

**Lesson material acquired from:**

<http://rockhall.com/education/distance-learning/digital-classroom-1950s/little-richard/>

**Saskatchewan Arts Ed Grade 7 Outcomes applicable to the following lesson.**

**CR7.1** Respond to professional dance, drama, music, and visual art works using analysis, personal interpretation, and research.

**CR7.3** Examine and describe how arts expressions of various times and places reflect diverse experience, values, and beliefs.

**CH7.3** Investigate and identify a variety of factors that influence artists, their work, and careers.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In November 1955, Little Richard released “Tutti Frutti” — making it to #17 on the pop charts (#2 on the rhythm and blues charts). Just a few months later, Pat Boone’s version of the song bypassed Little Richard’s by five spots, peaking at #12 on the pop charts. This statistic reveals a growing trend in rock and roll in the 1950s – the music industry’s promotion of white cover versions of songs originally recorded by African-American artists. Believing that these white covers were more palatable to mainstream America, record companies and radio stations not only pushed to “repackage” many rhythm and blues and rock and roll songs with white cover versions, but actively worked to find an audience for white acts, leaving African-American performers to fight for the spotlight.

- What were the realities of being an African-American performer in the early years of rock and roll? Where could you perform? What audiences could attend your concerts? What radio stations would play your songs? What stores would sell your records?
- Compare select covers to their original. (Use the infographic and the listening jukebox as a guide.) How would you describe each? Does one version sound more mainstream? What does the “mainstream” sound like?
- How did rock and roll begin to confront racial segregation in the 1950s? Was this shift generational? Regional? How did rock and roll audiences begin to challenge the expectations of segregation?

## ACTIVITY: *Rock and Roll in Segregated America*

*This activity is designed to help students better understand how issues regarding race and segregation underscored the backlash against rock and roll in the 1950s.*

- 1) Ask students to read and respond to the image on the right (from the White Citizen’s Council of Greater New Orleans, 1956):
- 2) Allow your students to analyze the material. Who is the intended audience? What is the intended effect? Who is to be protected? Who is the threat? What does word choice reveal about the author(s)? Why is buying records the key to the problem/solution? Why are followers instructed to call radio advertisers to complain?
- 3) Next, have students consider the point of view of all those involved in the issue. Ask students to respond as each of the following:
  - member of the White Citizen’s Council of Greater New Orleans
  - local record store owner
  - local radio store owner
  - radio advertiser
  - rock and roll fan
  - parent of a teenager
  - African-American performer

Ask students to consider what each has at stake. Also ask students to consider who actually has the power to make change or keep things as they are. Does a given response change depending on a person’s race?

- 4) Have students write a newspaper article on the topic, with quotes from all of the listed parties. Allow students to connect this issue to more current concerns regarding popular music. Compare the backlash against rock and roll in the 1950s to some of the backlash that exists today. Are there similarities? What is different? Are there mechanisms in place today that prevent certain audiences from accessing certain music?

