The King as Private

No doubt the most famous army private of 1959 was Elvis Presley, the only recently crowned “King of Rock and Roll.” Presley, fresh off a string of number-one hits and successful movies, received his draft induction and made the decision to enlist in the Army as any normal American male would do. In doing so, Presley cemented his reputation as the ultimate American symbol.

When Elvis received his induction notice in 1956, his manager, “Colonel” Tom Parker, promised the star that Elvis would get out of actually serving by enlisting in Special Services. If Elvis had joined Special Services, he would have done six weeks of basic training and simply had to give free concerts to members of the Armed Services for a few years to come. Elvis agreed to it, believing his manager was capable of getting any deal done. But he was mistaken.

According to popular myth, the Army denied the request, as the federal government was seeking to “punish” Elvis for his popularity with the youth and his affront to American values. From the early days of his career (which by 1957, when Elvis took his pre-draft physical, was only a couple years prior), Elvis had drawn the furor of moralists who deemed his songs, his performances, and even his appearance too licentious, lewd, and scandalous. Televisions had censored his leg-shaking dancing style, and several had remarked that his hair was too long and his music too inappropriate for white teenagers (race peppered almost every complaint about Elvis, even though he himself was a white boy from a segregated Southern town). Thus, the conspiracists have long believed that the government drafted Elvis to teach him a lesson.

In reality, though, it was Parker, not the government, who betrayed the King. Parker had no intention of letting Elvis play free concerts. In fact it was the Army who had offered Elvis the Special Services, as the Army really did not want to have a massive star enlisted when he could better serve the enlisted forces as entertainment. Parker rejected the deal, though, believing the Army would help make the King more popular with mainstream audiences. To Colonel Parker (who was not actually a colonel at all: the title was something he gave himself), if moralists did not like Elvis as he was, they would have no choice but to like him after he dedicated two years of his prime to Uncle Sam. Parker encouraged Elvis to join the regular army.

Elvis was upset that he had to enlist, but he went along with it. He nearly always went along with what Colonel Parker said, and he certainly saw the Army as an obligation he would’ve had without the trappings of fame. Even after years of immense fortune and fame, Elvis was still humble. At root, he was just a simple Southern boy who loved his parents, his nation, and his God. He believed that he owed something for his fame, so maybe, he figured, two years of service was one of the things he owed.

The only special treatment Elvis requested was a slight deferral in his service. He sought a two-month extension so he could finish making the movie King Creole, since Paramount had already invested $350,000 in the production. Elvis also hoped the movie would be his best. He worried that rock n roll would just be a fad and wanted to show that he could return from the Army as a serious actor, instead of just a teen idol.

The Army agreed, and Elvis was not inducted until March of 1958, when he was assigned Army
Serial Number 53310761. Private Presley was deployed to the Second Armored Division’s Tank Battalion (which was famous as the division General George S. Patton had led) and sent to Fort Hood in Texas. Elvis only received two other leaves after deployment. First, he had a normal leave that all soldiers got. Unlike most soldiers, though, he spent his recording new material for RCA, his record label. The second leave was taken for personal reasons. In August of 1958, Elvis’s beloved mother took ill. She died in Memphis, and Elvis was granted permission to visit her while she was ill and to extend his leave for her funeral. He mourned at Graceland, his Memphis mansion before returning to Texas. Gladys Presley’s passing was the worst moment of Elvis’s life (by his own admission), and he wondered if any of his success was worth it if he could not see his mother anymore.

Elvis served out the bulk of his two-year service in Germany. When he came back, he was older both in age and attitude, and only slightly less popular a star. He had fallen in love with the woman who would become his wife, Priscilla. His Army career completed Elvis’s American journey. From humble roots, Elvis had risen to the pinnacle of American success. And he had done it in the most American way possible. His music was an amalgamation of all the different cultures he had seen in Memphis, a melting pot city if there ever was one. And, like other American Dreamers, Elvis had worked hard to get his success. Then, he put that success on hold to serve country and ending up settling down after the service, just as millions of GIs had done after World War II. It was in his time in the service that Elvis’s became the ultimate American story.

