

The King and IQ

SCHOOLHOUSE ROCK MEETS Jailhouse Rock as students slip into their jumpsuits, slick back their hair and tackle classes focused on The King — er, Elvis Presley, that is.

Vernon Chadwick, an assistant English professor at the U. of Mississippi, teaches The Polynesian Novels and Hawaiian Movies of Melville and Elvis. The class, affectionately nicknamed "Melvis," digs up issues of race, class, ethnocentrism and colonization.

CLASS

"Elvis is a gateway of all the issues we raise in the classroom," Chadwick says. "Elvis' rock and roll was considered too black for white society, too sexual for Puritan society and too barbaric for American cultural society."

Ole Miss sophomore Sony Felts, who is enrolled in one of Chadwick's classes, says the course isn't as easy as some might expect.

"A lot of people have the idea of this 'Graceland fan' course, but it's on a much deeper level than that," Felts says. "I think we're going to see a lot more teaching about Elvis. How he affected the culture is what it's about."

Many modern-day performers still emulate Elvis, says Peter Nazareth, professor of English and African-American world studies at the U. of Iowa. Their imitation allows his musical style to live on in all forms of

music. "Elvis still has 150 voices coming from different people," he says.

UI grad student Cherry Muhanji, who has taken Nazareth's course American Popular Art: Elvis as Anthology, says she considered Elvis a racist before she took the class but now believes there is much more to him. "Elvis is as important as Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot and Tennessee Williams," she says.

Chadwick, Nazareth and other Elvis enthusiasts gathered to wax philosophic about the sequined one in August at the inaugural U. of Mississippi International Conference on Elvis Presley. But not everyone thinks The King is a viable topic of study.

"He's an important figure. Whether that in itself is enough to teach a course, I don't know," says

John Shelton Reed, a sociology professor at the U. of North Carolina. "Listening to [the discussions], I didn't find it particularly persuasive."

Elvis in the classroom may not have earned everyone's stamp of approval, but there's a whole lotta shakin' goin' on at the U. of Memphis in a course called Memphis Music, taught by David Evans. The course delves into Elvis' musical characteristics and the social forces that underlie his style.

Evans doesn't deny he's an Elvis fan, but does he believe the man who did so much for polyester and velvet is still alive?

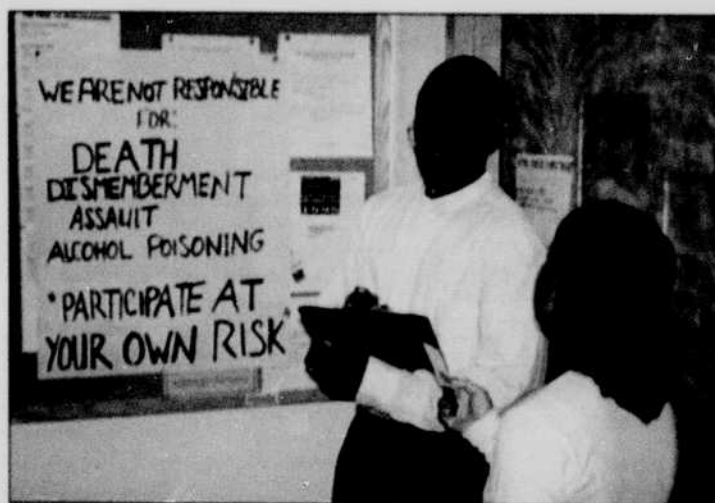
"No — I don't make pilgrimages to his grave and light candles or anything."

Kathleen Sellar, Syracuse U./Illustration by Sean Murray, Syracuse U.



Guest Expert: Torry The Traffic Guy

On Elvis:
"I wouldn't want to see myself in a class trying to do my hair up like Elvis and walk like Elvis with this big-ass cape on. That's crazy."



Don't blame it on the frats.

Greek Tragedies

AFTER 19-YEAR-OLD sophomore pledge Gabe Higgins drowned at a Texas Cowboys function, the popular U. of Texas, Austin, spirit organization joined the less-than-illustrious ranks of campus organizations and fraternities under suspension for accident liabilities.

Higgins was still wearing his cowboy boots when his body was pulled from the Colorado River the day after a Cowboys party in April. His blood-alcohol level was more than twice the legal limit for driving.

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Although police are still investigating whether hazing was involved, the university didn't hesitate to slap a five-year suspension on the Cowboys.

"We look at the severity of the case and the past record of the organization," says Jim Vick, UT vice president for student affairs.

Whether fraternities and campus organizations should be held responsible for accidents, hazing and assaults that occur at their functions is a hot issue. In June of 1995, there were two major court rulings on this front. Both cases were against fraternities accused of fostering an irresponsible atmosphere at a party. Both parties ended with a freshman being sexually assaulted.

A state appeals-court judge threw out the case against Delta Tau Delta at Indiana U., but a federal

jury in Rhode Island ruled against Tau Kappa Epsilon and the U. of Rhode Island for \$1 million.

Confused? Many are. The pertinent question faced by both courts — and now the Cowboys — is when does responsibility shift from the individual to the group?

"For an individual to be held responsible, the group's leaders must direct the activity or fail to perceive a risk," says the Cowboys' attorney, Scott Young.

The Cowboys incident shows that these problems are not limited to the Greek system; however, it's traditionally fraternities that get caught in the harsh spotlight.

In recent years, the 63-member National Interfraternity Conference has made efforts to reduce potential problems. These days, rush parties feature not steins of beer but glasses of milk. Some also hire security officers and host invitation-only parties. And fraternities even close their bars at 2 a.m. — just like the local joints.

But in the crackdown on Animal House antics, local law enforcement can sometimes go overboard. The Phi Gamma Deltas at UT were fined \$10,000 for a fall of 1989 mud fight that resulted in an infected cut.

With the courts providing an inconsistent guide for those in student organizations, members are left to decide what's harmless fun — and what's illegal.

James Hibberd, U. of Texas, Austin/Photo by Daymon Smith, U. of Massachusetts, Amherst