

FILIPINO AMERICANS AND POLYCULTURALISM IN SEATTLE, WA
THROUGH HIP HOP AND SPOKEN WORD

By

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Abstract

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The research and analysis in this document explore the unique relationship and history that Filipino Americans and hip hop culture each have with American imperialism. In this examination, the focus will be upon the contemporary intersections between Filipino Americans and hip hop and connecting them to historical events. While hip hop scholarship continues to grow, few researchers have looked at the interdependent effects that Filipino Americans and hip hop have had on one another. It is my goal to bring out the intricacies of this connection and focus on the component of activism that has run an important course for these communities. It is also my goal to expose the successes as well as the challenges in motivating activism regarding Filipino American issues specifically in the Seattle, WA community and surrounding area. My interest in connections will highlight how the arts, specifically hip hop related, have changed the aesthetic of how issues affecting the Philippines and the Philippine diaspora can and are being addressed. By following how different artists are putting theory into practice by involving themselves in activist organizations, we see some recycled methods of hip hop activism in contemporary forms. By including the geopolitical influences in my research, the dominant factors affecting Filipino American critical consciousness is made clearer.

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Introduction

A long history exists in the city of Seattle, WA and its surrounding communities in the Puget Sound for Filipino Americans. Along with much of the west coast of the United States and Hawai'i, Seattle is home to many Filipino immigrants who have created communities. Because of the American immigration laws that targeted and filtered the flow of incoming Asian Pacific Islanders as well as other people of color, Filipinos share a history of racialized exclusion. Still, Filipinos persevered to settle primarily in urban areas along the western U.S. in areas such as San Francisco, Los Angeles and Seattle. In Seattle, Washington and the rest of King County, Washington, the demographics from the 2000 census showed that over 33,500 people identified as Filipino in that area.¹ Two counties surrounding Seattle, Pierce County and Kitsap County in Washington have almost a combined 13,500 more Filipinos identified.² This substantial amount of Filipino Americans in the Pacific Northwest shows how a population is establishing new contemporary forms of anti-colonialism.

The locale of Seattle, WA provides more than just a population of Filipino Americans that make it a location of interest. It draws attention as one of the major cultural locales in the United States. Aside from a musical history most known for the birthplace of grunge music through bands such as Nirvana and Pearl Jam, Seattle fosters a wide range of arts. It continues to draw renown as a dynamic urban area with a blend of technology (i.e. Microsoft, Nintendo), trendy (i.e. latté lovers, Experience Music Project architecture), and natural environs (i.e. evergreens, outdoor sports). Seattlites are comprised of an eclectic population that makes up the largest populated area of the Pacific Northwest.

¹ "King County, Washington - Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000," ed. U.S. Census Bureau (2000).

² "Kitsap County, Washington - Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000," ed. U.S. Census Bureau (2000), "Pierce County, Washington - Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000," ed. U.S. Census Bureau (2000).

For the ways in which I examined Filipino Americans in Seattle, the concept of polyculturalism guided my understandings of coalition, youth culture, and anti-colonialism. Drawing together people in anti-racist work, polyculturalism provides a way to think about contemporary tools of coalition and anti-colonialism. Vijay Prashad's book *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* discusses Robin Kelley's initial idea of polyculturalism. In that text, a major comparison gets made by showing that polyculturalism picks up where multiculturalism falls short.³ While people initially felt multiculturalism would speak to issues stemming from increased globalization, it has only managed to be a term that gets connoted with recognition. The aspect of recognition draws focus to differences between populations yet doesn't produce solutions to the oppression. Polyculturalism conversely has its ideas associated in the anti-racist work that multiculturalism has not been able to address.⁴ Ascribing to polycultural understandings suggests a much different trajectory for progress than that of recognition. Recognition through multiculturalism takes on a narrow path that implies racial equity has been achieved in neoliberal ways of thought. Anti-racism pursues racial equity in a more circular way of thought while incorporating recognition into its different direction. From these fundamental differences, a polycultural approach properly describes the strides being made in the Seattle, WA area through hip hop culture.

Choosing to use polyculturalism provides an appropriate framework that speaks well to hip hop culture and its global presence. Its concept stands as a better tool to scale the walls of cultural nationalism, in which populations strongly affiliate with a cultural identity so much that they tend to exceptionalize their culture at the expense of coalition work. Although cultural

³ Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 61-69.

nationalism can do well to organize communities, it concurrently makes it difficult to produce connections that will work together to confront issues of oppression. Flipping the ways that society enforces hierarchical structures through hegemony, polyculturalism places the struggles and the histories for peoples of color at the forefront of the cultural discussion. Hip hop has never strayed from issues of race and incites much discussion over culture. Together, polyculturalism and hip hop encourage cultural discussions meant to address the historical oppression for people of color. With the immersion and emergence of Filipino Americans in hip hop culture, this specific population in Seattle, WA identifies with other people of color and a resistance to colonized education. This is critical since multiculturalism allows for celebrations of culture but does not promote a functional understanding of people's histories and the problems inflicted on people of color for the benefit of imperial gain. Polyculturalist ideas occur often within hip hop despite being rivaled by many hip hop conservatives who don't see hip hop as a shifting culture. They are also ideas that are important for Filipino Americans if they are to shed American ideas of Philippine nationalism and develop a more critical consciousness.

Ways in which this generation can support and affect lasting revolutionary change in the Philippines and the United States rely on the development and sustainability of a critical consciousness moved to action. A contemporary cultural form that has endured through co-optation and popularization to remain in tune with youth has been hip hop culture. Despite undergoing the pressures of capitalism, hip hop retains a lot of its connection to its grassroots beginnings as well as its identifying with people of color and people of lower socioeconomic classes. The ways that hip hop relates to these communities allow it to be fluid in supporting polyculturalism. Connecting to youth plays a critical part to how we affect change since they are

our leaders of the future. If they cannot understand histories of hardship and exploitation, there will not be a motivation to change these ills and combat these contradictions.

At the core of my research, Filipino Americans have experienced the many facets of subjugation. Due to the Philippines' unique relationship and interaction with the U.S. through colonization and neocolonialism, Filipino Americans undergo a difficult identity crisis that disassociates them from a national history of violent resistance to oppression. First generation parents in the U.S. continue this romanticized view of the historical pacification and oppression of Filipinos by the U.S.. To correct the incongruence means that we must stay aligned with youth culture and the elements that can positively change it. A unifying theory like polyculturalism appropriately speaks to the ways that culturally diverse youth in the Seattle, WA area come together through hip hop culture to go beyond multiculturalist ideals. With whiteness and its associated characteristics continuing to thrive as the hegemon in the U.S. and worldwide, Filipinos share a connection with other peoples of color for not meeting the standards of whiteness. Despite these commonalities shared as the "other" with people of color, Filipinos do not have an extensive history of engaging with other communities let alone understand why a need would exist. Witnessing these polycultural connections in Seattle provides examples that we can draw upon for future coalition work.

For my argument, I first investigate the issues with Philippine history that have been altered by colonizers. This allows one to see how the current state for Filipino Americans developed and propagates itself. Picking up from this history, the Seattle, WA region will be examined for ways that this space has allowed for Filipino American youth to develop through hip hop culture. The dynamics for that region lets us make connections as to how hip hop allows for polyculturalism to grow and how it draws together populations across racial lines and class

lines. The final part of the discussion focuses on how hip hop sponsors Filipino/Filipino American resistance. From the intricate histories for Filipino Americans, hip hop culture, and the Seattle, WA region, there is a polycultural movement for anti-colonialism that centers around youth.

Obscured Philippine History

The enveloping and constricting nature of colonialism have been inextricably linked to the Philippine Islands since they were named after Spain's Philip II. A country of over 7,000 islands, its people today deal with the metastasizing effects of colonization that afflict the diaspora of Filipinos worldwide. Because of a long history of exploitation, knowledge of an accurate history for Filipinos suffers from the co-opted telling of it by its colonizers. Resurrecting and sustaining this history remains tied to the people that counter neo-conservatism and its associated propaganda.

As if the depth of Philippine history didn't exist before encounters with Spain and then the United States, formalized Filipino education reinforces the colonizers' work as the primary way that neo-colonialism continues forth. One extremely significant way came through the institutionalized teaching of English opposed to the multitude of dialects spoken in most households across the archipelago. It demonstrates how indoctrinated the Filipino educational system developed over the years to support American hegemony. This aspect of lost culture, the loss of language, represents a piece of the greater exploitation that the Philippines continues to experience from their colonization.

Although there has been a contingent of scholars sustaining the spirits of Filipinos that died long ago, the past decade fostered a Filipino Studies that critically looks at the Filipino experience on a larger worldwide scale including higher education. But, beyond exploring the untaught history of Filipinos, we see increased research covering the various experiences across the Filipino diaspora and the conditions that cause these migrations. The Filipino diaspora refers to the millions of Filipinos worldwide outside of the Philippines having left due to the poor class conditions and the potential to make more money abroad for supporting themselves and those

they leave behind in the homeland. Filipino immigration to the U.S. dates back to the late 1500's when the first group settled as a result of the Manila galleon trade involving the Philippines and Acapulco.⁵ Just as with this first major settling in the U.S., the Filipino diaspora across the globe grew out of the intersections of labor, displacement, and oppressive conditions. Many Filipino communities sprang up globally since the colonization first begun by the Spanish.

The popular way of viewing Filipino immigration to the United States comes from seeing their numbers as waves. Through the years 1906-1935, the first wave of laborers came across the Pacific Ocean.⁶ Approximately 150,000 Filipinos came to Hawai'i and the mainland during this time period associated with agricultural labor.⁷ During World War II, the second wave of immigrants started coming from the Philippines around 1941 and going until approximately 1965. Many of these immigrants journeyed to the U.S. from relationships brought on by the war (i.e. war brides, servicemen, etc.).⁸ After 1965, more waves occurred steadily to match the immigration limits determined by the U.S. With all of these waves, they stayed rooted in American immigration laws set to exclude groups based on race. In 1965, laws changed to allow Filipinos along with other Asian Pacific countries to immigrate for a third distinct period. Over 650,000 Filipinos came from 1965 through 1984.⁹ America benefitted from their immigration law changes since it led to a *Brain Drain* in the Philippines, taking highly skilled labor out of the country.¹⁰ In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau recorded that the Filipino population (including multiracial individuals) totaled more than 2.3 million.

⁵ Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (New York: Twayne, 1991), 25.

⁶ "Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program - Filipino-American Centennial Commemoration," <http://www.apa.si.edu/filamcentennial/timeline.html>.

⁷ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1998), 57-62.

⁸ "Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program - Filipino-American Centennial Commemoration."

⁹ Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 432.

¹⁰ Ernesto M. Pernia, "The Question of the Brain Drain from the Philippines," *International Migration Review* 10, no. 1 (1976).

Of the communities that developed across the world, the west coast of the United States stands as one of the densest regions for Filipino migration. But, the repercussions on immigration law caused by 9/11 pushed other places in the world as more feasible possibilities for Filipino immigrants in recent years. Their displacement to the U.S. built communities that foster a questioning of culture and history by the younger generation of Filipino Americans, and their questions are spurred on by various factors including identity politics.

The works of previous activists and scholars (many times one in the same) provide a big part of the foundation that scholars today draw from to continue building the legacy of resistance. One of the most well known Filipino historians, Renato Constantino, analyzed issues that hinder the development of a truer Filipino identity. His paper, “Identity and Consciousness”, inspires a better approach to analyzing why difficulties persist when trying to overcome the widening gap of wealth ownership. It also provides an impetus promoting an awareness of the economic factors pulling Filipinos away from their homeland. Another activist/scholar who examines the root problems of the Philippines and their manifestations, Jose Maria Sison, wrote *Philippine Society and Revolution* under the pen name Amado Guererro. Writings from these two authors along with a host of others denounce the systems and institutions maintaining the economic and sociopolitical destruction of the Filipino peoples. These structures contribute to the ruining of family stability that commonly afflicts life in the Philippines as more of the population face few options to help support their families.

The history of colonialism in the Philippines breaks into three dominant periods: Spanish rule, American rule, and neocolonial rule. While economic benefit at the expense of Filipino subjugation runs through these periods, the employment of different primary tactics characterized them. Spain’s colonization of the Philippines relied heavily on religion to

indoctrinate Filipinos aside from military force. American rule decidedly used pacification in combination with a paternalist approach to supposedly *help* Filipinos learn self-government. Neocolonial rule built off of Spanish and American rule to make the Filipino people economically dependent on the U.S. and other affluent countries while reinforcing a colonized mentality through the Philippine educational system. Christianity, pacification, and economic oppression still haunt and prey upon the Filipino people. Today, the complexity of neocolonialism makes the process towards anti-colonialism even more difficult for Filipinos in the Philippines and abroad. Generations that have been further removed from living in the Philippines face even greater identity issues in comparison to those still in the homeland. Filipinos in the U.S. have the constant reinforcement of the English language, the dominant culture of white America, and news media to assimilate immigrants. These factors promote a stronger consent to colonization compared to Filipinos in the Philippines that may have internalized American ideals yet don't have the same level of hegemonic factors.

During pre-colonization, the Philippine Islands' system of governance goes back to a familial tribalism. Renato Constantino describes a connection between this tribalism and the absence of surplus value production. Sustenance set itself up as the primary goal for the type of agricultural work that was done. While the tribes were spread across the 7,100-plus island archipelago, the southern part of the island exhibited some quasi-Muslim attributes. A communal way of living was utilized and did not thrive on exploitation. Representations of Filipino history today disregard this lifestyle and instead recognize a colonized viewpoint that notes traditions and values which Spain inculcated following their arrival in 1519. Still, one of the most historically recognized pieces of Philippine history goes back to the killing of one of the most widely known world explorers, Ferdinand Magellan. For many Filipino Americans that

have tried to get a better understanding of their lineage as well as formulate their identity further, his death has come to symbolize a resistant and revolutionary sentiment.