1) Paragraph 2 implies that Elvis Presley had hoped he could have

A. performed concerts for the Armed Services instead of doing a full tour of duty
B. avoided having to enlist in the Armed Services because of his celebrity status
C. enlisted in the Air Force instead of the Special Services branch of the Army
D. skipped basic training so that he could finish filming a new movie
E. gotten Colonel Parker to defer his enlistment for a couple more years

2) The main function of paragraph 3 is to

A. explain how Elvis Presley was viewed by the government
B. suggest that Elvis Presley’s induction was no accident
C. give an example of the type of paranoid thinking that Colonel Parker promoted
D. provide a line of reasoning the author disproves
E. make the author’s main argument about Elvis Presley’s induction

3) As used in paragraph 3, the word licentious has the nearest antonym in

A. lascivious
B. virtuous
C. blemished
D. celebratory
E. prurient

4) When it came to enlisting in the Army, Elvis Presley was
A. excited but nervous  
B. humble and unloving  
C. foolish and untrusting  
D. arrogant but understanding  
E. unhappy but willing

5) According to the passage, which of the following locations did Elvis live in while he was enlisted in the Army?

I. Texas  
II. Los Angeles  
III. Memphis  
IV. Germany

A. I and IV  
B. I and III  
C. II, III, and IV  
D. I, III, and IV  
E. I, II, III, and IV

6) As used in the final paragraph, the word amalgamation most nearly belongs in which of the following word groups?

A. blend, mix, fusion  
B. icon, symbol, representative  
C. hero, celebrity, idol  
D. scandal, disgrace, sin  
E. conspiracy, plot, scheme

7) The author argues that, during Elvis Presley’s tour in the army, Elvis did all of the following EXCEPT

A. mature as an individual  
B. complete his transformation into an American symbol  
C. stop focusing on his entertainment career  
D. help him settle down into a family  
E. wondered if his success had all been worth it

8) The author of this passage most views Elvis

A. scornfully  
B. quizzically
9) How does the author describe Colonel Parker in this passage? Does the author imply anything about Parker’s personality or his control over Elvis Presley?

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10) In what ways was Elvis like the typical enlisted soldier? In what ways was he completely different?

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11) The author suggests that Elvis's time in the Army helped cement his story as the “ultimate American symbol.” In your own words, what do you think the author means by that? Does the author successfully make that argument in the passage?
1) A

Question Type: Reasoning

In paragraph 2, the author recounts how Elvis “agreed” to the proposed deal to join the Special Services, as he thought “his manager was capable of getting any deal done.” If he had joined the Special Services, “he would have... had to give free concerts” instead of the two-year regular tour of duty he ended up having to do. Thus, it is implied that Elvis Presley hoped he could have simply performed concerts instead of doing a full tour of duty, and choice (A) is correct.

The passage never suggests that Elvis hoped to get out of joining the Armed Services at all. In paragraph 2, it is only suggested that he would have preferred to join the Armed Services as a performer, rather than as a regular enlistee. Choice (B) is incorrect because of this.

Though Elvis did request a deferment to his enlistment to finish King Creole, it is never suggested that he would skip basic training to do so. Additionally, it is never implied that he wanted to get out of basic training at all, so choice (D) is incorrect.

The second paragraph implies that Elvis had hoped Colonel Parker could make sure Elvis could join the Special Services, but it does not imply that he hoped Parker could defer his enlistment for years to come. Elvis did get a deferment of a couple months to finish filming a movie, but the passage never suggests he hoped to defer enlistment for years. As such, choice (E) is incorrect.

2) D

Question Type: Reasoning

In paragraph 3, the author refers to “popular myth” and explores the theories presented by “conspiracists” about why Elvis Presley ended up in the Army. The author disproves this theory (which is that the government was punishing Elvis) in paragraph 4, when he or she states that, “in reality, though, it was Parker... who betrayed the King.” Thus, paragraph 3 provides a line of reasoning disproven by the author later in the passage, so choice (D) is correct.

The third paragraph provides information about how some “moralists” viewed Elvis Presley, but it actually does not provide any information about how the government viewed him. As such, choice (A) is incorrect.

