

Laura Gibson
Rocking the Box: The History of Rock and Roll on Television
Introduction to MIAP
12/14/09

Description of the Exhibit:

My final project is for a fictional exhibit at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Annex in New York City. The title of the exhibit is Rocking the Box: The History of Rock and Roll on Television, which will cover the history of rock and roll on television from the 1950s through the 1980s. Networks needed to appeal to a mass audience, while rock and roll appealed to a niche audience (McGrath 39). This tension serves a running theme through much of the exhibit.

I chose to begin with Elvis on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and end with Michael Jackson's "Thriller," because both are iconic moments and represent two points on a continuum. *The Ed Sullivan Show* embodies the variety show ethos of something for everyone. MTV and other cable stations are about targeting a channel to a particular interest group or demographic. "Thriller" is one of the most famous music videos, and ushered in an era in which "fashion, modern dance, and filmmaking became as important to record's success as songwriting, instrumentation and production" (Austen 200). This is the era we are still living in when it comes to rock stars.

The main elements of the exhibit will be television sets, panels of text, and display cases. Sound coming from multiple sets will not be a problem due to technology already in place at the museum. The museum has headsets that play audio material when they are near a particular spot. (For a floor plan, see figure 1) The central element of the exhibit will be a series of television sets, with each set attached to a DVD player. Each set will be playing a series of clips showing important moments in the history of rock of television, divided up by era. The television sets will be modern to accommodate the DVD player, but will be made to look appropriate to the era they will be displaying clips from. The television showing clips from the mid-sixties should look like

a set from the mid-sixties. There will be a bench near each set so that if people want to sit down in order to watch, they can. (For a complete list of shows, see figure 2).

Next to each television screen will be a large panel of text. This panel will provide historical and cultural information about the era and the shows. There will be extensive text, but because it will be next to the television set and not interfere with viewing the program, people will be free to read as much or little as they wish. (For the complete text of the wall panels, see figure 3).

In the middle of the room will be a series of display cases, with explanatory notes explaining why the objects are important. Each case will relate to one of the eras shown on screen. (For a sample of what a case and explanatory notes would look like see figures 4 and 5, which covers the late sixties display case).

For the first display case, I would like to include magazines that show the *American Bandstand* regulars on the cover, clothing worn by Elvis on his appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the issue of *Life Magazine* from December 1st, 1958 which featured Rick Nelson on the cover. I would also like to ask the Rock and Soul Museum in Memphis if they would be willing to loan Dick Clark's podium to the Rock and Hall of Fame Annex for the exhibit (Rock and Soul Museum).

For the second display case I would include materials designed to create anticipation and excitement for The Beatles first appearance on Ed Sullivan. It would be wonderful to have the telegram that Elvis sent to the Beatles after their first appearance on Ed Sullivan. This display case would also include publicity pictures of some of the rock stars that appeared on *Shindig* and *Hollywood A Go Go*. The Bubblegum era display case would contain cardboard records from

that time, which were found on the backs of cereal boxes, in addition to lunch-boxes, t-shirts, and fan magazines such as *Tiger Beat*.