Spanish rule in the Philippines began establishing internalized oppression for the Filipino peoples through the use of Christianity. Indoctrinating Filipinos to look upon their local priests as gatekeepers to an eternal afterlife in heaven powered Spanish control. At a time when Martin Luther rebelled against the papacy and its restrictions on how one could get to heaven, Filipinos were beginning their subjugation to the same types of conditions. Although some tribes in the Philippines maintained their quasi-Muslim beliefs, a critical mass was cultivated by Spain to reinforce power from halfway across the world. Constantino directs our attention to the way that religion was instrumental in supporting these hierarchal divisions. Allowing cultural traditions to still hold their place within each tribe created enough autonomy for the Philippine people while priests could imbue benevolent feelings towards the papacy.¹¹ Enforcing these rules for spirituality foreshadowed what would be expected of Filipinos later in their history of colonization.

Once the era of American colonization began, it tied the Philippines to a dependency on *first world* capitalist structures that it still depends upon today. As with so many other economically underdeveloped countries that are dependent on money from disguised loan sharks, the Philippines lacks the ability to improve its global financial standing with the wealth distribution gap widening between it and other countries. This growing disparity represents the same conditions occurring at a class level for Filipinos struggling against exploitive leaders. Families and investors sustain these practices through corruption, nepotism, and preferential treatment. Exposing the injustices becomes more critical each day because of these reinforcing factors.

¹¹ Renato Constantino, "Identity and Consciousness," in *VIII World Sociology Congress* (Toronto, Canada: 1974).

Through small concessions, with little or no effect on the oppressive conditions, neocolonial practices remain effective in producing profits for those that play a part in supporting these methods. A marking of an important shift in colonial methods came when the U.S., by recognizing the Philippines as an independent country, allowed itself to pose as the supposed liberators of a country that had been under the hand of colonizers for over 400 years. Instead, liberation has meant that the Philippines stands only free from colonizers in the traditional understanding. But, even that remains in doubt given the American military forces' presence over the last two decades. Similarly to how race, class, and gender issues evolved over time, neocolonialism launders its power through economic agents such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. The U.S. effectively instilled a mindset of internalized oppression in the Filipino people during the period that it maintained a threat of pacification. Combining the economic agents for their neocolonialism, the U.S. has been able to capitalize off of their efforts put into the Philippine educational system, financial dependency, and developing puppet governments.

A very publicized and outrageous display of governmental pawns, the Ferdinand Marcos reign from 1965-1986 neglected the needs of the Philippines and its people. Marcos' regime determined the direction that the Philippines would go for years to come by putting an immense amount of money into American investment opportunities. The Philippines was driven into an extensive amount of debt that carries over at a rising rate today from the manipulation by subsequent governments. Today, nepotism has only promoted more of the same corruption that previous governments indulged. This extends beyond the highest administration of Philippine government to even those at the local level. Promises to develop the economy and bring respect to the Filipino people have only affirmed that the elected leaders, as well as first world

capitalism, will continue to flourish using the labor of the working class. Tracking the value of the Philippine peso to that of the American dollar, the drastic decline over the past fifty years follows the poor national spending decisions by each consecutive administration. Ferdinand Marcos provides an easy example of the poor use of the Philippines' national spending with much of the national budget going towards beautifying the country rather than addressing its poverty. But, the Philippine economy was destined for problems with its dependency on free trade ideologies and a dependency on the U.S.¹²

Idolization and deferment to American demands and ideals leaves the Philippines in a constant struggle to combat the invisible hand of neocolonialism. In ways such as the national language being recognized as English and the kowtow to America through the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), the Philippines' puppet government leaders support their building their own bankrolls at the expense of plundering the national economy further into debt and poverty. Noted as a defining characteristic that confirms the neocolonial handiwork of the U.S., the VFA extends the Philippines as a space for America to utilize as a military base. Against their very own laws that prohibit such an agreement to take place, the Philippine administration cowers to its colonial masters for the clout that comes with it.¹³

Changing the way that injustices continue to happen in the Philippines requires changes to happen not only in the Philippines. Since a key to the Philippines economic dependency on *first world* loans perpetuates the benefit to the Philippine ruling classes along with foreign investors, the financial and agricultural exploitation must be stopped. This calls for people in first world countries to support appropriate action. The saying that "the children are our future"

¹² James J. Halsema, "Philippine Financial Policies," *Far Eastern Survey* 18, no. 9 (1949). Frank Golay, "Economic Consequences of the Philippine Trade Act," *Pacific Affairs* 28, no. 1 (1955).

¹³ Michael J. Montesano, "The Philippines in 2002: Playing Politics, Facing Deficits, and Embracing Uncle Sam," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 1 (2003): 161.

resonates with many as the demographic that needs to be influenced in order to effect change down the road. But, the dilemma for this demographic is tied to stagnant educational practices that do not speak to youth experiences. The goal should be to educate using methods that allow youth to empathize and better understand these types of issues.

Exploring the United States for ways in which youth connect beyond local issues to global ones, various avenues have been shown to be effective. Beyond the institutionalized educational system, popular culture forms show the trends for youth and how to connect with them. Finding ways that popular culture forms can be bound to an engaged political awareness would create a revolutionary combination for youth. Instead of continuing educational approaches that depend on ageism, we must look at youth with a maturity that normative culture oppresses. This does not mean that something new must be created to achieve this outcome. By examining popular culture forms which can draw youth and relate to them, we can try to mold these cultures into a resistive form of education.

This draws my attention to a culture that ascends higher than a popular culture phenomenon and shows its potential to be an educational tool, hip hop. Using that description, I am also careful to not idealize hip hop and romanticize it to a level which becomes fiction. Through a historiography of the intertwined relationship of Filipino Americans, hip hop, and spoken word in Seattle, WA and its surrounding communities, I will show how their intersections bring promise for anti-colonial practices.

Space and Race – Hip Hop Aesthetics and Filipino American Youth in Seattle, WA

Hip hop aesthetics in Seattle continues to develop much in the same way that it has across the rest of the U.S. Having roots in the Jamaican and African American experience, hip hop's connection with Black culture remains pronounced as a global phenomenon. But, the changing racial hybridities and the polycultural push that hip hop culture instills have drawn the focus away from hip hop being only a Black subculture.

The draw to examine hip hop is that it has been an art form maintained for accessibility by poor communities of color. If we take into consideration the early beginnings of hip hop when it started coalescing as a more coherent culture, accessibility required it to stay visible and not confined by so-called *high art* standards. An article by Derek Murray titled "Hip-Hop vs. High Art: Notes on Race as Spectacle" puts it well by stating "Hip-hop is ideologically dichotomous to the art world's contemplative structure, and its self-conscious excessiveness grates against any attempt by the art world to soften and ultimately harness its potency."¹⁴ *High art* is likely to target a more affluent audience in comparison to hip hop. Historically, hip hop represents a more entrenched critique of its surroundings and society whereas *high art* can frequently be done as "art for art's sake". To do "art for art's sake" implies that the artist disassociated himself from any influences on their particular art piece. But, this kind of mentality inherently contains falsehood since one's world views, social location, and access to resource cannot divorce itself from the individual. Objectivity remains an ideal that cannot be reached. Thus, the experiences and biases of the artist and the access to resources to produce a specific art piece can show how people are oppressed by their limited economic means. So, *high art* commonly claims to diverge from the relationship although hip hop supports that it is bound together. Unlike *high art*, hip hop continues to maintain its accessibility cross culturally and

¹⁴ Derek Conrad Murray, "Hip-Hop Vs. High Art: Notes on Race as Spectacle," *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (2004).

includes poor and underrepresented communities such as the many Filipino Americans across the Seattle, WA region.

The Filipino American youth that have grown up in the Seattle community go through a similar experience compared to other Filipino American youth across the West Coast of the United States in terms of feeling a place within hip hop culture. Traditionally, the niche within hip hop that Filipinos have gravitated towards is the element of deejaying. During the advent of hip hop's flourishing in the U.S., the other three of the original four elements of hip hop – emceeing, breakdancing, and graffiti writing – did not conjure up associations with Filipino Americans. But, breakdancing emerged as a second element that was picked up by Filipino American youth because of its accessibility. Not requiring much to take part, the popularity of breakdancing grew within many poor communities of color. As hip hop's penetration into the mainstream came, the polycultural message embedded in hip hop emerged to the forefront of the movement. With its rise, racial tensions and cultural tourism were constantly questioned among those who were not Black; particularly for White participants.

Through identifying with Black culture, Filipino American youth find a space consciously or subconsciously through participating in hip hop culture, as examined by the scholar Mark Villegas. His thesis specifically covers these connections. Villegas argues that many youth draw to the aesthetics of hip hop culture before they ever begin critically analyzing their social location and the history behind it. While there is a wide range of tropes under the spectrum of hip hop education, we see that opportunities exist for youth to break from the status quo of racialized and sexist messages that media continues to reinscribe in new fashions. As women pose as sexual props in the vein of MTV music videos, there are artists who offer more depth when it comes to breaking from the colonized mentality.

Seattle's hip hop scene reached its high point in the early 90's in terms of media attention and national popularity. Sir Mix-A-Lot set the standard for Seattle hip hop artists aspiring to make it big. Although hip hop continuously proves itself as a polycultural art form, it's dominated and connoted with Blackness. Filipino American youth that wanted to participate in the spaces that showcased hip hop needed to go to places dominated by Black culture such as clubs and community events. Often, the Filipino American youth participating and supporting as racial minorities in these spaces gravitated to the deejays who were primarily Filipino. As pointed out before, this consistently proved itself as the hip hop element acceptable for Filipino performance. The seemingly untouchable hip hop element of emceeing never correlated to Filipinos for hip hop heads. There were those who pioneered a Filipino presence within hip hop. But, the dominance of Black culture associated with emceeing superseded any Filipino identity historically for emceeing.

Emcee Geologic of the Seattle-based hip hop group, Blue Scholars, remembers how others constantly second guessed him for his claim to partake in the craft.¹⁵ Any rapper trying to build his/her reputation recognizes the gauge for that respect came through battle rhyming. Geologic, or Geo for short, notes a difference for his involvement. He regularly found himself justifying his authenticity as an emcee to many Black individuals and also to other Filipino Americans unaccustomed to a Filipino moving into that realm. Mistaking him as a deejay was a common occurrence for Geo when he would be at these ciphers or hip hop showcases. His response to the questioning of his abilities came through his performance in cipher circles, a place that could give that respect yet could also take it away. Journeying through the hip hop scene was not an easy thing for Geo in terms of how much he proved himself as a valid

¹⁵ George Quibuyen, *Interview* (Seattle, WA: 2007). This interview laid out the personal experiences for Geologic and his development as an artist.

participant in the emceeing element of hip hop. His experience adds evidence to how hip hop has shown itself to draw a pan-ethnic contingent. But, it doesn't mean that stereotypes and discrimination no longer play a role in how a person gets viewed in relation to the culture. Filipino Americans still do not get associated with having the attributes of an emcee.

Not until the spoken word group *isangmahal* formed did an open space exist for expressing one's self as a Filipino American in Seattle. *Isangmahal* is a spoken word group comprised predominantly by Asian Americans in their 20s who crafted their words through performance in a creative way. The group's name comes from the combination of the two Tagalog words *isang* meaning "one" and *mahal* meaning "love". Bearing the taglines "subverting cultural genocide" and "love is love", the organizers for the group wanted it to represent a safe and welcoming environment allowing spoken word artists and others in the aesthetic to express their thoughts freely. Held ritually at the Northwest Asian American Theater (NWAAT) situated in the heart of Seattle's International District (I.D.), the space was located a few blocks away from where Carlos Bulosan stayed regularly at one of the residential hotels as well as near the spot that Bruce Lee trained. The events sponsored there by *isangmahal* captured the essence of what those two individuals did for Asian Americans. Symbolically, the space signifies the resistance to American dominant culture as did Filipino and Asian immigrants when they congregated in search of a sense of community.

Over time, *isangmahal* and its shows that occurred at quarterly inspired many Filipino American youth to express their ideas and individuality. Inspiring other collective artists to organize such as Chicago's spoken word group *I Was Born With Two Tongues*, *isangmahal* affected communities beyond a regional scope. Reynaldo Gaon, known as "Jojo" or "Kuya Jo"

in the Seattle community, recalls that the group was formed to be an outlet for the Filipino and Asian Pacific American community since none existed at the time.¹⁶

For Geologic and his experience with the organization, he stated that *isangmahal* shows provided a completely different environment to express himself. Instead of being questioned for his participation in hip hop as an emcee, he found that he was accepted. Geologic received gratification in those moments of performance from seeing and hearing the positive responses given from fellow *isangmahal* members along with the audience. Affiliating with the Black cultural spaces of hip hop before the creation of *isangmahal*, Geologic felt that he could connect with the cultural experience of other Filipinos that primarily attended these events. Starting with a small audience consisting mainly of the performers, *isangmahal* welcomed a small local contingent in 1997. It continued to grow as more community members discovered this avenue to identify themselves and their uniqueness within the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

Over time, *isangmahal* underwent changes while continuing to innovate as it grew and some member turnover took place within the collective. Evolving the group came with the pains of trying to define how the space changed in terms of its goals and intentions. Kuya Jo along with his brother and former member of *isangmahal*, Bobby Gaon, attested to the ways that the space no longer carried the simple characteristic of being a safe and inviting venue for Filipinos to get on the microphone.¹⁷ Critical issues pertaining to race, class, and gender regularly appeared in many of the pieces performed on stage. Some regular topics at shows included the colonization of the Philippines, the exoticization and objectification of Filipino women, and self-defining one's identity. Although these and other issues got examined with a critical

¹⁶ Reynaldo Gaon, *Interview* (Seattle: 2008).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; Robert Gaon, *Interview* (Seattle: 2007).

consciousness, it never became a requirement that pressured artists when determining what one could do on stage for their allotted time. As members critiqued their work and others' work in the collective, *isangmahal* began to fragment its constituents. The two philosophies that kept conflicting with one another revolved around maintaining a space open to expression versus a space requiring a critical lens that filtered content along race, class, and gender lines.

Unfortunately, these approaches led to irresolvable differences that detracted too much from a unified alliance. "Open mic" shows and features dwindled in occurrence as the group's relationships diminished. It was not until 2008 that other groups, The Arts Kollektive and Makipag, emerged to put on a show aimed at Filipino as well as Asian Pacific American issues like *isangmahal*.