The third paragraph provides information about a belief that Elvis Presley’s induction was “no accident,” as choice (B) suggests. However, this is not the author’s own argument, and the author refutes such thinking in paragraph 4. For this reason, choice (B) is incorrect.
Paragraph 3 does provide an example of a type of paranoid thinking, as it refers to a conspiracy theory about Elvis Presley’s induction. However, the author does not imply that Colonel Parker promoted that theory or any other paranoid thinking. As such, choice (C) is incorrect.

The author’s main argument about Elvis’s induction is presented in paragraph 1 and again at the end of the passage. In those places, the author argues that Elvis’s Army career made him “the ultimate American symbol.” Paragraph 3 does not provide either this argument or evidence supporting it, so choice (E) is incorrect.

3) B
Question Type: Vocabulary

licentious (adjective): promiscuous or viewed as unprincipled sexually or morally.

In paragraph 3, the author refers to “the furor of moralists” who had deemed Elvis’s songs, etc. “licentious, lewd, and scandalous.” The fact that licentious is listed alongside lewd and scandalous implies that licentious is similar in meaning to them. Since the question asks for an antonym of licentious, it must be looking for a word that has the opposite meaning of licentious, lewd, and scandalous. Choice (B) provides such a word, since virtuous means full of good morals or showing high moral standards. Thus, choice (B) is correct.

In paragraph 3, the author refers to “the furor of moralists” who had deemed Elvis’s songs, etc. “licentious, lewd, and scandalous.” The fact that licentious is listed alongside lewd and scandalous implies that licentious is similar in meaning to them. Since the question asks for an antonym of licentious, it must be looking for a word that has the opposite meaning of licentious, lewd, and scandalous. Choice (A) is incorrect because it provides a word with similar meaning, not a word with the opposite meaning: lascivious means expressing or indicating lust or lewdness.

In paragraph 3, the author refers to “the furor of moralists” who had deemed Elvis’s songs, etc. “licentious, lewd, and scandalous.” The fact that licentious is listed alongside lewd and scandalous implies that licentious is similar in meaning to them. Since the question asks for an antonym of licentious, it must be looking for a word that has the opposite meaning of licentious, lewd, and scandalous. Choice (C) is incorrect because it provides a word with a similar meaning: blemished means containing a moral defect or fault.

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“licentious, lewd, and scandalous.” The fact that licentious is listed alongside lewd and scandalous implies that licentious is similar in meaning to them. Since the question asks for an antonym of licentious, it must be looking for a word that has the opposite meaning of licentious, lewd, and scandalous. Choice (E) is incorrect because it provides a word with a similar meaning: prurient means having or encouraging lewd behavior.

4) E
   Question Type: Reasoning

The passage discusses Elvis Presley’s beliefs about entering the Army in paragraph 5. There, the author states that, “Elvis was upset that he had to enlist, but he went along with it” since he “was still humble” and “believed that he owed something for his fame.” Thus, Elvis was both unhappy or upset that he needed to enlist but willing to do so, as he did end up enlisting. Choice (E) is correct because of this.

The passage never suggests that Elvis was excited about entering the Army. In fact, paragraph 5 states that he was “upset that he had to enlist.” Choice (A) is incorrect as a result.

Paragraph 5 does state that Elvis “was still humble,” but no part of the passage ever suggests he was unloving. In fact, paragraph 5 states that he “loved his parents, his nation, and his God.” Choice (B) is incorrect for this reason.

The passage might imply that Elvis was foolish when it came to his belief in Colonel Parker, but it definitely does not imply that he was untrusting. In fact, paragraph 5 states that Elvis “nearly always went along with what Colonel Parker said,” implying that he almost always trusted Parker. Choice (C) is incorrect for this reason.

5) D
   Question Type: Research

To answer this question, look for the part of the passage that describes the places Elvis lived while he was in the Army. This occurs in paragraphs 7 and 8. In paragraph 7, the author states that Elvis was “sent to Fort Hood in Texas” first. This supports option (I). He or she goes on to mention Elvis returning to “his Memphis mansion” for his mother’s death and funeral, supporting option (III). Finally, in paragraph 8, the author states that “Elvis served out the bulk of his two-year service in Germany,” supporting option (IV). The passage never suggests nor states that Elvis was in Los Angeles at any point during his tour of service. Because options I, III, and IV are supported, choice (D) is correct.