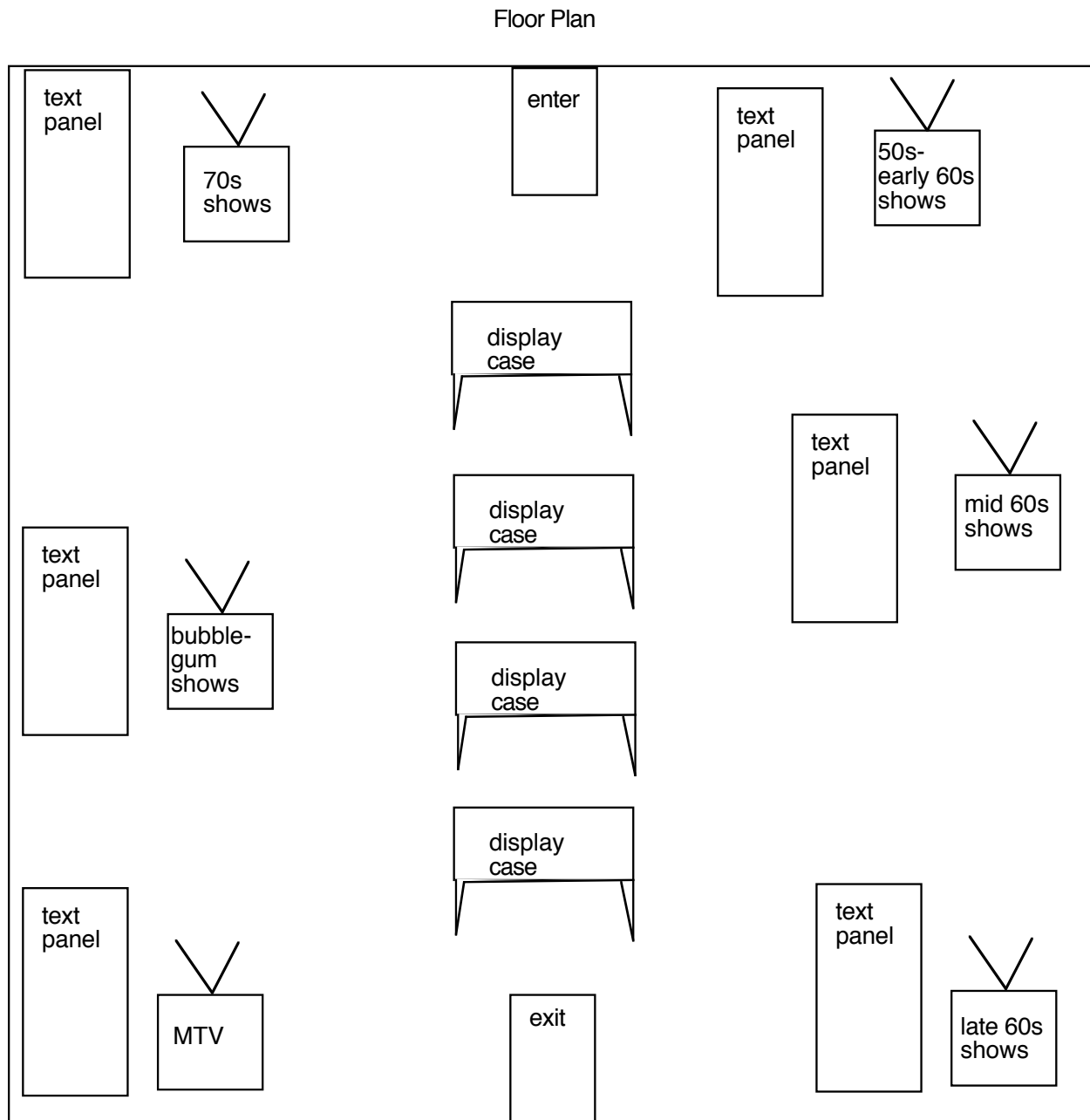
The seventies display case would contain pieces of the Blues Brothers costume, script pages from rock related *Saturday Night Live* sketches, articles of clothing worn by *Soul Train* dancers, and publicity pictures from *The Muppet Show*. The MTV display case would have print ads for the channel, a copy of the VHS tape of *The Making of Thriller*, and fan letters to MTV video jockeys or VJs as they were known. The items would come from a variety of sources such as other museums, collectors, thrift stores, eBay, network archives, record company archives and university archives.

As this exhibit deals with copyright protected material, licensing the clips, songs, and publicity rights for the singers and in some cases the host will be important. On my own I was able to locate the copyright owners for some of the material. (For a list of copyright owners, see figure 6).

One of the issues I struggled with in researching the material for this exhibition was deciding what to include and what to exclude. Ultimately, I came to the conclusion that I had to make difficult decisions, which were bound to disappoint some fans. Instead of letting museum-goers leave upset that I had excluded something they deemed important, I decided to create a contest which would let people vent their frustrations by allowing them to create a list of what they think are the most important moments in the history of rock on television. When people turn in their headsets at the end of the exhibit a staff member would offer them a chance to enter the contest. (For a contest entry form see figure 7).

The contest would also function as a publicity tool. People who view the fan generated lists on the website may become more eager to visit the exhibit and be given the opportunity to

create their own list. Publicity would be conducted through social networking sites such as myspace, Twitter, and Facebook. Radio ads would air on oldies and classic rock stations. Print ads would appear in *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, and other music magazines (For the print ad, see figure 8).