From the work put in by organization, there was a collective message of Filipino American anti-colonialism. In the ways that they designed their flyers to the details in the way that shows were promoted, there was a consistent theme of using images of Filipinos that symbolized an understanding and connection with the Philippines. One flyer advertising for an anniversary show displayed a Filipino child with minimal clothing clutching a hammer amidst rubble (Figure 1).



Figure 1. isangmahal promotional flyer – September 26, 2003

These images connoted the type of work that many members ended up fostering through their art. Conveying a bond with their Filipino-ness and the struggles happening at home and abroad showed their audiences that resistance to the socioeconomic oppression stands firm internationally. Binding individuals across age lines made the art even more compelling. Although youth attendance at shows grew and was encouraged, *isangmahal* was not a space that geared itself specifically to the development of youth poets and performers. This spurred on the creation of a group that could promote the development.

A spinoff from the work of *isangmahal*, the Seattle chapter of Youth Speaks formed in 2002 to reach out to youth showing an interest in the spoken word art form. Originating in the San Francisco Bay Area, Youth Speaks reaches out on a national level to organize young writers.

Despite the decline of *isangmahal* due to group dynamics, Youth Speaks Seattle gained prominence by competing in many regional and national poetry competitions. It embraced much of the same principles and values of the original *isangmahal* mission, but attracted a more pan-ethnic membership. Youth Speaks Seattle states their mission as “to aid young poets' personal transformation and nurture self-expression through mentorship, workshops, and supportive public performance opportunities to amplify the youth voice.”¹⁸ JoJo Gaon along with another former *isangmahal* artist, Angela Dy, played large roles in developing the programming for Youth Speaks Seattle in its early beginnings in Seattle. Angela continues to be very active in the planning for Youth Speaks Seattle as their Program Director while she fosters her own pursuit of emceeing as *El Dia* and one-half of the group First Quarter Storm. Competing and performing on local and national slam poetry levels, Youth Speaks Seattle members express themselves vocally in an artistic way. These performances allow validation for the work that the youth members put into developing their art. Teaching and learning through poetry plays to the ways that youth immerse themselves.

Scholars Heather E. Bruce and Bryan Dexter Davis wrote on the topic of poetry as a critical pedagogy and how hip hop intersects with it. They write that “Hip-hop is where many of our students live” and that a “hip-hop oriented pedagogy seeks first of all to reconstitute as subjects those who have been treated as subjects.”¹⁹ Speaking about how poetry allows for a verbalization of thought rather than alternative expressions (such as violence), Bruce and Davis see the medium of poetry as a way to engage their students further than the conventional models of the American educational system. As more changes come on pedagogical practices, we must always take into consideration that youth expression relies more on peer interaction and not

¹⁸ "Youth Speaks Seattle," <http://www.seattleyouthspeaks.org> (accessed November 20, 2007).

¹⁹ Heather E. Bruce and Bryan Dexter Davis, "Slam: Hip-Hop Meets Poetry--a Strategy for Violence Intervention," *The English Journal* 89, no. 5 (2000).

predominantly by educational institutions.²⁰ Authors Floyd Beachum and Carlos McCray validate an important viewpoint for those in our educational system by saying “The task for educators is to familiarize themselves with youth culture/value systems and realize the subsequent affect on youth identity.” Seeing that Heather Bruce and Bryan Dexter Davis examined poetry’s pedagogical use, we find that educators want to break from the status quo in connecting with students.

Combining these learning styles with the colonization of the Philippines, we see that we must be thoughtful about how we can meaningfully work with Filipino American youth to reconnect them to greater issues of the diaspora. Institutionally and systematically, American colonization efforts successfully quelled much of the desire for many Filipino Americans to work towards anti-colonialism by infusing a pro-American viewpoint into their rhetoric and pedagogy. We see the effects carried over when discussing Filipino Americans. Touching on the state of Filipino America and its youth, E. San Juan, Jr. critiqued how youth connect with the homeland in his book *On the Presence of Filipinos in the United States*. San Juan, Jr. asserts that the latest generation of Filipino youth ascribes to popular culture forms of “becoming the model ‘multicultural American’” and that these “sublimated any claim for collective recognition of qualities other than the acquisitive or possessive.”²¹ This leaves us to ponder how we can draw the youth together on a level that creates a bridge from identity politics to substantial organized action. E. San Juan, Jr. also notes that agents such as the Civil Rights Movement and international movements for national sovereignty (including the National Democratic Movement in the Philippines) that stimulated this critical development are now defunct or no longer significant factors for Filipino youth.

²⁰ F. D. Beachum and C. R. McCray, "Cultural Collision in Urban Schools," *Current Issues in Education* 7, no. 5 (2004).

²¹ E. San Juan Jr., *On the Presence of Filipinos in the United States* (Salinas, CA: SRMNC Publishers, 2006), 91.

If we truly desire to break down the barriers constraining the development of our youth beyond superficial identity politics and fringe concerns, consciousness must be situated in the recognition of class divisions.²² The popular television show *Desperate Housewives* displayed a particular scene in 2007 showing Teri Hatcher's character, "Susan Mayer", doubting the validity of a Doctor of Medicine degree from the Philippines. Backlash ensued from the Filipino American community against the network and the *Desperate Housewives* staff as word spread about the hurtful episode. Sentiment in a few circles showed that some Filipino Americans questioned why unity arose in the Filipino/Filipino American community around this television scene, but not around more systemic issues. Rallying upon this issue produced a positive result in the community since it became more commonly known in larger communities and even garnered 128,299 signatures for an online petition aimed at the show producers.²³ At the same time, it was disconcerting to find that this type of organized response hasn't occurred in the U.S. to combat the social injustices carried out on a daily basis in the Philippines. The difficulty of unifying Filipino Americans together around the outright problems of their home country troubles the very possibility of a cross cultural coalition. To create a unified force in the "belly of the beast", there must be an organized contingent willing to stand against the hegemony of first world authority.

²² Ibid., 95.

²³ "Filipino Americans Demand for an Apology from Abc and Desperate Housewives," <http://www.petitiononline.com/FilABC> (access April 10, 2008).

Hip HoPolycultural

As noted previously, multiculturalism continues to get propped up as a sign for racial equality in the United States. But, its flaws signal its inadequacy to speak to issues of racism. Vijay Prashad develops on this by pointing out that

“multiculturalism tends toward a static view of history, with cultures already forged and with people enjoined to respect and tolerate each cultural world. Polyculturalism, on the other hand, offers a dynamic view of history, mainly because it argues for cultural complexity.”²⁴

This places an individualist outlook to race discourse as opposed to a more communal approach that polyculturalism offers. Based in race consciousness and separated from color blindness, polyculturalism points to interconnectedness between people that takes into consideration different socioeconomic influences while drawing from similarities. Cultural nationalism and multiculturalism work against this worldview. At the core of what polycultural means, Prashad offers an important quote from the *Colorlines Magazine* when Kelley first discusses the concept:

“...so-called ‘mixed-race’ children are not the only ones with a claim to multiple heritages. All of us, and I mean ALL of us, are the inheritors of European, African, Native American, and even Asian pasts, even if we can’t exactly trace our bloodlines to all of these continents.”²⁵

²⁴ Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, 66.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

Vijay Prashad used this description and other insight from Kelley to show that polyculturalism unsettles the static notion of cultural authenticity in which many Americans still constrain their thinking. Critically looking at how ethnic communities restrict coalitions through cultural nationalism, polycultural practices provide more of a solid base for deconstructing social inequities. Conceptually, it crosses the boundaries set forth by cultural identifiers without being overly liberal in understanding equality.

Applying polycultural ideals to the current social structure of the U.S. requires a more committed approach to breaking down territorial thinking. A Caucasian citizen in the U.S. would have difficulty being taken seriously in many circles if he or she claimed their heritage as African. The normalized mentalities of identity along with the ideas for what passes as authentic for identities needs to be uprooted in order for polyculturalism to develop. But, the proliferation of multiculturalism at all levels of society makes it extremely difficult to overcome. Finding widely accepted mediums would facilitate the awareness and educating needed to combat racism.

Enter hip hop and its associated aesthetics. As it continues to grow as a global art form, hip hop aesthetics enable people across socioeconomic lines to take in its messages. However, romanticizing the early beginnings of hip hop and its transformative power is not my intention. Instead, I wish to focus on its strength as a fluid and mobile means for influencing broad populations. Having a wide-ranging audience comes with its own set of problems.

Cultural tourism takes place when folks don't wish to deal with the societal problems that hip hop engages. When guest speaking at Washington State University in 2004, Chuck D of the legendary hip hop group Public Enemy iterated that the state of hip hop has been altered by television and its accessibility. He stated that anyone with access could easily emulate what they

see as hip hop and duplicate it. If Chuck D had known that the next step for the Internet age would include such popular sites as YouTube, he may have included its proliferation in examining the trajectory for hip hop culture. This age of media now allows those with Internet access to receive on demand presentations of hip hop aesthetics. Both the positive and negative representations of hip hop get consumed and reproduced at an even quicker rate. Although hip hop creates a highly accessible medium, we must be cautious in how we decide to utilize its power since it does not filter out the more constant negative stereotypes seen through most popular forms of media.

Hip hop's popularity grows so large now that the attention expands into the realm of higher education. It is a hot topic that current scholars are examining for its effect on culture. Jeff Chang, hip hop historian, helped to make Hip Hop Studies grow with his book *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*.²⁶ He followed this work with the anthology *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*.²⁷ In *Total Chaos*, Chang utilizes the concept of polyculturalism in his Introduction notes and says it "describes the way cultures influence each other. It functions like a jazz quartet (blending, inspiring, and changing together) or a DJ mixing records (matching rhythms and keeping it moving)."²⁸ Examining hip hop today, we must not forget its roots and how it still developed out of Blackness.²⁹

Situating hip hop as a polycultural agent, I do not try to make it seem like this concept is brand new. Just as Adam Mansbach shows in his contribution in *Total Chaos*, we must be reminded that hip hop derives from multiple musical traditions such as jazz and rock.³⁰ The

²⁶ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005).

²⁷ _____, ed., *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop* (New York: BasicCivitas, 2006).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xv.

²⁹ Mark Villegas, "Hip Hop Mestizaje: Racialization, Resonance, and Filipino American Knowledge of Self" (UCLA, 2007).

³⁰ Adam Mansbach, "On Lit Hop," in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*, ed. Jeff Chang (New York: BasicCivitas, 2007), 100.

differentiating factor though comes from the reach of hip hop today and its related economics for production. It maintains its appeal by continually speaking to the youth, the perpetrators of what's trendy because of their associated disposable income. As a writer of literary hip hop, or "lit hop" as he mentions, Mansbach thinks that hip hop writing still gets rendered as separate from other bodies of literature. I mention this because it is telling of how hip hop may be a hot topic for research in academia currently, but it still lacks acceptance as a result of being pigeon-holed into a limited genre. This signals that hip hop acts as a cultural theater to those that do not recognize it as something that can truly be transformative. It also shows that its study doesn't speak to the larger contingent of readers. If it reaches print, evidence shows that "mainstream press rewards books that address race and class, but only if they do so within certain parameters" and that these works are not accepted if they suggest "blurring right and wrong."³¹ Mansbach's insight tells us that hip hop must be disassociated from the struggles intertwined within its history if it stands a chance to be accepted as literature. This symbolizes how hip hop's opposition to the normative can only be consumed if it does not associate blame with anyone for the oppression that much of hip hop addresses.

Hip hop culture must remain an important part of the discourse on anti-colonialism not only because of its ability to speak to a wide audience, but also through its power to transform spaces already delineated by race, class, and gender. Work done by Lakandiwa DeLeon explored how the history of Filipino DJs opened up the spaces of hip hop to accept other Filipinos into the fray of its production.³² Mark Villegas expands on the identification of many Filipino youth with Blackness because of a pronounced experience of "otherness" by the

³¹ Ibid., 97-98.

³² Lakandiwa DeLeon, "Filipinotown and the Dj Scene: Cultural Expression and Identity Affirmation of Filipino American Youth in Los Angeles," in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity*, ed. Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (New York: Routledge, 2004).

majority of people of color.³³ The change by which Filipinos enter into this space means that there is recognition of acceptance. As hip hop has developed into a pan-ethnic experience, it has also become a polycultural agent with the inclusion of Filipino Americans and other ethnic communities. While we must examine how it promotes inclusion, we also need to find the factors advocating for exclusion, or ideas that classify as hip hop conservatism.³⁴

Studying youth culture for Asian Americans poses a lot of opportunities for further research. Since there has not been much done in this area, understanding the development of youth culture among specific ethnic groups offers opportunities for learning.³⁵ From these regional studies, connections can be made to larger diasporas. Through hip hop, we can take coalitions beyond cultural citizenships. We know that hip hop gains its form through the direction of youth culture and that youth identify with it.

Many hip hop heads that support the notion of hip hop functioning within a rigid identity have shown a consistent longing for the days of hip hop “purity”. This a reference to the early years of hip hop in which the music contained messages of empowerment and included a wide breadth of hip hop genres and sounds. Discrediting certain types of hip hop performance because of their message takes away from the diverse spectrum of hip hop aesthetic. As listeners of music, we all carry our own preferences for lyrical content, rhythm, melody, and other pieces to a hip hop song. This carries over to the rest of the hip hop aesthetics whether it involves clothing, image, and other elements. From our preferences, our prevailing understandings of hipo hop polarize to conservatism and liberalism. If we take a conservative stance, we risk losing parts of hip hop that still draw avid listeners and consumers. On the opposite end, hip hop

³³ Villegas, "Hip Hop Mestizaje: Racialization, Resonance, and Filipino American Knowledge of Self", 4-5, 39.

³⁴ A good source of my development on the topic of hip hop conservatism has come from the ideas expressed in an online blog titled the “Democracy and Hip Hop Project.” <http://democracyandhiphop.blogspot.com/>

³⁵ Lee, Jennifer and Min Zhou Lee, ed., *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 313-14.

liberalism could mean that we look past the trajectory of hip hop aesthetics and its dialectical relationship to society and consumerism. Hip hop conservatism and liberalism do not necessarily reflect a person's overall political philosophy. Someone that supports the hyperconservative platforms of the Republican Party can still identify as a hip hop liberalist. How do we draw from hip hop aesthetics without approaching it in a way that tries to contain its inherent fluidity and also focuses upon its influence on polyculturalism?

