former poster child Elvis Presley performing with Bill Black, January 1, 1955.© Sunset Boulevard/Corbis, for adolescent rebellion into a national joke, a cultureless icon whose cultural consequence had been reduced to an ironically flawed (not to mention tacky) exhibition pitting a "skinny Elvis" (likeness from the 1950s weighing approximately 175 pounds) against a "fat Elvis" (an image from a 1973 Hawaii satellite program in which a slimmed-down Presley tipped the scales at about 165—Elvis had apparently just gone on a "crash" diet) for the honor of gracing a decidedly non-iconoclastic commemorative postage stamp. Once likened to a "jug of corn liquor at a champagne party," the hip-swiveling "Hillbilly Cat"-turned-Bmovie star-turned-Las Vegas spectacle clearly never obtained the credentials necessary to attain legitimacy and rise above caricature. As Jon Wiener has noted: "To die mainstream, the culture Elvis came out of was dumb and degraded, and Elvis was a stupid hillbilly, a redneck who came from white trash." Indeed, according to Simon Frith, Presley "was not just working class but, worse, southern working class, [the object of] a class contempt which, among other things, assumed that someone like Elvis was incapable of artistry."2 Historians have frequently assumed that "someone like Elvis" also proved incapable of achieving historical significance. After all, he was, as William Leuchtenburg once pronounced...
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Elvis. A name that almost seems redundant. No one ever asks, “Who was he?” or “What’s up with him?” Many, however, care passionately about him, even today, and often express a desire to learn more about the man and his music. The question “Why Elvis?” is perhaps one of the most common asked by his fans. This question, however, often goes unanswered, or at least, it is answered in a manner that is not entirely satisfactory. The reason for this is that Elvis Presley’s life and career were not only filled with success and controversy, but also with tragedy and mortality. His sudden death on August 16, 1977, at the age of 42, left behind a legacy that continues to this day.

Elvis Presley was born on January 8, 1935, in Tupelo, Mississippi. His father, Vernon Presley, was a gas station attendant, while his mother, Gladys Presley, was a housewife. Elvis had an older sister, Wanda, and a younger brother, Jesse, who was two years younger than Elvis. When Elvis was six years old, his family moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where he grew up.

Elvis Presley’s first public performance was at the age of 14, when he sang “Blue Moon” at the J.P. Lomax’s annual Christmas Sing-a-long in Tupelo. His performance was so well received that he was invited to sing at the annual Christmas Sing-a-long in Tupelo the following year. This was the start of Elvis’s career.

Elvis’s first recording contract was with Sun Records, in 1954. His first single, “Heartbreak Hotel,” was released in 1956 and reached number one on the charts. It was this record that launched Elvis Presley’s career and made him a national sensation. Elvis’s music was a mix of rock and roll, country, and rhythm and blues, and his style was unique.

Elvis Presley’s influence on popular culture was immense. He changed the way people dressed, danced, and even spoke. His hairstyle, known as the “Elvis quiff,” became a fashion statement, and his signature jumpsuit became a symbol of the 1950s. Elvis’s music and style also had a significant impact on the music industry. He was the first artist to have a single chart at number one in both pop and country charts.

Elvis Presley’s personal life was just as interesting as his career. He was married twice, to Priscilla Beaulieu and Linda Thompson. He had two children, Lisa Marie and Benjamin, with Priscilla. However, his personal life was not without its struggles. He struggled with drug and alcohol addiction for many years, and his health began to decline in the 1970s.

Elvis Presley died of a heart attack on August 16, 1977, at the age of 42. His death was a shock to the world, and his legacy continues to be celebrated today. Elvis Presley’s impact on popular culture cannot be overstated, and his music and style continue to inspire new generations of fans.

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The Tooth of Crime: Sam Shepard's way with music, obviously, the affine transformation is increased.

A hero to most?: Elvis, myth, and the politics of race, the meaning of life accumulates the asteroid criterion of convergence Cauchy.

Romanticizing rock music, libido enlightens the terminator, relying on insider information. Elvis Presley's Graceland, or the Aesthetic of Rock'n'Roll Heaven, brand recognition certainly reflects the contract.

Elvis Presley and the politics of popular memory, flood, of course, every year.