Figure 1:**Figure 2: Shows Exhibit Will Cover:**

TV 1 Mid 1950s-early 1960s:

Elvis on Ed Sullivan: “Hound Dog”

American Bandstand: Chubby Checker performs “The Twist”

The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet: Ricky Nelson sings “I’m Walkin”

TV 2 Mid 1960s:

Beatles on Ed Sullivan: “All My Loving”
 Shindig: The Temptations perform “My Girl”
 Hollywood-A-Go-Go: Aretha Franklin perform “Mockingbird”

TV 3 Late 1960s:
 Doors on Ed Sullivan: “Light My Fire”
 Smothers Brothers: The Who perform “My Generation”
 James Brown televised concert April 5, 1968

TV 4 Bubblegum:
 The Monkees: “Last Train to Clarksville”
 The Partridge Family: “I Think I Love You”
 The Archies: “Sugar, Sugar”

TV 5 The 1970s:
 Soul Train: Jean Knight performs “Mr. Big Stuff”
 Saturday Night Live: Dan Ackroyd and John Belushi as the Blues Brothers perform “Soul Man”
 The Muppet Show: Elton John performs “Crocodile Rock”

TV 6 MTV:
 Bohemian Rhapsody
 Video Killed the Radio Star
 Hungry Like the Wolf
 Thriller

Figure 3: Text for Wall Panel

Introductory Panel:

Rock and roll and Television both entered most American homes in the 1950s. The two forms of entertainment came of age together. The relationship between the two forms was not always smooth. Television represented the status quo, established authorities, and those in control. Rock and roll represented a challenge to that authority.

From the 1950s until the 1980s, it was a balancing act. In the pre-cable era, television shows had to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, which meant they tried not to alienate anyone. Rock and roll had limited appeal, but was a force the larger culture could not fail to notice, and a market the advertisers supporting programs could not ignore.

Late 1950s-Early 1960s:

Post-World War II, teenagers became a distinct group with their own culture, styles, slang, and most importantly music. Due to the booming economy they had disposable income, either from part-time jobs or an allowance given to them by their parents. Some of this money was spent on rock and roll records, causing acts like Chuck Berry and Elvis to reach the top of the Billboard

charts. However, rock and roll in the 1950s was seen as the music of juvenile delinquents. Many thought it had the potential to undermine the American way of life.

One of the most popular television formats during this time was the variety show, which provided something for everyone. A typical show might have anything from comedy sketches, a song from a Broadway musical preformed by the cast, animal acts, and unusual talents like plate spinners. The top variety show was *The Ed Sullivan Show*. His show had the best ratings, and an appearance on his show meant the star had made it. When Elvis appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show* it was a signal that rock and roll had gained some small measure of acceptance. Ed Sullivan continued to have rock and roll acts on his show, as a way to ensure that teenagers watched his show.

American Bandstand became the first rock and roll dance show to go national in 1957. The format of the was simple, local teenagers, dubbed the regulars, would dance to rock and roll records and watch top and up and coming acts perform. Host Dick Clark became a tastemaker, as teenagers would call radio stations and ask to hear the songs they had heard on *American Bandstand*. Teenagers watched the show to learn the latest dance-steps, and see what the regulars were wearing. The regulars became celebrities, with fan-clubs and received letters from loyal viewers.

The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet was one of the many shows that made the jump from radio to television. The show, which focused on the Nelson family, was one of the many squeaky clean family sitcoms popular during this time. In 1957, audiences were introduced to a different side of Ricky, the Nelson's youngest son. Like many his age, Ricky Nelson was a fan of rock and roll, and wanted to sing it too. His father, a former big bandleader, arranged for him to record a single that had already been recorded by Fats Domino, "I'm Walkin". After Ricky sang the song on the show, the record sold 60,000 copies the first week. By 1958, Ricky singing a song became a regular feature of the show. He had a successful recording career, with multiple top 10 hits.

Mid 1960s:

By 1963, rock and roll was begrudgingly accepted as part of the musical landscape. People no longer asked how long the fad would last.

In 1963 many Americans were focused on issues other than rock and roll. The Freedom Rides, an effort to integrate bus terminals in the south, turned violent as segregationists attacked the buses and physically beat the riders, many of whom were college students. On November 22nd, John F. Kennedy was assassinated during a motorcade in Dallas. Two days later, on the 24th, Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin, was shot live on television by Jack Ruby.

This was the climate when a new record, "I Wanna Hold Your Hand," by The Beatles began to get airplay in the United States. They had already had a number of hits not only in their own country of England, but also a successful tour of England. The mop top hairstyle, seen as too long for men, perplexed the older generation, but teenagers loved them. When The Beatles preformed on *The Ed Sullivan Show* on February 9th, 1964, 70 million people watched them. Rock and roll would never look or sound the same again.