Choices (A) and (B) are incorrect because they are each missing one of the three locations that Elvis did live in during his tour in the Army.
Choices (C) and (E) are incorrect because they each incorrectly list Los Angeles as a location in which Elvis lived during his time in the Army.

6) A

**Question Type:** Vocabulary

amalgamation (noun): the action or result of combining or uniting.

In paragraph 8, the author states that Elvis’s music “was an amalgamation of all the different cultures he had seen in Memphis, a melting pot city if there ever was one.” Describing the music as being made up of “different cultures” and from a “melting plot” implies that an amalgamation is something made up of many diverse things. Thus, amalgamation would most belong in the word group containing blend, mix, and fusion, making choice (A) correct.

In paragraph 8, the author states that Elvis’s music “was an amalgamation of all the different cultures he had seen in Memphis, a melting pot city if there ever was one.” Describing the music as being made up of “different cultures” and from a “melting plot” implies that an amalgamation is something made up of many diverse things. Thus, amalgamation would most belong in the word group of words about blending, not a word group about what Elvis became. Thus, there is nothing to indicate that an amalgamation is similar in meaning to icon, symbol, or representative, and choice (B) is incorrect.

In paragraph 8, the author states that Elvis’s music “was an amalgamation of all the different cultures he had seen in Memphis, a melting pot city if there ever was one.” Describing the music as being made up of “different cultures” and from a “melting plot” implies that an amalgamation is something made up of many diverse things. Thus, amalgamation would most belong in the word group of words about blending, not a word group about what Elvis was. Thus, there is nothing to indicate that an amalgamation is similar in meaning to hero, celebrity, or idol, and choice (C) is incorrect.

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7) C
Paragraph 8 states that, when Elvis returned from the Army, “he was older both in age and attitude.” Thus, his time in the Army matured Elvis as an individual. Since this question asks for the thing the author does NOT argue Elvis did, choice (A) is incorrect.

In paragraph 8, the author states that Elvis met his wife in the Army and that he “ended up settling down after the service.” Thus, it is argued that the Army helped settle Elvis into family life. Since this question asks for the thing the author does NOT argue Elvis did, choice (D) is incorrect.

In paragraph 7, the author recounts the death of Elvis’s mother and argues that the death caused him to wonder “if any of his success was worth it.” Thus, the author argues that, during his time in the Army, Elvis wondered if his career had all been worth it. Since this question asks for the thing the author does NOT argue Elvis did, choice (E) is incorrect.

8) E

Question Type: Reasoning

The author of this passage is never once critical of Elvis. Instead, he or she writes that “Elvis had worked hard,” that “he was still humble,” and that his is “the ultimate American story.” All of these are ways of praising Elvis Presley, so the author seems to view Elvis mostly reverentially, making choice (E) correct.

The author does not imply that he or she is amused or puzzled by Elvis or his behavior. Instead, the author lists a number of explanations for how and why Elvis ended up in the Army and makes an argument about what the time meant. For these reasons, it cannot be said that Elvis is treated quizzically by the author, so choice (B) is incorrect.
The author does not treat Elvis with distance or cool detachment. Instead, he or she writes that “Elvis had worked hard,” that “he was still humble,” and that his is “the ultimate American story.” All of these are ways of praising Elvis Presley, so it cannot be said that the author is clinical concerning Elvis, as clinical would imply that the author took a scientific disinterest in his or her subject. Choice (C) is incorrect because of this.

The author does not treat Elvis with distance or cool detachment. Instead, he or she writes that “Elvis had worked hard,” that “he was still humble,” and that his is “the ultimate American story.” All of these are ways of praising Elvis Presley, so it cannot be said that the author is objective about Elvis. Instead, he or she is subjective, as he or she is biased toward Elvis. Choice (D) is incorrect because of this.