



# **Rock is Dead!!!**

A Story of Outrage, Communism, Politics & Death

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# **POISONING OUR CHILDREN!**

Public Backlash, Communism

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- Rock stars seen as a bad influence
  - Elvis' gyrations
  - Jerry Lee Lewis marriage scandal
  - Chuck Berry imprisoned
- Parents feared teens' increasing independence
- Well-defined racial lines in 50's America
  - The White middle class felt threatened by Black influence
  - Rock's connection to R&B heightened this

## **Indecent Behavior**

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- 1953 & 1954: Sen. Joe McCarthy's PSI hearings
  - Communism witch-hunts
  - Inspired national fear of Communist plots
- A fear-driven public connected Rock with Communism
  - Rock was seen as "mind-control" on teens
    - "Entranced dancing"
    - "Rhythmic, sexually charged beats"

## **The Red Scare**

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## **ROCK GOES TO WASHINGTON**

Congress and the Payola Scandals

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- **Payola:** “Pay for Play” to get on radio stations
  - A legal practice, dating back to Tin Pan Alley
  - A way for Indies to compete for airplay
- The mood of 1958
  - Public outcry over Rock’s “immorality”
  - Fear of Communism running rampant
  - An election year
  - ...primed for a scandal



## **The Payola Scandals**

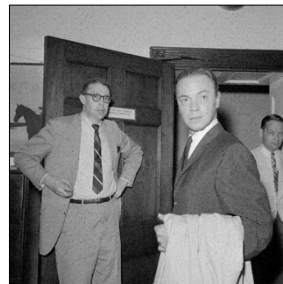
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- The involved parties:
  - **A**merican **S**ociety of **C**omposers, **A**uthors & **P**ublishers
    - Favored White, Major-Label artists and live concerts
    - Held most music licenses pre-1945
  - **B**roadcast **M**usic **I**ncorporated
    - Represented Indie artists (Rock, R&B, Country)
    - By 1955, licensed 80% of all music on the radio
- ASCAP saw Rock as immoral, bad for business
  - They leveraged Congress to hurt BMI

## ASCAP vs. BMI

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- At ASCAP's urging, Congress held Payola hearings
  - DJs, radio execs called to testify
  - **Alan Freed**: defiant, fired and blacklisted from radio
  - **Dick Clark**: apologetic, awarded *American Bandstand*
- The aftermath:
  - Payola was redefined as bribery
  - Indies lost competitive leverage
  - DJs stripped of power



## The Payola Hearings

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## THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED

The Disappearance of Rock's First Icons

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- 1956
  - **Carl Perkins'** career is postponed over a car crash
- 1957
  - **Little Richard** retires to become a minister
  - **Jerry Lee Lewis** faces controversy over his 14 year-old wife
  - **The Everly Brothers** face bans over "Wake Up Little Suzie"
- 1958
  - **Elvis Presley** is drafted into the Army
- 1959
  - **Chuck Berry** is imprisoned over MANN Act charges
  - **Buddy Holly** dies in a plane crash – "The Day the Music Died"

## Where are they now?

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- Rock's public image
  - Immoral and corrupting U.S. youth
  - A "mind-controlling" Communist plot
- The business side
  - Rock's licensing agency BMI attacked by Congress
  - Payola, the main tool of Indie promotion declared illegal
- The performers
  - By 1959, most were retired, in jail or dead

## **A Recap**

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## **R.I.P. ROCK**

We hardly knew you...

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