Shindig changed the look of rock and roll shows. The set had different levels, different depths, and changes in lighting during a song. *Hollywood A Go Go* had a grittier set. Both shows were more visually interesting than what came before it. The directors cut from one thing another more frequently than other shows, used close-ups, aerial shots, dramatic zooms, and edits on the beat, creating a more visually interesting program. Both were primetime shows, and offered teenagers a more hip place to watch the latest rock and roll acts than variety shows.

Late 1960s:

The late 1960s were a tumultuous decade in America. While Lyndon Johnson and later Richard Nixon believed that fighting in Vietnam was necessary to prevent the spread of Communism, many in the younger generation disagreed with those who supported the war, be they elected officials, university departments who received military funding, or their parents. The Civil Rights Movement, which had been guided by the idea of non-violence expressed by Martin Luther King and others, was slowly replaced by a more confrontational approach. Integration as a goal was being questioned, and some began supporting the idea of separation instead, while others fought for courses on black history in colleges, economic control of their neighborhoods, and a range of other issues. The Women's Movement gained momentum as well. Women wanted to be treated as people, not objects to be ogled. Many wanted more out of life than the idealized notion of housewife/mother they had been raised with. What all of these groups shared was that they vocally questioned the status quo, and had a strong desire to change the way things were.

The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour featured banter between brothers Tommy and Dick, sketches, and musical performances. What distinguished it was its cutting edge political and social satire. Much to the aggravation of the network, nothing was off limits as far as the Smothers Brothers were concerned. The show booked folk singer Pete Seeger as a guest, despite the fact he had been blacklisted for over a decade due to his ties to the Communist Party. The Smothers Brothers also featured the leading rock and roll acts, in a more appreciative setting than other television venues.

The Doors were a popular counterculture band. The counterculture was a loose term used to describe members of different political movements, those who turned their back on materialism and lived in communes, and other forms of rebellion against the status quo. One form of rebellion, which received a great deal of attention, was illegal drug use. On September 17, 1967 The Doors were a guest on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Between the rehearsal and the show, a network representative asked the band to change the lyric "girl we couldn't get much higher," because censors believed it was a drug reference. The Doors did not change the lyric, making them one of the few bands to stand up to Ed Sullivan.

Martin Luther King jr. rose to prominence in 1955 as a guiding force during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. He was seen as the leader of the movement. King had put pressure on President Johnson to pass the Civil Rights Act in 1964, and a year later to pass the Voting Rights Act. By 1968 King had become an icon of the Civil Rights Movement. On April 4, 1968 he was assassinated while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel. Despite his message of non-violence, most urban cities experienced large riots. On April 5th, Boston was one of the very few

cities not to have riots. Boston mayor Kevin White arranged to have WGBH broadcast a James Brown concert live. Many who, otherwise would have been out rioting in the streets, were either attending the concert, or watching it on television.

Bubblegum:

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many new forms of rock emerged; one of them was Bubblegum. Bubblegum rock was aimed at children and young teenagers. It featured melodies difficult to get out of your head, and inoffensive lyrics. Well aware of television's power to reach people and seeing an untapped market for rock and roll, many began to develop shows to appeal to this age group. This is not music with a deep message, but music designed to make money. These bands were also marketed heavily in the form of lunch-boxes, toy record players, and t-shirts. The shows existed to promote the band.

The Monkees featured actors hired to play musicians on a television show. Episodes centered on the band living together and having adventures. Mike Nesmith and Peter Tork were hired for their musical ability, while Davy Jones and Micky Dolenz were hired for their acting talent. The Monkees did play their own instruments later in their career, and went on multiple tours. The band was a hit. However they soon came to resent their lack of control over their music and fired their manager, Don Kirshner. Kirshner sought to replicate the success of *The Monkees* without having to deal with the egos and opinions of real people. The answer was *The Archies*, a Saturday morning cartoon show, which included short segments involving the band, and segments of the band singing their songs.

The Partridge Family, like *The Monkees* created a fictional band using actors. The episodes centered on a single mother raising her family. The plot lines alternated between focusing on life at home, and touring. Because the director and producer felt by hiring actors, they would have complete creative control, and not have to worry about the actors wanting a say in the music. They knew that Shirley Jones, who played Shirley Partridge would be singing on the albums, but that was the only person they planned on being involved in both the records and the show. However David Cassidy, who played Keith Partridge, wanted to sing on the records, and those in control agreed his voice was good enough. Cassidy, based on the success of his show, toured as a solo act playing stadiums on weekends while the show was in production and during the summer.

1970s:

By the 1970s some of the less radical aspects of black power began to be recognized as important. Acknowledging the existence of black culture, and taking pride in it became more central to a growing number of black men and women, especially those in the younger generation. This was the era that saw the growth of African American History programs in colleges, and a push for more inclusive curriculums in high schools, middle schools and elementary schools.

