

“IT’S BIGGER THAN HIP HOP”: POPULAR RAP MUSIC AND THE POLITICS OF THE HIP HOP GENERATION

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ABSTRACT

A number of authors and supporters of hip hop culture have suggested that rap music has the potential to serve as a vehicle for the next stage of the Civil Rights Movement. However, the extent to which rap music has addressed political issues important to post-Civil Rights Black Americans, or the “Hip Hop Generation”, has gone unexamined. This study attempts to do that by first determining which political issues are most important to this group and, then, analyzing the extent to which the most popular rap songs – those heard by the largest audiences – have addressed those issues. Results show that popular rap music in its first years as a popular musical form and in present years fails to address these political issues to any significant degree, though in past years popular rap music addressed these themes with *slightly* greater frequency. Suggestions are given for why this decrease occurred and for why there exists such a dearth of political rap music in all of the years from which songs were sampled. Lastly, the implications of the widespread existence of rap that does not address issues important to the Hip Hop Generation are provided.