Avoiding conservatism means to recognize that hip hop developed to its form today from its initial beginnings through a synthesis of influences. Hip hop historians have a difficult time completely noting the very start for hip hop because it coalesced different genres (jazz, rock, etc.). But, this adds to hip hop's appeal. It maintains a reputation of reflecting upon society and heavily on a subaltern voice that speaks to people of color. As stated, we never should stray from noting hip hop's genealogy within Blackness. Having a captive audience worldwide and pan-ethnic representation, hip hop navigates the societal pressures of commodification and co-optation of the culture.

For hip hop heads familiarized with its history, a cause for concern comes from the fact that the audience and financial supporters of hip hop music and culture are predominantly suburban, white youth. Their demographic connotes a privileged experience in the U.S. that allows them to utilize their white privilege and disposable income to partake in cultural tourism. The backwards contradiction of the intended hip hop audience and the current demographic draws speculation over the viability of polyculturalism. This is not to say that suburban, white youth cannot relate to hip hop's foundational roots. But, their relation to hip hop differs from youth of color because of the social inequities that still exist. Jane Elliott, a sociologist who researched privilege based on certain physical attributes, in a lecture at Washington State

University on March 4th, 2008, made a very relevant and simple suggestion to those that supposedly do not try to utilize their unearned white privilege, “Share it!” At a basic level, hip hop brings the next generation of white folks into spaces born out of Black culture albeit one inscribed in capitalist commodification. But, what other spaces for communities of color have been able to conjure such a following of white folks? Although the threat of promoting cultural tourism lingers with white youth engaging with hip hop culture, it provides possibilities for outreach despite their conscious or unconscious recognition of privilege.

As the possibilities for mainstream recognition and mainstream financing remain on the horizon of possibilities for Blue Scholars and their contingent called Massline Media – including Common Market and Gabriel Teodros – we can begin interrogating what recognition could mean for them. Most notably within the crossroads of hip hop and the Filipino American community, Apl.de.ap of the hip hop group Black Eyed Peas shows the difficulties of trying to represent the Filipino culture within the limelight. Holding our communities of color to a higher standard shows through in the various types of representation. For communities of color, representation through media brings pressure to fully document the multitude of experiences for that particular population. In comparison, white media production feels no limits to what they choose to create.³⁶ For an underrepresented population such as Filipino Americans and their invisibility in hip hop emceeing, a standard would be applied for an emcee like Geologic and his representation of Filipinos although he covers a breadth of transnational and social justice issues. Overcoming these expectations without the privilege that white media producers enjoy spells difficulty for the Blue Scholars to break into the mainstream. To see how hip hop can cross barriers to break this mold, polycultural ideologies seem to provide some possibilities.

³⁶ Homi Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory," in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

The scholarship building on the idea of polyculturalism³⁷ draws interest because of how it shows that a simple concept of connectedness can affect one's approach to coalition work. As I have said, it picks up where multiculturalism fell short by staunchly setting itself in doing anti-racist work rather than stopping at recognition. Hip hop aesthetics provides a way for folks with different identities to come together and build past the obstacles of identity politics. Seattle hip hop has proven itself no different in that it draws culturally diverse participants. A component by which Seattle seems to have set itself apart from other regional hip hop scenes comes from the artists that lead the charge, identifying from a pan-ethnic spectrum of people and speaking on critically conscious topics.³⁸ Granted that there are many different ethnic communities that have representation in different ways within hip hop culture, but none of these artists emerged from the same metropolitan area at roughly the same time with this type of coherent message addressing injustices at local, national, and transnational levels. Seattle stands poised to do this.

Despite the culturally diverse movement of Seattle hip hop artists and their polycultural influenced styles, struggle comes with it. In January 2008, a forum took place to address the state of hip hop in Seattle. Various artists with different experience levels discussed the aesthetic. The most pressing concern that was voiced came from Black artists who questioned the rise of non-Black artists to the forefront of the Seattle scene. With this position, non-Black artists got more publicity on a national level. Observers of the Seattle hip hop scene's development could not deny that the faces for the Seattle hip hop brand were the Blue Scholars, having a Filipino American emcee and a Persian deejay, DJ Sabzi. Tensions arose over the thought of yet another case of commodifying Black culture. Geologic understood the basis for these concerns rather than taking a stance of defensiveness. The history of co-opting Black

³⁷ Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, 56-69.

³⁸ Athima Chansanchai, "Seattle's Spin on Hip-Hop," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer Online* (2007), http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/pop/303919_hiphop16.html. Seattle P-I.

music by non-Black artists has been most popularized by Elvis Presley and more contemporarily, hip hop artist Eminem.³⁹ On the other hand, he also recognized his own connections and affiliations with the Black community as a person of color.⁴⁰

Addressing the fear that a Filipino American emcee gains attention within a Black art form plays an important role by questioning the racial dynamics of the Seattle hip hop scene. While the fear may be unfounded, it draws attention to something that hasn't happened in Seattle for quite some time, the rise of a hip hop artist on a noticeable national scale. While much attention focuses on when Blue Scholars and/or members of the Massline Media crew will sign a record deal, not many know the struggles endured to maintain their standing in the hip hop community. A majority of their fans go unaware that Blue Scholars have been offered the chance to sign with a top record label. But, the contracts presented to them restricted the ways that they could promote themselves and the image that they built. The struggle for Geologic and Sabzi to still march forward in putting out CD's, doing concerts, and outreaching to new and established fans comes with a lot of work that could get handled if a contract were agreed. As a group that now makes hip hop their primary source of income, their lifestyles require an immense amount of work put into such areas as album distribution, increased concert performances, and many more aspects of managing their place in the music industry.

³⁹ Mickey Hess, "Hip-Hop Realness and the White Performer," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 5 (2005): 372-73.

⁴⁰ Quibuyen, *Interview*. December 19.

Urban Spatial Dynamics and Polyculturalism

Seattle's history has given it a label of being a liberal city.⁴¹ The events that happened with the 1999 WTO meeting in Seattle drew even more attention to the city being perceived as liberal and as being against globalization along with other cities that attempted to host these meetings.⁴² But, the social ills still appear despite the guise.

Polycultural aspects of the Seattle hip hop scene show the different ways that communities find themselves drawn together. Maintaining and creating spaces that can bring people together that can relate and understand one another plays an important part in facilitating polyculturalism. One of the most pressing threats to these spaces stems from gentrification. By looking at two examples affecting a part of Seattle's urban spatial dynamics, we can understand how spaces are under fire.

One recent example can be found from examining a spot that promotes local hip hop artists yet faces intimidation from some of their residential neighbors. Hidmo Restaurant, an Eritrean cuisine restaurant and gathering place for the community in the Central District of Seattle, was targeted by some community residents. The owners of the restaurant received notification from the City of Seattle about these complaints and how some neighbors felt strongly against the restaurant being close to their household. Feeling that the Restaurant fostered drug dealers, crime, and related activities, neighbors organized a petition to bring the concern to the City of Seattle. Despite these claims that have no proven basis, the owners of the venue must face a legal battle to keep their business operating.⁴³ Without these types of places

⁴¹ Neil Modie, "Where Have Seattle's Lefties Gone?," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, August 12, 2005.

⁴² A. Cockburn and J. S. Clair, *Five Days That Shook the World: Seattle and Beyond* (Verso, 2000).

⁴³ Jonah Spangenthal-Lee, "Hidmo Hit," *The Stranger Online* (2008), <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/Content?oid=479758>.

that support and actually host community gatherings like its Ladies First events⁴⁴, community issues suffer from not getting actively addressed. Instead, Hidmo faces demonization for the ills that plague their low-income location.

Ladies First has showcased local women hip hop performers during their shows hosted at the Hidmo Restaurant. These events are rare to find since women in hip hop have steadily become more and more invisible. It is unique in that it draws a polycultural contingent together to share in learning, community, and camaraderie. Two of the highlighted artists living in the Seattle area are El Dia and Rogue Pinay. In their performances, it is common for them to bring up topics of women's empowerment in their lyrics. As underrepresented artists in a Black male dominated position of emcee, this outlet for their performance is significant because of the demographics of that neighborhood being predominantly Black. Simply being there in that space is important in itself. Yet, engaging the community as Filipina artists and the love that they get back speaks to the polycultural environment developing in Seattle that gets fostered in places like the Hidmo Restaurant.

Activist Donna Denina helped to put together a video that covered an event in Seattle on December 7, 2006, titled *INDAYog: The Rhythm in the Movement* and was hosted at Hidmo. Constructed by Pinay Sa Seattle with the help of Communities Against Rape and Abuse and Youth Speaks Seattle, the event highlights the need for coalitions between women and supportive men to uplift the community. *Indayog*, a Tagalog word that translates to "rhythm" in English, combined female emcees, b-girls, and spoken word artists to bring awareness to how local activists were being targeted as well as to educate about civilian killings in the Philippines. "INDAY" receives capitalization since it translates as a term for a female friend in Tagalog and

⁴⁴ "Communities against Rape and Abuse," <http://www.cara-seattle.org/ladiesfirst.html>.

emphasizes that the event comprised only women performers.⁴⁵ Seattle Post-Intelligencer reporter Athima Chansanchai made an important statement about Seattle hip hop after INDAYog occurred. She states, “One thing that sets Seattle’s hip hop apart from the national bling thing is its women, who are entering the spotlight not as scantily clad video hos but as ladies with something to say.”⁴⁶ This observation appropriately sets apart Seattle’s scene compared to other environs when examining a host of local female artists.

A spectrum of socioeconomic issues came to the forefront in the performances that evening. Some of the performances witnessed by the crowd of over 300 included a spoken word piece that questioned cultural identity, another piece that covered militarization in Central America, b-girl talents, a hip hop performance spoken mostly in Tagalog and speaking to empowerment, and a spoken word piece addressing the demonization of homosexuality.⁴⁷ Self-love undergirded these performances.

INDAYog brought together diverse cultural communities to educate about injustices locally and abroad. Connecting the struggles in the Philippines to the more tangible experience for people in Seattle stressed that we are tied to these socioeconomic problems. Since many of the attendees were families and included all ages⁴⁸, it displayed the bringing together of populations outside of just youth. This should not diminish the role that youth and youth culture historically play in shaping the future of the music. Rather, this unification should signal how the hip hop community draws more than youth and can depart from the stigma of the genre not being accepted by the nuclear family structure.

⁴⁵ Donna Denina, e-mail message to the author, March 13, 2008. Donna Denina, 2008.

⁴⁶ Chansanchai, "Seattle's Spin on Hip-Hop."

⁴⁷ Donna Denina, "Indayog," (Seattle: 2007).

⁴⁸ Chansanchai, "Seattle's Spin on Hip-Hop."

As mentioned at the beginning of INDAYog, part of their goals for the evening included building awareness to the abject treatment of local activists. The video by Donna Denina showed the connection to a particular incident that involved Seattle activist Freedom Allah Siyam. Filipino Americans are now targets, subject to the treatment of Arab Americans following the 9/11 incident.⁴⁹ These links from the first all female hip hop event in recent history in Seattle show a revolutionary support across race, class, and gender lines. Using hip hop aesthetics to draw culturally diverse performers and audience members around local Filipino activists and social injustices in the Philippines demonstrates the levels of Filipino American anti-colonialism efforts in Seattle. This event shows that a dedicated effort to bring together multilateral issues in a common space for education can function in an interactive way that bonds people through a personal connectedness whether or not they identify as Filipino or Filipino American.

So positive was INDAYog on the community that a follow up event took place recently on January 19, 2008. It took place once again at the Youngstown Cultural Arts Center in Seattle, specifically West Seattle. This district often gets associated with a lot of gang activity and problems associated with lower socioeconomic classes. In the same spirit as the first, INDAYog II utilized a pan-ethnic presentation to educate and uplift. This time, one of the definitive parts of the evening came from media discussing the gentrification of the Central District of Seattle and the pressing legal issues brought against the Hidmo Restaurant.⁵⁰

Aside from being a restaurant, Hidmo's owners collaborate with organizers in the community such as Pinay Sa Seattle to host a once a month show, the aforementioned called

⁴⁹ Sarah Mirk, "Questioning Freedom: Fbi Keeps Tabs on Seattle Filipino Activists," *The Stranger Online* (2006), <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/Content?oid=87909>.

⁵⁰ Sarah Greenleaf, "Filipina Women Stage Indayog 2," *West Seattle Herald* (2008), http://www.westseattleherald.com/articles/2008/02/11/news/local_news/news08.txt. West Seattle Herald.

Ladies First. Providing the space for this event shows the support for the goals of Ladies First as noted by the Communities Against Rape and Abuse website:

LADIES FIRST concepts are ever shifting and gathering, but there is a core of:

1. Providing women, trans, gender non-confirming, two-spirit, queer women space to be on the mic and practice their skills (visual and spoken)
2. Focus on voice and creation, hip hop or otherwise, to empower and give voice to individual struggles in a collective, supportive, and community space that centers marginalized voices in communities of color, not in a divisive way, but rather uplifting way.
3. Sustain partnerships, so more people are brought into the space, regardless of gender to hear these voices on stage
4. Stating who we are as CARA, but not prioritizing our story over the people that walk into the space. Meet people w[h]ere they are at and give them beauty, temporary relative safety, creativity, and what ever peace they need to walk into the world with a pleasant memory of the possibilities and vision of a different future....
5. Change the way “we” view ourselves, safety, and violence (state and sexual violence)⁵¹

Given its support for community programs and education, imagining the Hidmo as a center for crime and gang activity in the neighborhood should cause great concern. Critically tying the Hidmo’s legal battle over gentrification presented the audience with the concern for how their communities face an institutionalized attack on the poor. Closing down a place that provides hope, education, and awareness to an underserved community would not affect affluent

⁵¹ "Cara Online."

populations; it would hurt the families that consider Hidmo as a safe place for them.

Gentrification in Seattle, as with other metropolitan areas, comes at a greater cost to the poor, working classes beyond moving them out of their neighborhoods. It alters the demographics of the urban areas of the city and contributes to the growing wealth divide.