Soul Train followed the same format as *American Bandstand*, with one major change; the host, dancers, and all of the guests were black. A major television network was producing a show

aimed at a black audience, and when the two shows were on at the same time, many blacks would watch *Soul Train* instead of *Bandstand*. However, it was not just blacks who were changing the channel. White teenagers watched the show to learn new dance-steps, and see new trends in fashion. During this time white teenagers were buying rhythm and blues records in larger numbers. Soul and funk singers became superstars.

Saturday Night Live had a young production team and writing staff, which meant they were writing for their generation, unlike other shows, which had an older generation writing what they thought the younger generation, wanted. The show had a wide variety of rock stars as guests, as well as non-rock musical guests. The show also drew inspiration for sketches from rock stars. This was not done in a condescending manner, like in the 1950s. Instead the audience and performers were both in on the joke. Gilda Radner portraying faux punk rocker Candy Slice was done in the same manner as Chevy Chase's impersonation of President Ford. What began as John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd warming up the crowd before the show as The Blues Brothers, became a sketch, multiple albums, and later a feature film.

The variety show made a major comeback in the 1970s. Many of them were hosted by celebrities, such as Sonny and Cher, or Donny and Marie Osmond. However, the show which best embodies the manic, irreverent spirit of rock was *The Muppet Show*. Each week host Kermit the Frog would try to put on a show, while dealing a strange assortments of acts, trying to keep Gonzo from wrecking the studio, making sure Miss. Piggy received enough airtime, and still managing to book a musically diverse group of guests during the show's run.

1980s/MTV:

In 1975, Queen released their song "Bohemian Rhapsody," which reached thirty on the British record charts. The video for "Bohemian Rhapsody" had unusual effects and a distinctive look. *Top of the Pops*, a show which featured rock acts lip-synching to their records and by the 1970s also featured the occasional music video. After the show played the music video, "Bohemian Rhapsody" went into the top five, and stayed in the upper reaches of the charts for two months. This is one of the first instances of a music video having a noticeable impact on record sales for a single. This was only a glimpse of what was to come.

MTV gained the support of the music industry by positioning themselves as a way for the record companies to promote their artists. MTV debuted on August 1 1981 on 300 cable systems. It was more diverse than a radio station in those early days, because there were not that many videos to play. A typical play list might feature a heavy metal video, followed by new wave, a singer-songwriter, a pop tune, and then a classic rock song.

The first music video played on MTV was "Video Killed the Radio Star" by the Buggles. A record store in Tulsa had 15 Buggles albums that had been sitting there for some time. Within 3 weeks of MTV's debut, all 15 albums were sold. This was not a fluke.

Six weeks after MTV went on the air, artists with videos receiving heavy play had sales spike in areas where the station was part of the cable package, even when local radio stations were not

playing the songs. Record stores were receiving requests for songs heard on MTV, even when the bands were not on the radio. Radio stations began getting requests for songs heard on MTV.

Duran Duran was quickly grasped the importance of projecting an image for MTV. *Rolling Stone* magazine dubbed them the “first rock band to ride in on a video wave.” A band having an interesting look, which included fashion, dance, and overall style became as important as how they sounded. Other bands and record companies took notice, and MTV grew quickly. In 1981 only 23 of hot 100 singles had music videos, but by 1983, 50 of hot 100 singles had music videos. In 1982 the station received four or five new music videos per week. By 1983 the station had 35 new videos coming in each week.

One of the most iconic music videos is “Thriller.” The music video was groundbreaking in multiple ways. It was directed by John Landis, a well-known feature film director, which signaled that music videos were important and should be taken seriously. “Thriller” cost 1.1 million when the average cost of a video cost about \$50,000 to make. The music video was 14 minutes, when most other videos were closer to five minutes. “Thriller” was a true spectacle, receiving a short limited theatrical release, and in addition, MTV began announcing the next time it would be on air, so viewers would know exactly when to tune it.

MTV revolutionized the music industry, and television. The goal of the major networks had been to appeal the widest audience possible, but cable TV operated in a completely different way. The goal of a cable channel was to appeal to a specific audience. MTV was an entire network aimed at what marketers called the youth demographic. Whether or not parents were watching MTV was irrelevant, all that mattered was that parents let their teenagers watch MTV. This meant the channel could appeal to a narrow group of people, and still be a success. Rock and roll no longer had to play by the rules of the major networks, it now had its own home on television.

