

Research explores evolution of hip-hop from party music to political platform

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A new University of Cincinnati-Blue Ash College study explores the evolution of hip-hop from party music into a political platform.

Todd Callais, an assistant professor of sociology, [criminology](#), and criminal justice at UC-Blue Ash, focused on the hip-hop industry because of its impact on society and because there is a clear timeline of its development.

"You can identify a beginning to the hip-hop culture that was fairly recent," said Callais, who will present his research at the 108th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association. "It started in the mid-1970s and the performers were primarily interested in entertaining and expressing themselves. By the early to mid-1990s performers began more consistently looking at hip-hop as a political opportunity with social movement implications."

He points to "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash as the first song by a major artist to address social issues and achieve widespread popularity. It highlights the social and economic barriers that force many African-Americans to live in poverty in the [inner city](#) and the frustration that results from these inequalities, Callais said.

Callais uses 1995 as the turning point for this shift when hip-hop truly evolved into a platform for social movement. For his research, he interviewed 25 people involved with hip-hop before 1995 and 25 who joined the industry after. These included performers, writers, producers,

and critics.

"I argue that musical participation in itself can be a social movement, as opposed to the soundtrack for a movement that is already happening, like we saw in the 1960s," said Callais. "Hip-hop gives performers another way to reach and influence a larger audience. Many of the rap artists in the last 15 to 20 years identify themselves as being more overtly political in their efforts."

According to Callais, key figures in the rap industry today are leading a movement countering the mainstream rap [stereotypes](#) of violence, misogyny, and crime to help create a better image for rap music. The modern movement leaders ironically cite early hip-hop artists as their influences, even though these early artists may have lacked truly political intentions.

More information: The paper, "Music and Social Movements: Historical Hip-Hop Participation Frames and Modern Rap as Social Movement Participation," will be presented on Sunday, Aug. 11, at 10:30 a.m. EDT in New York City at the American Sociological Association's 108th Annual Meeting.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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