The second example that speaks to the relationship of the urban spatial dynamics of Seattle and its connection to polyculturalism, hip hop, and the Filipino American community is the Monorail Project. It continues to be slowly built and bringing gentrifying agents with it. The Blue Scholars have mentioned this project in their lyrics to encourage listeners to be aware and critical of how their city is changing with this project. By including these critiques in their songs, it brings hope that listeners will recognize how it affects them and those around them.

Scholar Michael Viola wrote on the content of many lyrics from Blue Scholars, and how it uses a critical pedagogy that works on different levels to uncover the direct ties that people have to capital.⁵² Blue Scholars' line, "Monorail construction push the tenants off the land"⁵³, reflects on the large capital project that the City of Seattle wavered indecisively over since the initial proposal in 1997.⁵⁴ The majority of this doubt centered on the funding sources of the project and its feasibility financially. Still, the project moved forward but constantly met financing obstacles due to going over budget. The project ended up being dissolved with some construction being left behind. The project planned on serving West Seattle through to the Ballard area of Seattle, two distinctly different communities with the former being comprised of many underserved populations. At the same time the Monorail Project was in the works, a light rail was being formulated to cut the heavy traffic being brought on from the southern suburban

⁵² Michael Viola, "Hip-Hop and Critical Revolutionary Pedagogy: Blue Scholarship to Challenge 'the Miseducation of the Filipino'," *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 4, no. 2 (2006).

⁵³ Blue Scholars, *Southside Revival*. The Long March EP, December 2005.

⁵⁴ Kery Murakami, "Monorail Agency Officially Dissolves; Cost Taxpayers \$125 Million," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, January 18, 2008 2008.

traffic. Once the Monorail Project dissolved, the light rail still continued to do gentrifying work. The light rail was being constructed and would work its way through the heart of south Seattle. With its extended construction zones and partially built structures, it slowly developed through predominantly lower income communities populated mainly with people of color. As more of these folks move to more affordable housing, further putting them on the fringe of the city and away from where they work, these people of color still face the evident traffic problem that awaits a completed solution. Meanwhile, the businesses in the community continue to face their demise from gentrification along with the deterrents that construction zones pose in a city bogged down by a lack of an adequate transit system. Reflective of the community that surrounds them, people of color who own these businesses are forced into closing or relocating. As mentioned previously, Hidmo Restaurant hails as the latest community business that faces an undue obstacle although it reaches out to the community beyond its financial purposes.

As the light rail construction continues to inch towards completion and Seattle still sees the effects of partial Monorail Project construction, it continues to leave broken neighborhoods in its wake. Now, the damage has taken place to established communities of Filipino Americans along with the broader communities of color. With the changing demographics of the urban landscape in Seattle, it should come as no surprise for people of color that they face leaving their homes at the expense of expanding commerce and big business interests. The transportation projects are a throwback to the gentrification imposing itself a few decades back. Community activist Bob Santos wrote a book describing his days of fighting to maintain the Seattle International District, also known as Chinatown, despite pressures to build an athletic stadium in the early 1970s. Among the main tenants in the International District were older Asian

Americans who had lived in the low income housing sites for countless years.⁵⁵ These residential hotels share a historic thread with Filipino American history since they were the ones where Carlos Bulosan had stayed at when he first came to America. At the time that the proposal for the stadium began its initial viability assessments, the older generation of many Manongs and Manangs, first wave Filipino immigrants to the U.S., still lived in this community. This venture to maintain the community would be a connection between young Asian student activists with older ones who experienced other battles for recognition.

Although the domed stadium, the Kingdome, ultimately got constructed, it did not come without a fight. Other vendors tried to cash in on this new business opportunity by trying to advance into the International District so that they would be able to cater to the athletic team fans. Activists successfully protected the International District, but still feared for the effects of having such a venue next to them. Among these fears, property taxes loomed as an important one that needed to be adamantly opposed if the community stood a chance to be intact. Preserving the International District proved the necessary collaboration between older community activists with the new lifeblood in youth activism. With the Blue Scholars being a group to include gentrification issues in their music, we find another attempt to connect youth to these concerns. With the examples of the Hidmo Restaurant and the respective monorail and light rail projects, urban spaces may be a way to connect with youth.

⁵⁵ Bob Santos, *Hum Bows, Not Hot Dogs!* (Seattle: International Examiner Press, 2002), 74-87.

Hip Hop and Youth Culture

Something that hip hop has consistently been able to do in its history is connect with youth. If we can understand the ways that we can utilize hip hop's nature to draw our youth to issues that directly and indirectly effect them, we can move social justice issues forward through polyculturalist means. Further examining Seattle's hip hop scenery can aid us when looking at the methods that this culture has influenced others to action.

We have already seen that Filipino American youth have come together to organize around social justice issues. For Filipino American organizing, we have seen a national issue draw generations together through the fight for Filipino Veterans Equity from World War II. This movement shows us how youth have taken it upon themselves to be more active in social justice issues. As America enlisted Filipinos to fight with them as their colonial counterparts, an expectation of military benefits was promised to Filipinos. But, the U.S. Congress took away many of these obligations to Filipinos in 1946 through the Rescission Act.⁵⁶ The benefits due to those Filipinos who joined America in the fight during World War II should still be honored. The fight continues, trying to secure this equity despite many of these veterans growing older and passing away. Some of the activists that lead the charge today come from the same families as these elders. As critical consciousness spreads in the community and draws together pan-ethnic support, the cross-generational efforts ensure that social injustice issues enter a collective memory that passes on to the next peoples to take up the fight.

A different approach to looking at collective efforts can be found in the concluding pages of the anthology *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity*. Editors Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou forecast the areas of research that would build upon what their book outlines.

⁵⁶ N. Satoshi, "The Filipino World War II Veterans Equity Movement and the Filipino American Community," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 32 (2000): 7.

Their compilation aids in showing the significance of the term “Asian American” and whether it aptly describes the current state of Asian America. While this can play an important part towards a more polycultural approach to activism and enlightenment, complexities exist when looking at the experience for Filipinos in America and at a more micro-level in Seattle. Professor Rick Bonus in the University of Washington’s American Ethnic Studies Department pushes the argument for Asian American identity to examine the hybrid experience for Filipino Americans. His work indicates a unique experience nationwide as well as in Seattle. In an interview, Dr. Bonus says:

Many Filipino Americans here in Seattle, for example, resist being identified as Asian Americans not only because they realize how “different” we are from Asians in many ways, but also they know that Filipino Americans turn into a minority when included within the larger group of Asian Americans. In other words, they don’t see the benefits of being part of this larger group. As a matter of fact, they see themselves losing out because their histories are marginalized and their power is minimized.⁵⁷

While this rejection of Asian identity can risk opposition to polyculturalism, it represents a catalyst for associating and aligning Filipino identity with other ethnicities such as Puerto Ricans, African American, and “most especially, Pacific Islander Americans.”⁵⁸ Rather than associating Filipino Americans with other ethnic identities based on the Philippines global spatial proximity to other countries, we must break free from this multiculturalist confining mentality.

⁵⁷ Antonio Tiongson Jr., "Reflections on the Trajectory of Filipino/a American Studies," in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed* ed. Antonio Tiongson Jr., Edgardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The confusion that many Filipino Americans encounter in the U.S. comes from this mindset when trying to self-identify as either “Asian” or “Pacific Islander.” Instead, we should look to historical experiences in making these ethnic associations. For instance, Philippine history more closely resembles that of Puerto Rico rather than that of Korea when looking to these countries’ experiences with colonization. Filipino Americans have shown a likeness to black culture in many ways through hip hop because of a relationship with being considered an “other” amongst predominant white culture. As we consider Seattle and other places, we must stay mindful that a more comprehensive identity is taking place because of these associations. In breaking from the category of “Asian American”, Filipino youth in Seattle have looked elsewhere to get validation due largely in part to the way that they have been Americanized. Disassociating from the other groups under the Asian American umbrella does not mean that there cannot be Filipino American support for these communities. However, it does mean that other groups of color can provide the validation that other Asian American ethnic identities have not been able to completely provide because of comparable cultural experiences. Polyculturalism provides the fluidity for people with different ethnic identities to still relate personal and cultural histories while recognizing interconnection.

Fostering a mentality of recognizing the various struggles of communities and acknowledging how we can support each other contains tremendous potential. If Filipino American youth in Seattle and nationwide get the validation that they need and deserve, we can imagine a larger scale of anti-colonialism. The process continues to happen for the youth that have already questioned their social location. But, connecting anti-colonialism to polyculturalism will support a move from identity politics to enlightenment to political action. The relationship that the emerging Seattle hip hop artists have built with community youth

means that they are in a position to really influence the next generation. Similar to the Blue Scholars, whose lyrical content aligns with a critical revolutionary pedagogy, other Seattle artists share a similar consciousness in their messages.

Recently, 1st Quarter Storm arrived on the Seattle hip hop scene. Combining two Filipina Americans, artists Rogue Pinay and El Dia, it covers topics of domestic violence, women's rights, and Philippine colonization among other social issues. Rogue Pinay and El Dia, also known as Katrina Pestano and Angela Dy, got help from Gabriel Teodros for producing their first mixtape.⁵⁹ Teodros connects to Blue Scholars through his affiliation with the Massline Media label. El Dia also connects with Geologic from both of their participation in the *isangmahal arts kollektive*. Rogue Pinay's organizing efforts with Pinay Sa Seattle connects her to Blue Scholars since this organization collaborates with AnakBayan-Seattle, an organization in which Geologic was a member. Utilizing these artists' collaborative efforts, organizing people around Filipino anti-colonialism gets punctuated.

The name for the duo, 1st Quarter Storm, pays homage to the movement in the Philippines that garnered support by many Filipino citizens denouncing the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in 1970. Their name invokes a powerful time for the people of the Philippines who suffered from the self indulgence of Marcos' public policies which did not serve the interests of the peasants. Considering the organizing work in the Seattle area by Rogue Pinay and El Dia, their group name effectively situates their politics.

As with many hip hop artists, a connection with one's neighborhood and city often motivates a sense of pride to represent. Just as in emcee and breakdancing battles to graffiti tagging, representing self and community brings pride. But, connecting on transnational issues

⁵⁹ Erika Hobart, "1st Quarter Hip-Hop Via Rape, Politics, and the Philippines," *Seattle Weekly* (2008), <http://www.seattleweekly.com/2008-02-20/music/1st-quarter-greets-hip-hop-via-rape-politics-and-the-philippines.php>.

as a community makes the movement through hip hop in Seattle different from what we see nationally in the U.S. It goes beyond a small group of individuals that back this support. Coalitions abound to reciprocate the support amongst community organizations. Hip hop stands as an appropriate and popular way to disseminate empowering messages that many relate to their own experiences.

Geologic and San Francisco hip hop artist Kiwi, formerly of the Native Guns, announced recently that they plan to continue The People Power Tour 2008 that they initially launched during the first half of 2008. Their tour consisted of concert dates during the months of April and May 2008 and covered stops in various areas across the U.S. The label of People Power draws attention to the revolutionary movement in the Philippines that put an end to the reign of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. Like 1st Quarter Storm's group name, the People Power Tour recalls a renaissance when Filipino people united against exploitation. The Philippine government today uses tactics to oppress its own people just as the Marcos administration did. On a webpage created to spread interest and support for this tour, they state their goal "to rally youth and students nationwide to raise awareness about the worsening social, political and economic conditions in the Philippines under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's current administration."⁶⁰ They also self identify as:

...active Filipino community organizers in their respective cities, drawing connections between the struggles of Filipinos in the US and their compatriots back home. They share the view that art is not only a reflection of the world, but a tool which can shape a more just future society. From the rapidly gentrifying street-corner to the Ivory Tower of academia, Kiwi and Geo bring forth a message of resistance and self-determination in the

⁶⁰ Kiwi, "Facebook | the People Power Tour W/ Geologic (Blue Scholars) and Kiwi!!!," <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=24517327216>.

tradition of pro-people hip-hop music by such artists as Dead Prez, Public Enemy and KRS-One.⁶¹

As this goal and self-identification show, the work of Geologic and Kiwi through hip hop also defines their community organizing work. Leaders in their respective Filipino communities, their message contests the dominant discourse in mainstream hip hop. It ties together what commonly gets separated, what passes as personal and what passes as political.

In some of the Blue Scholars marketing statements, they get described as trying to “blend the personal and the political.”⁶² An important critically conscious concept, the “personal is political” draws people away from trying to discern between the two. Instead, it forces people towards a self critical mentality that stresses that a person always remains engaged and connected to society. The idea relates directly to polyculturalism because they both carry philosophies of interconnectedness that situates people within the problem and never removed. Like Black scholar Bakari Kitwana examined, “Until hip-hop is recognized as a broad cultural movement, rather than simply an influential moneymaker, those who seek to tap into hip-hop’s potential to impact social change should not expect substantive progress.”⁶³ Developing this ideology further, we must explore what substantiates a “broad cultural movement” in hip hop if we plan on effectively using it. We can look to Public Enemy’s ability to work collaboratively with the Black Power movement in hip hop. But, the formula for Public Enemy’s influence faced co-optation just as mass produced t-shirts of Che Guevara co-opted the image in the past decade. So, how must the formula change to suit the needs for Filipino American anti-colonialism based on a polycultural approach? Geologic’s involvement in AnakBAYAN-Seattle

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "Blue Scholars | Bio, Tour, Community - Eventful," [http://eventful.com/performers/blue-scholars-/P0-001-000056407-5](http://eventful.com/performers/blue-scholars-/P0-001-000056407-5;); "Myspace.Com - Blue Scholars," <http://www.myspace.com/bluescholars>.

⁶³ Bakari Kitwana, "The Challenge of Rap Music from Cultural Movement to Political Power," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 345.

influenced his usage of a self critical mentality drawing from a Maoist perspective of Criticism and Self Criticism. This approach demands individual people to analyze their own actions for the greater good of the population. Integrating these doctrines into music like Blue Scholars does provides a way for popular culture to support this message.