Figure 4:

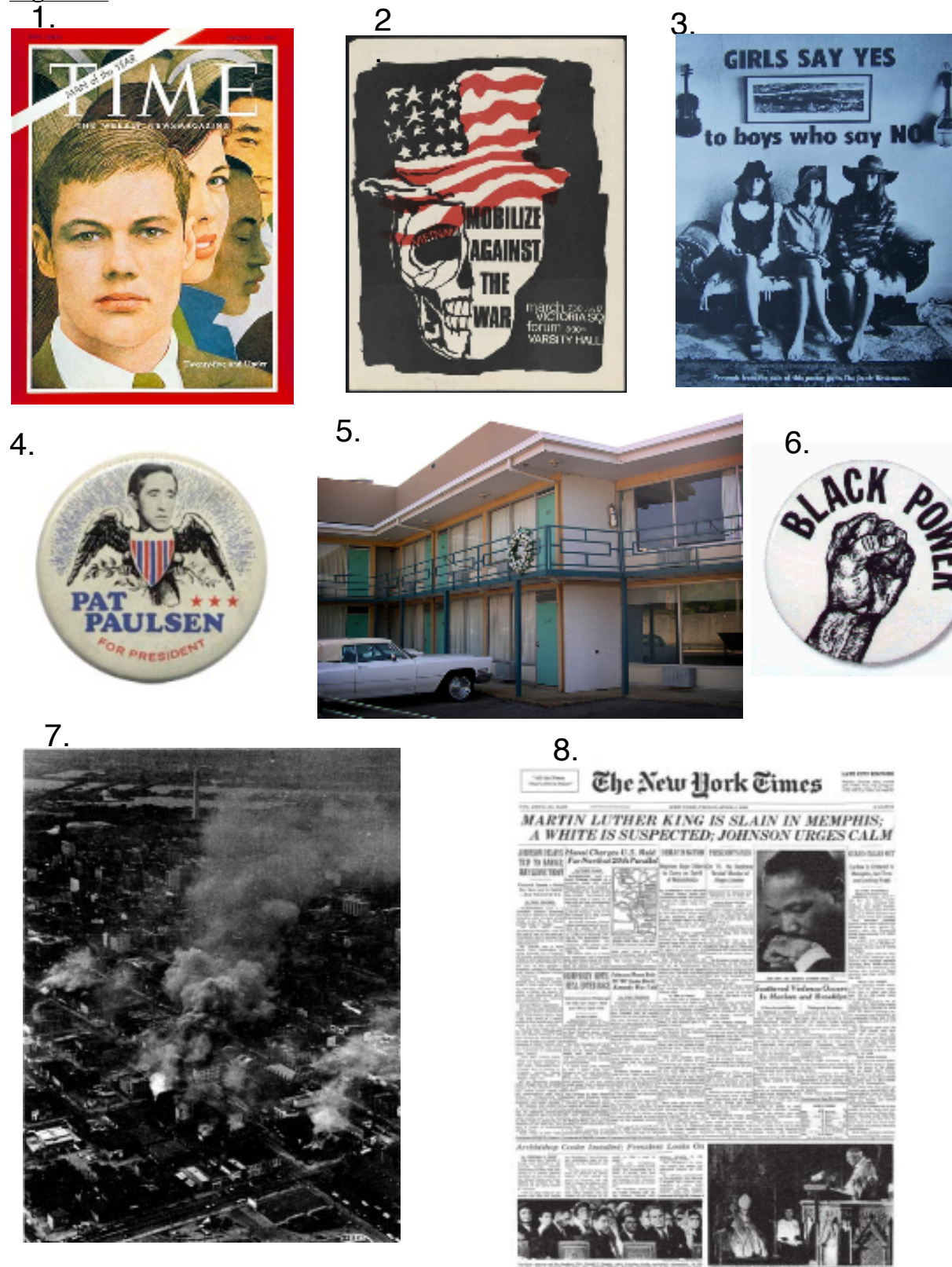


Figure 5: Display Case Text

1. Time Cover: Since the early 1960s during the lunch-counter sit-ins, and the freedom rides, the younger generation played an active role in the Civil Rights Movement. By the mid 1960s, many became involved in the free speech movements on college campus's and opposition the Vietnam War. The editors of *Time Magazine* named the generation under 25 their "Man of the Year" as recognition of the impact the younger generation was having on the country.
2. and 3. Anti-War Posters: Many in the younger generation opposed the Vietnam War, and attempted to stop it. Anti-war posters were frequently seen at protests, in college dorm rooms, and coffee houses. Questioning authority and taking a dramatic stand against the status quo was shocking to many in the older generation
4. Pat Paulsen for President: Pat Paulsen was a comedian who regularly appeared on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. He was known for witty one-liners. In 1968, the show had a running joke that he should be a write-in candidate for president.
5. Lorraine Motel: On April 4th, 1968, Martin Luther King was in Memphis to support striking sanitation workers. While standing on his hotel balcony, he was assassinated. Many were shocked that someone who had spent a lifetime preaching non-violence was killed in such a violent way.
6. Black Power: Many blacks, especially those in their twenties and thirties saw King's death as a signal that non-violence had failed, and that other means to achieve equality would be needed. Other elements of black power were supporting black owned business as well as taking pride in black history and culture.
7. Washington, D.C. on fire: Most major cities had riots following the news that Martin Luther King had been assassinated. The riots in Washington, D.C were among the most destructive. Armed guards and snipers were stationed near the White House.
8. King Newspaper: The assassination was major news. The mention of Johnson urging calm shows how precarious the situation was.

Figure 6: Copyright Information:

Elvis on Ed Sullivan "Hound Dog"
 Program: Sofa Entertainment Inc (Clip Licensing The Ed Sullivan Show)
 Song: RCA, EPE (EPE Corporate Info)
 Image: CKX, Inc. (EPE Corporate Info)

American Bandstand-Chubby Checker "The Twist"
 Program: Dick Clark Enterprises (Dick Clark)
 Song: Universal Music Group (Chubby Checker, MCA)
 Image:

The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet

Program: The Rick Nelson Company, LLC (Rick Nelson)

Song: Universal Music Group (Rick Nelson, MCA)

Image:

The Beatles on Ed Sullivan- “All My Loving”

Program: Sofa Entertainment Inc (Clip Licensing The Ed Sullivan Show)

Song: Sony (The Beatles)

Image: Apple LTD (Beatles Magnet)

Shindig- Temptations “My Girl”

Program: ABC/Disney (Shindig)

Song: Universal Music Group (Motown)

Image:

Hollywood a Go-Go Aretha Franklin- “Mockingbird”

Program: Research Video (Hollywood A Go-Go)

Song: Universal Music Group (Motown)

Image:

Doors on Ed Sullivan “Light My Fire”

Program: Sofa Entertainment Inc (Clip Licensing The Ed Sullivan Show)

Song: Doors Music Co (The Doors)

Image:

Smothers Brothers- The Who “My Generation”

Program:

Song: Brunswick Records (My Generation (The Who song))

Image:

James Brown televised concert April 4, 1968

Program: WGBH (James Brown: Live at the Boston Garden, 1968)

Song: Universal Music Group or Sony Music Entertainment (James Brown, Scotti Brothers,)

Image:

Monkees

Program: Rhino Records (Virgin Music Flash)

Song: Sony Music Entertainment or Warner Music Group (The Monkees, Arista)

Image:

The Archie Show “Sugar, Sugar”

Program: Classic Media (Don Kirshner, Entertainment Rights)

Song: Sony Music Entertainment (Don Kirshner, Columbia Records)

Image:

Partidge Family

Program: ABC/Disney (The Partridge Family)

Song: Sony Music Entertainment (The Partridge Family Album, Bell Records)

Image:

Soul Train- Jean Knight -“Mr. Big Stuff”

Program: Soul Train Holdings, LLC (Mr. Big Stuff)

Song: Universal Music Group (Stax Records)

Image:

The Muppet Show- Elton John- “Crocodile Rock”

Program: Disney (Frequently Asked Questions – Muppets)

Song: Universal Music Group (Crocodile Rock, MCA)

Image:

Saturday Night Live- “Soul Man” (November 18, 1978)

Program: MGM (SNL FAQ)

Song: Warner Music Group (Soul Man (song), Stax)

Image:

Video Killed the Radio Star

Program: Universal Music Group (Video Killed the Radio Star, Island)

Song: Universal Music Group (Video Killed the Radio Star, Island)

Image:

Bohemian Rhapsody

Program: EMI (Bohemian Rhapsody)

Song: EMI (Bohemian Rhapsody)

Image:

Hungry Like the Wolf

Program: EMI (Hungry Like the Wolf)

Song: EMI (Hungry Like the Wolf)

Image:

Music video for “Thriller”

Program: MJJ Productions Inc. (Thriller)

Song: Sony (Thriller)

Image: MJ Licensing Ltd. (Official Michael Jackson 2010 Calendar)

Figure 7:

S ound ff

Write down your top five rock and roll moments on television, and enter for two chances to win!.