Going beyond the confines of the Northwest acts requires a lot of hard work because recognition for hip hop music now defaults to the people that have a certain type of sound. Lyricism does not get the type of appreciation that it deserves. Through mass marketing, perceived popularity, and the latest trends, the hip hop music that sells and receives attention does not coincide with the music that produces the best message. Yet, the rise of Seattle hip hop thrives on its roots to the Seattle scene and its image departing from the glitz that the mainstream depends on. Youth culture's influence on the hip hop trends in style and music cement their importance to art. Engaging the local youth through local hip hop to which they can relate helps bring together a regional platform for Seattle hip hop style to gain notice nationally. We can see how Seattle bonds hip hop to social consciousness polyculturally through various collaborative support efforts. One example occurred on International Womyn's Day on March 8, 2008.

During International Womyn's Day, events occurred across the world including Seattle. Pinay Sa Seattle hosted the gathering with some hip hop artists supporting the movement. It included local groups such as Abyssinian Creole, an African American group composed of Gabriel Teodros and Khingz, Nam, a Vietnamese American artist, and 1st Quarter Storm. High school youth gave a statement in cooperative efforts too. Other speakers came from different ethnicities and related strongly to the recognition of women.

A central message to this event centered on an argument for the removal of the latest Filipino political puppet for the U.S., President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (GMA). The

unjustified political killings of Filipino organizers happening in the Philippines makes awareness and support more needed than ever to protect the rights of the people. Part of the campaign to remove GMA simply uses the word “oust” to get the point across. Among the performers, support for the removal of GMA came from a member of Abyssinian Creole, Khingz. Painted on his forehead in purple lettering, the word “OUST” staunchly made it clear that he supported the effort as a black male. He was one person of a culturally diverse crowd that supported this event and the concern about issues for women as well as the problems related to the Philippines. With this localized event united to a global campaign of awareness, we must be aware of how other local actions relate to national and global efforts.

Spoken word in Seattle shares the power to affect change locally and globally with its accessibility and how it provides a different outlet of expression. From the spirit of the *isangmahal arts kollektive*, other projects and groups formed out of other communities because they were spurred on by the education *isangmahal* fostered. As mentioned, the Youth Speaks-Seattle chapter formed after *isangmahal* established its presence. The spoken word group I Was Born with Two Tongues out of Chicago, Illinois gained its footing from the inspiration of *isangmahal*. Many other collaborations and friendships came together as a result of the touring and networking of *isangmahal*. Since it died out, engaging ways still get utilized to educate. Aaron Counts proves to be an example of this. Aaron co-directs Youth Speaks-Seattle chapter with 1st Quarter Storm member, Angela Dy. Mr. Counts has taken his personal experiences with spoken word and his collaboration with Youth Speaks-Seattle and utilized it to make headway for his primary employment. Aaron organizes programs for incarcerated Black men. To help his writing group to express themselves more effectively, he relies on the art of spoken word to

constructively build with these young men.⁶⁴ In essence, his work with these young men parallels the work going towards Youth Speaks-Seattle and their members. The creative measures employed by spoken word and hip hop aesthetics help to bring these people to a heightened awareness of their feelings and expression. For these incarcerated men and youth writers, spoken word allows them to feel comfortable in conveying their feelings when it seems they would not otherwise. This exemplifies the ways that the creativity involved in hip hop aesthetics crosses broad demographic boundaries.

As expressed in the research by Oliver Wang and Lakandiwa DeLeon, the Filipino mobile DJs of the San Francisco Bay Area and California became an assumed part of the hip hop scene. Wang showed that the process of becoming a DJ for Filipino Americans was a part of “*becoming Filipino*.”⁶⁵ Entwined with hip hop aesthetics, discovering a Filipino identity proves possible for Filipinos who consider themselves a part of the music culture. Although researched in California, the experience along the west coast of the U.S. for Filipino Americans bears similarities for influence.

What is the purpose of examining the musical choices for Filipino Americans? Some insight comes from Oliver Wang’s quote of Deborah Wong, “Asking what music an Asian American listens to is a way into considering how and why Asian Americans make choices about identity, pleasure, and location, not least because very little public culture is Asian American.”⁶⁶ To Wong, popular culture still sustains the strong stereotypes for Asian Americans which many times include Filipino Americans despite identity issues for Filipinos underneath the “Asian”

⁶⁴ Aaron Counts, *Interview* (Seattle: 2007).

⁶⁵ Oliver Wang, “Spinning Identities: A Social History of Filipino American Djs in the San Francisco Bay Area (1975-1995)” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkely, 2004).; DeLeon, “Filipinotown and the Dj Scene: Cultural Expression and Identity Affirmation of Filipino American Youth in Los Angeles.”

⁶⁶ Oliver Wang, “Between the Notes: Finding Asian American in Popular Music,” *American Music* 19, no. 4 (2001): 461.

blanket. This supports the notion of why a higher standard exists for Filipinos in the media by their own community. If music speaks directly to the experience for Filipinos, then a door opens for drawing in the Filipino community. Just as the Filipino mobile DJs created a site for exploring one's Filipino identity, other parts of hip hop expression can incorporate youth in a critical analysis of this identity now that we see a Filipino American emergence in different areas of Hip Hop.

The latest development of the Seattle arts community and Filipino Americans has been the establishment of the *Arts Kollektive*. This group has emerged with much of the same spirit that *isangmahal* had established. But, a noted difference is how the *Arts Kollektive* utilizes much more of an established political agenda in how they perform. *isangmahal* rooted itself in a more simple, yet not less important, perspective of letting the power and opportunity for expression drive one's participation. As this approach became clouded and no longer the sole driving force for the organization, divisions over philosophy arose and led to its dissolution. The initial approach for the organization did not maintain an "art for art's sake" mentality as mentioned earlier regarding *high art*. Instead, the political component of this foundation lay within the provision of space for Filipino American expression without constrictions. Still, the rifts remain, framed by the push for some members desiring a more dialectical materialist approach to their art.

Hip Hop and Filipino Resistance

As Hip-Hop gains more acceptability in higher education and scholarship in general, the tendency still remains to see predominantly through the scope of African Americans and Caribbean Americans because of the historical foundations with these two populations. On the fringe, the contributions and acceptance of hip hop by other racial minorities within the United States has been analyzed in a small context although the art form has a profound influence on the current and forthcoming generations of these groups. The few that have taken it upon themselves to look at this relationship deeper have caught the interest of more scholars that are producing more of this needed work. But, there are still scholars who don't see the engagement of hip hop with other ethnic minorities as being significant. Analyzing the art form and its effect on communities is important because it has been an expression that challenges imperial rule while representing the subaltern voice. Filipino American youth are a population that have been involved with the development of hip hop culture and are now utilizing it to further their own understanding of their social location. Along with this understanding has been a buildup of political awareness and community activism. As new First Generation Filipino Americans come to the U.S. and later generations grow up in America, the revolutionary history of resistance is lesser known to Filipino Americans because of the lasting effects of the American empire. Neocolonialist doctrines carried out by an implanted Americanized educational system has allowed concessions to Filipinos in terms of an emancipated veneer. This can be seen in how younger generations of Filipino Americans have lost strong affiliations to the Philippines because of Americanization. Part of this loss develops from normative ideas of thinking that Filipinos have equal ability to succeed through their freedoms. Yet, the Philippines serves U.S. ideals because of its economic dependence. My interest in the growing Filipino American

community in Seattle, Washington has shown ways that the population is using hip hop and activism to push for change.

Because of identity politics with the check box mentality and the growing advent of multiracial Filipinos in the United States, organizing Filipino Americans can be a difficult task. As stated earlier, each generation of Filipino Americans that is further removed from living in the Philippines encounter larger identity issues than those still in the Philippines. Aside from all of the contradicting realities for Filipinos in America, most parents that have immigrated share a strong desire for their kids (as well as themselves) to assimilate quickly. This compares well with other Asian Pacific Americans and their goals of acceptance. Desiring their youth to fit in quickly with normative culture continues to prop up the problematic stereotypes of the Model Minority that suggests Asian Pacific Americans have shown they can experience class mobility because they work hard in American society without complaining about their socioeconomic status. Instead, the Model Minority Myth prevents polycultural communities from working together. Filipino American youth experience an underdeveloped knowledge about their familial past and history of Filipino culture because of the pressure to conform. With this being the result of an American neocolonial education that has debilitated the generations of Filipinos that followed, an incongruent Philippine nationalism has been misappropriated and misled. Combining the desire for Filipino parents to assimilate and their romanticized view of the U.S., successive generations have been taught at home as well as in their classrooms to be American. Stories describing the violence used against Filipinos by the U.S. in its colonizing campaign have gotten erased and replaced by images of the U.S. as a protector of the Filipino people. The acceptance and adoption of English over Filipino dialects furthers this indoctrination while making it tougher for these later generations to have ties to their Filipino heritage. Identity

issues pose a more difficult problem since Filipino Americans are wrongfully shown through an American education that they, too, can be Americans while their actual experience reinforces that they are *Other*. Filipinos in their native land continue to receive an American education as well. But, they are not fooled into thinking they are American such as the rhetoric by the U.S.. For them, they are fooled into thinking that America equates to the ideal. So, Filipino Americans experience more complex identity issues at an individual level whereas people in the Philippines have identity issues at a national level. Although identity politics often proves problematic for reasons such as drawing people to an individualized world view, it must be noted for its positive potential also.

Although identity politics and the pseudo-nationalism undergird cultural nationalism, we must still be cognitive in how they have shown the power to bring communities together on a united front. If we look at community and youth organizations based around ethnic affiliation, we find that people develop strong bonds with others because of cultural citizenship signifiers (i.e. language, food, interests, etc.). For this reason, it is important to understand how it works if it can continue organizing people for changing poor social conditions. In a different way, polyculturalism provides potential to achieve the same unity, but create broader coalitions that are not hindered by those same cultural citizenship signifiers. Still, the diaspora of Filipino workers and immigrants who continue to leave the Philippines are often instilled with cultural nationalism. As the new generations of Filipino Americans grow up in the U.S., a conflict often exists between parents and their kids because of the pressures to succeed through their parents' methods and understanding of success. Some Filipino American youth have gained the desire to learn more about a Philippine history that has been clouded and twisted to meet American needs and interests. The search for a balance between Filipino parents and Filipino youth desiring to

explore and develop their knowledge of activism is not a new riff. Renato Constantino's document, *Parents and Activists*, discusses the same challenge back in 1971.⁶⁷ In the same spirit, it is my intention to look at how Filipino American youth are getting organized along with how they are finding the courage to challenge parental values and imperialist values, consciously and unconsciously.

Making Filipino education work for American economic and strategic interests has taught a majority of the Filipino population to uplift white America through the adoption of English, the embracing of American popular culture over its own, and through false perceptions of the U.S. as a protectorate of democracy. Adopting these values has led Filipinos to sacrifice their own cultural values. It is problematic for Filipino Americans to feel it necessary to assimilate for financial success, which comes at the cost of losing Filipino cultural traditions and a more appropriate education to address the state of the Philippines. It is argued that the loss of this history and knowledge is cultural genocide.⁶⁸ This is difficult for many white Americans and assimilated brown Americans to fully understand, how cultural genocide affects people and why American assimilation has hindered communities of color because of social advantages like *white privilege* and social mobility.

Having my own vested interest in Filipino Studies and the ongoing struggle by Filipino peoples across class lines, I am drawn to look at how the connections between this social problem is being negotiated in hip hop. As respect continues to be built for the study of hip hop in colleges and universities, it is significant that we continue the growth of its study by examining how diversely it has affected people. As two of the most noted Black critics, Michael Eric Dyson and Robin D.G. Kelley, have incorporated the current state of hip hop and its

⁶⁷ Renato Constantino, "Parents and Activists," *Graphic*, April 28, 1971.

⁶⁸ Dylan Rodríguez, "'A Million Deaths?'" in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed*, ed. Antonio Tiongson, Jr., Edgardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

trajectory into their commentaries on Black America, it is my interest to do the same with the Filipino community. Some people may not see the significance of looking at the Filipino community. But, those who understand the contributions of Filipino Americans can see how it continues to influence more of the newer generations. In seeing how hip hop is influencing Filipino American youth, it is my goal to parallel the history of resistance among Filipinos with that of hip hop and to determine how these histories share similarities and have converged over the years. Within hip hop history, a counter narrative to the domineering powers has been a foundational piece. Tracing a part of hip hop history to Bronx, NY shows how it railed against the ignorance of the poverty and violence overtaking their neighborhoods. Philippine history has been hijacked by imperial powers over time and has needed a counter narrative in order to revive the spirit of resistance that has remained throughout the years. Subaltern stories in hip hop and Filipino culture have never allowed the working class struggle to be forgotten.

To investigate the ways that hip hop has been accepted into the mainstream is to look at the connections it has built among youth. As the youth of today deal with the pressure of being the next generation that will handle issues, it seems that low expectations are placed on their abilities with tired ageist critiques dominating American media messages. The U.S. consistently finds itself reflecting on the maturity of our youth and how they are in a crisis because of increased high school violence and teen pregnancy concerns to name a couple. Hip hop and its continued history of breaking from the norm has made it a popular choice for youth wanting to break from adult ideals. Many of these ideals do not uplift the community. Instead, self advancement is promoted in terms of personal income and wealth. With the support of White suburban youth, hip hop has clearly changed over the years to cross over race and class lines. Acceptance into the white mainstream ushered in the development of the giant hip hop culture

industry. Yet, it still remains a genre that rubs against the grain of hegemonic values. Crossing race and class lines, the theory of polyculturalism can justify many points of this discussion because of how it can be applied towards cultural and economic crossover for hip hop. The term “crossover” refers to the widespread influence of hip hop and its breaking away from being a musical form that only the poor, working class, black and brown folks could identify with their lives. Polyculturalism has been a driving force in helping hip hop expand beyond this demographic and become global. While recognizing hip hop’s roots in black culture, we must not continue limiting our understanding and description of it since it clearly established itself as a global art form that has been transformed polyculturally.

Polyculturalism is identified as “grounded in antiracism rather than diversity.”⁶⁹ Being “antiracist” communicates a more active approach to solving issues of race, including White supremacy, than “diversity” has shown. “Diversity” has been co-opted as a term to describe the neoconservative ideal that gets away from addressing the continued racial oppression tied into economic exploitation. As polyculturalism is a concept in which all people come from different lineages, it does not try to discount the historical experiences and setbacks for specific communities. Alternatively, it pushes people to take more of a stake in different racial concerns and issues by instilling a better sense of buy-in. A polycultural approach is important because it strays from the contemporary trend to use multiculturalism to prop up the same institutions of American empire that maintain corporate power and control.