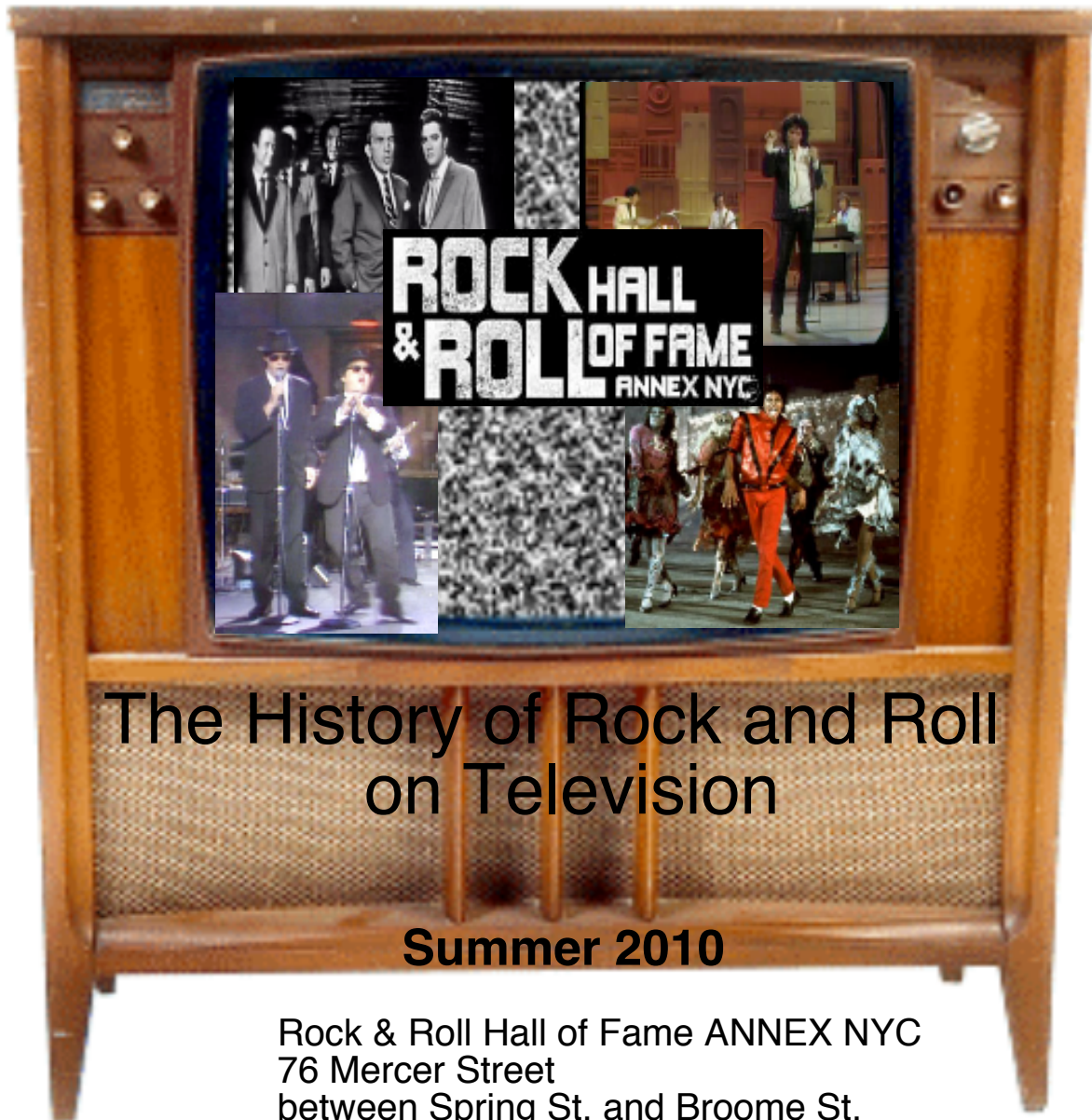
The daily winner will have his or list appear on our website.

The winner of the week will receive a rockin prize pack.

Your Picks	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Figure 8:

Rocking the Box



The History of Rock and Roll on Television

Summer 2010

Rock & Roll Hall of Fame ANNEX NYC
76 Mercer Street
between Spring St. and Broome St.
New York, NY 10012

For tickets call 866.9.ROCKNY
order tickets online at
<http://www.rockannex.com/home>

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