Links between polyculturalism and hip hop can show us the ways that hip hop culture is fluid across so many mediums. Progressive politics in hip hop demands more intimate conversations about the state of hip hop today and what hip hop is able to do as it struggles against capitalist co-optation of the art. Discussions like the one included in Jeff Chang’s *Total*

⁶⁹ Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, xi.

Chaos in the chapter “Got Next: A Roundtable on Identity and Aesthetics after Multiculturalism” show the difficulties of forecasting hip hop activism.⁷⁰ The panel of Greg Tate, Vijay Prashad, Mark Anthony Neal, and Brian Cross examined how hip hop culture is situated in a space between the state and the masses. Their panel predominantly revolved around multiculturalism and whether hip hop was the new version of this. While Brian Cross agreed that hip hop is in essence the new multiculturalism, he made a solid point that parts of the art form “fabricate and create certain kinds of communities of resistance” that have “been incredibly significant” while it “doesn’t map easily onto [...] mainstream electoral work.”⁷¹ Comparing underground hip hop to mainstream hip hop, Mark Anthony Neal brought up at the roundtable that underground hip hop is not even being consumed by its initial target audience, people of color.⁷² Neal doesn’t elaborate as to why underground hip hop is missing its target audience. He does see the so-called hip hop underground as a space that will also fall prey to “top-down control”.⁷³ This understanding would mean that underground hip hop’s autonomy is futile in terms of escaping the full grasp of imperialism.

Applying this theory to the Seattle, WA hip hop scene and how it has developed over the past five years, there are artists that have complicated this idea and have shown a common potential to resist imperialism as its roots. I have chosen to examine the artists that comprise the Massline Media label because they are examples of those in hip hop who are diligently holding tight to their artistic freedom while concurrently trying to reach a bigger mass. Although it is not a new challenge for many artists, it has been increasingly difficult with the current trajectory for hip hop showing that conforming to big label marketing needs is the standard. The team of Blue

⁷⁰ Vijay Prashad, "Got Next: A Roundtable on Identity and Aesthetics after Multiculturalism," in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*, ed. Jeff Chang (Basic Civitas Books, 2007), 39.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 39-40.

⁷³ Ibid., 40.

Scholars, Common Market, and Gabriel Teodros who make up Seattle-based Massline Media are artists that have remained steadfast in trying to maintain their artistic control.

If we apply Mark Anthony Neal's insight to one of the Blue Scholars, it is clear that the fan base has shown itself to be predominantly White suburban youths at concert venues. Aside from this, there remains a dedicated youth of color following with many being Filipino American. For these artists and the people with whom they have made a bond, it is difficult to answer Neal's question of "How do we take the constituency that's been brought together by hip-hop and go *beyond* hip-hop?" It is an important question, but we must critically look at what constituency has been brought together and what brings them together. Changes that we have seen in the demographics of hip hop fans and consumers have surprised many people of color, especially Black artists. Hip hop artists feel the pressure to cater to the people who will enable them to profit, white suburban America. Similarly, social justice and activism attracts certain demographics that may be unexpected. An example of this can be found at the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) Conference.

Connected to Seattle and one of the biggest events in its history, the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) Conference was the scene of a huge organized rally against imperialism. The majority of the demographic supporting the rally was overwhelmingly White. People of color had mixed reactions to this phenomenon with some being surprised and others citing a variety of reasons why more people and organizations of color were not represented. Approximately only 5% of the protestors were people of color.⁷⁴ With people of color being the overwhelming majority of victims of the oppression caused by WTO policies and tactics, it would be expected that greater representation at such an event would have taken place. While

⁷⁴ Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez, "Where Was the Color in Seattle?: Looking for Reasons Why the Great Battle Was So White," in *Cultural Studies: From Theory to Action*, ed. Pepi Leisty (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2005), 295.

white support and support in general is welcomed in fighting oppression, it is unsettling that more people of color did not actively participate in the demonstrations. The scholar Elizabeth Martinez discovered an array of different reasons. Some of the main reasons were: lack of awareness regarding the WTO and its global effect, limited access to information because of the Digital Divide, community obligations, and financial obstacles. With these factors continuing to hinder people of color and no signs for change to soon come, ways must be found to inspire, motivate, and educate our youth since assimilationist education has proven to be self-reinforcing. For Filipino Americans, being products of America's colonial experiment at the turn of the 20th century has led to a hybrid of American culture and values with Filipino ones. But, this hybridization has only substantially benefitted America and other "first world" countries. Getting Filipino Americans as well as other people of color to participate in large scale forms of resistance is important if there is to be any change to the current regime.

Considering both hip hop and the Seattle WTO protests of 1999, there is a lack of participation from the audiences that would seem to be most staked in their purposes. Filipino Americans have a buy-in to both. The masses of Filipino American immigrants are diasporic products of neocolonial agents like the WTO and International Monetary Fund (IMF) while much of the youth of this population express themselves through hip hop culture. With increased participation in hip hop, underground hip hop specifically, and certain aspects of social activism like the Seattle WTO protests, white folks have been the ones who have continued to show public involvement and support. Higher numbers of participation for people of color would be expected in both a culture that has historically been a representative voice and in activist responses to imperialist related mediums that continue to hurt communities of color globally. In discussing the Seattle WTO protests, I am cognitive that this is but one event that does not

overshadow other events and other organizing methods that are making strides through peoples of color within the U.S. and abroad. This example is a measure for the Seattle, WA community and the involvement levels for people of color and one of the biggest ethnic populations in that area, Filipino Americans. Developing the political awareness and desire to get involved in these social movements is my underlying focus of these macro-level views of hip hop and political activism.

Recent developments in the aesthetic of Seattle have led me to see changes that have drawn Filipino American youth to hip hop and critical pedagogical thinking. This observation has come through the work of the Blue Scholars. The case for their work has been eloquently made by the scholar Michael Viola, who has examined contemporary contributions by Filipino Americans in hip hop. He has specifically presented how some of these messages contain critical revolutionary pedagogy, in the case of Blue Scholars⁷⁵, and messages of resistance in Philippine history, in the case of the Native Guns.⁷⁶ Native Guns, a group that now is pursuing solo projects, are comprised of two Filipino Americans, Kiwi and Bambu, from the Los Angeles/San Francisco area of California. Native Guns' music also carries the ultimate ideal of developed critical consciousness while shedding light on *third world* issues including those afflicting Filipino peoples. With these artists, progressive lyrical content is a cornerstone for artistic expression.

Resistance to empire is exemplified through different methods historically. Going back to the roundtable discussion by hip hop critics of *Got Next?*, the changing nature of hip hop and social movements gets discussed. If hip hop targets populations for resistance, it does not mean

⁷⁵ Viola, "Hip-Hop and Critical Revolutionary Pedagogy: Blue Scholarship to Challenge 'the Miseducation of the Filipino'."

⁷⁶ Michael Viola, "Filipino American Hip-Hop and Class Consciousness: Renewing the Spirit of Carlos Bulosan," *Monthly Review Webzine* (2007), <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/viola150406.html>.

that the message cannot and is not still reaching a critical mass for oppressed communities of color. In the case of Blue Scholars, they have played a role that sets them apart from other hip hop artists out of the Seattle, WA area by actively participating in activist organizing. For Geologic, his organizing efforts with the Seattle chapter of AnakBAYAN occupied much of his time. Since dedicating himself full time to Blue Scholars and its development in 2006, he has had to alter the ways in which he is able to support AnakBAYAN-Seattle as an active member because of the demands of touring, production, and other tasks related to bringing more publicity to the group. The AnakBAYAN-Seattle chapter has ties to the National Democratic (ND) movement and has the following mission:

We are a collective of Filipino and Filipino Amerikan youth and students who are concerned about the global oppression of our people. We hope to improve our conditions by studying and educating others about the rich culture and proud revolutionary heritage of the Filipino peoples continuing struggle. We also work towards building anti-imperialist unity among all people to expose and oppose U.S. imperialist intervention in the Philippines.⁷⁷

The lyrical content of the Blue Scholars shows the ties to AnakBAYAN- Seattle and its support of the National Democratic Movement. Connecting international struggles of the Philippines to Filipino American youth is a way that neocolonial education and its legacy upon the Filipino diaspora is virulently fought. This revelation means a difference in ideological approaches for life in America between youth and their parents.

As meaningful today as when it first appeared in 1971, Renato Constantino's *Parents and Activists* speaks to the dichotomous approach to life in the U.S. for Filipino Americans. Constantino says, "Many of the older generation have known economic want and oppression in this society but they fail to attribute this suffering to the workings of imperialism."⁷⁸ He continues, saying how activism is viewed by parents as a passing condition that is nothing more

⁷⁷ "Anakbayan Seattle," <http://anakbayan.net/>.

⁷⁸ Renato Constantino, "Parents and Activists," *Graphic*: 7.

than an opportunity for rebellion. But, Constantino explains the nature of activism and its relation to parents:

Activism rejects the older generation's belief in an immutable social order. Its allegiance is to revolutionary change, not to reformism. It is disillusioned with the patchwork solutions of previous generations. Therefore the young scoff at parental suggestions that they reduce the dimensions of their protest to specific problems[...] They know that these specific problems are interrelated and will never be solved unless basic changes in society are instituted. They no longer pin their hopes on the election to the office of good men as previous generations did. They know that mere changes of men will mean nothing.⁷⁹

Although the older generation has passed on some of their apathy from neocolonialist teachings, Filipino American youth are also at a point in which they are also more willing to question their histories. Questions over identity for many displaced ethnic communities in the U.S. provide starting points for the interrogation process of Filipino history. In relation to Filipino American youth and other youth of color, Constantino's words are felt in a different way given the latest U.S. invasion of Iraq and the need for new troops to be recruited. Youth of color in the U.S. are recruitment targets that are lured by financial opportunities that would otherwise not be available to them. These youth must make critical decisions over what they are willing to sacrifice to gain some financial security. If Filipino American youth choose to actively participate in the subjugation of Iraq and other countries, the American colonial project with the Philippines will have reached a level where its colonial subjects are producers of new colonials. Reaching out to youth to educate and develop their critical consciousness is not an easy task with pop culture status systems countering these goals. This is why the hip hop phenomenon in Seattle, WA is important to Filipino American youth, because it incorporates transnational issues utilizing pop culture mediums.

⁷⁹ Ibid.: 3.

Mainstream American hip hop has proven that the beats and sound of a production can override lyrical content in terms of what people enjoy hearing. A good example of this was demonstrated in Chris Rock's satirical comedy piece on the likability of Lil Jon and the Eastside Boyz' song "Get Low."⁸⁰ Rock poked fun at all of the women that liked the song and danced to it although it featured explicit misogynistic lyrics that they didn't feel applied to them. But, examples like this do not mean that we should regard hip hop lyric as unnoticed afterthoughts to the music. Instead, we should note that lyrics are but one component that can make a song, artist, or album successful in sales. As the Massline Media artists continue to gain fans, they remain labeled as *underground* in reference to their smaller regional and niche fan base. The reason why hip hop labeled as *underground* attracts its fans is due in major part to the lyrical content, style and delivery that it offers. While the content can draw fans to this type of music, it does not necessarily mean that it will move the listener to want to act upon what is being said. Are the words interpreted as lessons to be learned, subliminal messaging, or basic aesthetic indulgence? For Massline Media artists, there are teachings underlying their conscious hip hop. More than just messages, the lyrics that the Blue Scholars produce are situated within a critical pedagogical approach. A broader study of the Blue Scholars' lyrics shows their intent on analyzing world issues with an internationalist perspective while also offering different ways to transform some of these issues.⁸¹ Some examples from their latest album release, *Bayani*, provide a way to connect listeners to global concerns as well as local ones. From the track "Opening Salvo", Geologic raps:

*Peace to my third world equivalent
Even if I can't fight beside you, I write what I can
To get our fam[ily] in other lands to understand your pain*

⁸⁰ Joel Gallen and Keith Truesdell, "Chris Rock - Never Scared," (USA: 2004).

⁸¹ Viola, "Hip-Hop and Critical Revolutionary Pedagogy: Blue Scholarship to Challenge 'the Miseducation of the Filipino'."

*[Be]'Cause your beef is mine and we one of the same*⁸²

In these bars midway through the song, a clear recognition of Geologic's social location gets connected to the third world struggle. Geo points to his and many Filipino American histories by mentioning that family still lives abroad from the U.S. trying their best through the hardships. Understanding that his positioning as an emcee is a point of privilege, he wants to use that to educate. More lyrics with a bond to global poverty comes from the track "The Distance" on

Bayani:

*And a third world diploma not even worth the paper its written on
With no elevators going up to the top y'all,
Intead it's long days slavin' over hourly wages*

and

*A moment of clarity, he may never come home
Despite the familiarity of faces from his homeland
That speak his same dialect
Fellow country women and men
Standing in line to get green cards, visas, and passports
Barely making enough, over half a paycheck remitted with love*

These words from this song show how immigrants to the U.S. face hardships just to make a living despite having achieved their degree already abroad. It also describes the experience for many immigrants in their need to send money back home in a contradicting cycle. For the Philippines, these remittances prop up the poor economic conditions. Still, immigrant laborers attempt to receive proper documentation that allows them to stay and work longer in the U.S. From these lyrics, we find that Geologic wants to critique the dependence that countries like the Philippines have on U.S. markets and business. The Blue Scholars consistently deliver these critically conscious messages that break from the hip hop mainstream. This would signal some reasoning for the difficulty of making the move into the hip hop spotlight nationally.

⁸² "Opening Salvo," in *Bayani* (Blue Scholars, 2007).

As Blue Scholars still remain in the categorization of *underground hip hop*, waiting to break into the bigger market and garner the influence that comes with it; they have been able to do so on much of their own terms. But, much of what passes as the mainstream is dependent on possessing a proven sound or a sound that could be potentially unique and appealing. If this is the standard by which Blue Scholars must abide in the current music industry, lyrical content will not be the component of their music that will really aid in this jump.

If a group like Blue Scholars were to make the move into the mainstream of hip hop music, the expectations that would be placed upon them as celebrities would be immense. Located in Seattle, they have built up a reputation that some would label as being *raptivists* because of their ties to hip hop and to political organizing (often one in the same for them). On a bigger regional or even national level, politically conscious hip hop stars get pigeon-holed into this genre and never get marketed as much else. On their latest album release *Bayani*, Blue Scholars continue their resistance to imperial rule in their lyrical content and sound while showing many sides of their intentions and engagement with hip hop. Geologic states his uncertainty of what the music business holds on the track *Loyalty*, “with the possibility this means we’ll all end with two albums and a handful of people I call friends, and friends I call my comrades, and comrades who is fam”.⁸³ His words are an acknowledgement of the duo’s accomplishments along with the people that have supported them in their journey. It is refreshing to see these two artists iterate their thanks by realizing that they have done some really good work although they would like to break into the bigger market. These words communicate that they are aware that their participation and ability to be financially supported by their art is not taken for granted.

In the event that Blue Scholars were able to make it into a larger market for their music, fans would want the same consistency in message that they have come to like about Blue

⁸³ "Loyalty," in *Bayani* (Blue Scholars, 2007).

Scholars. But, would their message be heard and heeded at the next stage? Yvonne Bynoe makes the point in her book *Stand & Deliver* that raptivists involved in political issues and organizing are not seen as being the people that would actually change the issues that they address.⁸⁴ It is not my goal to prove the Blue Scholars as viable options to elected government in an imperialist government system. However, Blue Scholars are involved in community organizing and are actively trying to resolve issues of race, class, and gender. Other artists have chosen to give their support to organizations once they have achieved enough financial stability. But, Blue Scholars are active in their surroundings and trying to support everyone in the process rather than just themselves. This approach is not a new concept. However, it is a method that is bringing other working class communities of color into a hip hop renaissance in the Pacific Northwest that can draw comparisons to some of the biggest groups to do this from the African American community such as Public Enemy and KRS-One.

Balancing the competing factors of a capitalist music industry and the political messages that are cashing in on it has been an increasingly difficult path for progressive hip hop artists. In one of the first compiled works on Hip Hop Studies, Todd Boyd's article "Check Yo Self Before You Wreck Yo Self" talks about the decline of politics in hip hop as well as in pop culture. He analyzes:

"...political rappers have not been able to link their progressive politics with the ever-changing demands of the music industry or the rap audience; thus their critiques have lately fallen on deaf ears, and their cultural significance has almost completely disappeared. Witness the breakup of the one-time leaders of this political trend, Public Enemy, in the summer of 1995. In contemporary culture it is not only important to bring the political noise, but one must remain significant from an audience perspective as well."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Yvonne Bynoe, *Stand & Deliver: Political Activism, Leadership, and Hip Hop Culture* (Brooklyn: Soft Skull press, 2004), xii-xiii.

⁸⁵ Todd Boyd, "Check Yo Self before You Wreck Yo Self: The Death of Politics in Rap Music and Popular Culture," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 328.

To be significant to an audience means that an artist must be visible in terms of popular culture standards. As Blue Scholars continues to gain more fans, their appeal comes from their unique and contemporary style to which youth can identify. For the culturally diverse area of Seattle, the appeal of Blue Scholars and Massline Media not only comes from the cultures represented by the artists but the polycultural understanding that allows fans to relate to them.

Within the city of Seattle, Massline Media artists have revitalized a stronger interest in the local hip hop scene since the days of Sir Mix-A-Lot during the late 80's and early 90's. This is not to discount the hip hop sounds that Seattle artists have produced since that time. Blue Scholars has brought attention to Seattle hip hop without selfishness. Such evidence of this was visible at their show series in December of 2007, titled "The Program", that highlighted multiple Northwest hip hop artists over a five day span.⁸⁶ They have garnered much attention as they have gotten more fans and increased a wider range of awareness about their music. For Seattleites familiar with the hip hop scene and the way that Massline Media has supported their local brand of hip hop, they are offered a look into the potential that a polycultural community could look like.

Filipino American youth in Seattle continue to develop their understanding of self as others across the diaspora. Identity politics are confusing with tradition and assimilation having to be negotiated as a result of colonized education. Many are misled into only seeing a shallow aesthetic of Filipino culture. "The Miseducation of the Filipino" by Renato Constantino describes how being misled by American ideals has left a gap in the telling of Philippine history from a Filipino perspective.⁸⁷ Americanized education has been supportive and reinforcing to *first world* lies and interpretation. The fact that the Blue Scholars' emcee is a Filipino American

⁸⁶ "Blue Scholars Present: The Program," The Stranger, <http://the stranger.com/seattle/Special/TheProgram>.

⁸⁷ Renato Constantino, "The Miseducation of the Filipino," *Graphic* (1966).

gives Filipino American youth a role model through status systems for youth culture. It is a position that brings pride to being Filipino along with awareness to Filipino issues. Having a role model with a critical pedagogical approach clearly strays from the more material interpretations of what being a Filipino in America means. Having this type of outreach and effect on Filipino American youth allows the subaltern histories of Filipino elders to be passed on in an art form that is well suited to be heard and accepted by youth. Addressing some of the other histories and issues for other communities of color educates Filipino American youth on how the struggles are similar. Connecting struggles expands youth awareness outside the constraints of identity politics without inhibiting the positive organizing factors that identity can provide. Promoting the bond of youth culture with activism and this type of *conscious* hip hop can be the response to institutions that maintain and support individualistic intentions residual from American indoctrination.

By holding the distinction of being America's first guinea pig for colonial rule, the Filipino diaspora has been influenced by *first world* ideologies that stem from U.S. idolization. As explored by earlier Filipino revolutionary writers like Renato and Letizia Constantino, the Philippine educational system being controlled by the U.S. is the primary culprit for such exceptionalism to so-called American "goodwill." This type of education continues to manifest itself in the Philippines and abroad. Subaltern people's histories were aggressively opposed by U.S. militarism as were other forms of resistance. It is from this resistance that the resilience of the Philippines and hip hop have similar pasts. The large immigrant population of Filipino Americans in Seattle has the potential to teach a more enlightened view of Filipino and American history to the youth. The power to affect a large group of Filipino American through a medium like hip hop culture inspires youth to take part. It also provides a foundation for youth

to build upon so that they can be more critical and involved with their education. Hip hop is ideal for teaching these youth because of how the message of resistance developed in its own history.

As hip hop formed more tangible roots in the Caribbean and in the South Bronx, the original “elements” of hip hop along with the accompanying lifestyle was a response to the imperialism being waged by the U.S. government on its own people. Hip hop has proven that it is a cultural expression predominantly made by and for the working class masses. Its early beginnings flourished as a response to the lack of attention given to the poor communities both in the Bronx and the Caribbean. It allowed the people that were not given a voice in mass media sources a way to be storytellers to the hardships in their neighborhoods. Hip hop has struggled to be accepted in the mainstream just like the people it has represented.

So, with the history of cultural resistance in hip hop’s history, how do these messages get interpreted and acted upon by the Filipino youth today? Searching out and finding these youth in the Seattle, Washington area was done through youth organizations that are comprised of Filipino and other youth. Organizations like Youth Speaks Seattle continue to offer a space of expression to Seattle-area youth through the art of spoken word. It is clear that youth education and empowerment is at the heart of this organization by just looking at their tag line: “because the next generation can speak for itself.”⁸⁸ Its roots lie in the group *isangmahal* and its spirit of allowing a stage to speak although it’s affiliated with the national Youth Speaks organization. They too were combatting the different pressures of identity and consciousness that surrounded their members. It is necessary to recognize that spoken word and its history is debated as to whether it is truly interlinked with hip hop. Given the nature of the lyrical art and expression and its many connections to hip hop, I have included it in my discussion.

⁸⁸ "Youth Speaks Seattle."

Bakari Kitwana discusses in his article within the anthology *That's The Joint* that the rap industry needs to look at itself as a whole to find a better way to uplift African American communities.⁸⁹ He points to a unified front as the answer to confronting the obstacles that maintain the status quo of Blacks resorting to *minstrel-esque* performances for the individual profit. Kitwana's analysis of how the Black community and greater world community is affected by hip hop signals a need to examine other communities in which hip hop has shown significant influence. Through what Kitwana calls a unified front, hip hop can have a greater impact in social and political spaces. The four areas that he believes rap has an immense potential to change society are through the areas of: the growing white youth audience, white industry leaders, prominent hip hop artists, social responsibility to Black integrity, and commercial and grassroots alliances.⁹⁰

Kitwana has broken down these areas of opportunity for a unified hip hop front to make an impact upon the African American community. If we take each of them and apply them to the Seattle Filipino American community, we find that they can be closely interchangeable. Growth in the local hip hop scene over the past decade has been due in part to the white youth that have provided much of the financial support. Although white youth is the area of great influence because of their greater buying power, there is great difficulty in trying to get a critical mass to internalize the message that conscious hip hop can bring.

As mentioned, the idea of polyculturalism is well represented in hip hop culture. The type of polyculturalism that Prashad and Kelley discuss allows for a type of multiculturalism that engages people on sociopolitical issues that crosses racial and socioeconomic lines. For Massline Media, their contingent of artists is very racially diverse. Representing Filipino,

⁸⁹ Kitwana, "The Challenge of Rap Music from Cultural Movement to Political Power."

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 348-49.

Persian, Ethiopian, and white European culture, Massline artists educate on a multitude of international issues. Their different lyrical styles give attention to the problems for each of their cultural and spiritual communities. But, the key to their alliance is put best in a line from Geologic of Blue Scholars when he says in their song *No Rest for the Weary*, “the lessons might change, but the essence of the message is the same.”⁹¹ Examining Massline and the messages that they convey through their music and other media, it is questionable as to how much is internalized by the predominantly white suburban youth audience. This is not something that is unique to the Massline family, but an issue that other scholars have debated. The primary sides of the discussion have been whether the white audience has been merely cultural consumers or potential agents for social change. Bakari Kitwana has also tried to address this riddle in his various works. In his article, “The Cotton Club”, he addresses the transformation of the hip hop audience and the dilemma for Black performers that make their livelihood on the White audience base while producing their music with the Black community in mind.⁹² “The Cotton Club” also addressed the second group that Kitwana feels can be affected from a unified hip hop front, the white industry leaders.

In continuing to look at these areas of potential, Kitwana ends up bringing up the major obstacle to changing these white leaders in power. “The Cotton Club” mentions how the founder of the hip hop activist group Rap Coalition tried to collaborate with hip hop magazines and some execs to find out who was purchasing hip hop albums, specifically along race lines. Her efforts were dismissed as not being worthwhile or of interest. Although the Rap Coalition was given these types of responses, the glaring trend that hip hop artists are seeing with white-dominated hip hop crowds would signal a similar rise in album sales. So, we must be critical of these hip

⁹¹ “No Rest for the Weary,” in *Blue Scholars* (Blue Scholars, 2006).

⁹² Bakari Kitwana, “The Cotton Club: Black-Conscious Hip-Hop Deals with an Overwhelmingly White Audience,” *The Village Voice* (2005), <http://www.villagevoice.com/music/0526,kitwana,65332,22.html/full>.

hop media gatekeepers when they say they are communicating that there is no value in knowing who is purchasing hip hop albums. One of the basic principles taught in business course classrooms across the U.S. is to be aware of the market you are targeting and whether or not you are effectively marketing to them. It should be noted that there are other ways to familiarize a company with its market aside from race. However, race and ethnicity have been one of the most critical factors to companies and businesses for appealing to different communities. Putting all of these messages together, it makes it apparent that industry leaders in hip hop don't want to shed light on an obvious signifier for hip hop marketing as long as they are making profit. Finding these connections shows how critical a role that white industry leaders play in the direction of hip hop.

The dominance of white gatekeepers in hip hop is a testament to the infiltration of first world imperialism and its co-optation of the methods of resistance and education. As with the Philippine educational system being hijacked by the U.S., hip hop and its powers to educate are compromised with U.S. corporatism. During the time that the U.S. controlled the educational system of the Philippines, the subaltern voice still remained to make sure that knowledge of the true revolutionary heroes of Philippine history were taught and the value of Philippine language was preserved. Today, the results of neocolonialism continue to support the structures of the American empire. Seeing how the co-optation of the Philippine educational system has taken shape today, it is troublesome to think about the path for hip hop if it continues to be guided by some of the same *first world* tenets.

Internal colonialism is a concept that can adequately describe the effects on the Filipino American community and its historical experience in the U.S.. Linda Gordon contextualizes internal colonialism well in her contribution to the anthology edited by Ann Laura Stoler,

Haunted By Empire.⁹³ Gordon's "Internal Colonialism and Gender" describes it as being used by Lenin and Gramsci to mean "intersecting economic exploitation and political exclusion of a subordinated group that differed racially or ethnically from the dominant group" that occurred "within a polity rather than across oceans or borders."⁹⁴ As Filipinos began to migrate to Hawaii and the mainland U.S., it did not take long for them to see that these new lands of work and perceived opportunity would not accept their culture. As colonialism would transform into neocolonialism in the Philippine homeland, internal colonialism was the new type of colonialism that Filipino immigrants to the U.S. would get instead. Gordon proves that the concept has not been utilized as much historically because of its failure to describe many of the intricacies of oppression across multiple lines of race, class, and gender. But, Gordon also sees it as useful because it offers a lot in describing the collaborations between groups within the U.S. and Third World freedom struggles. Although generalization can be the downfall of the concept's use, the concept does appropriately describe Filipino Americans in relation to white America when Gordon says that it "often rests on the view that racism is at root an economic phenomenon, produce by capital's search for profit."⁹⁵ Through the capitalist economic system established in the U.S., racism has flourished during American history and following side-by-side with the expanding profit margins that hip hop culture has been able to provide. Examining the concept of internal colonialism reveals the ways that hip hop has been a mode for racism to be sustained. It also provides some of the foundation for exploring the potential for white audiences to popularize and practice some of the teachings within conscious hip hop.

⁹³ Linda Gordon, "Internal Colonialism and Gender," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 427-28.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 428.

Amidst the changes of hip hop's gradual acceptance into the American music mainstream over the last three decades, it has drawn in fans from ghettos to suburbia as the contemporary culture of *freshness*. For many struggling hip hop artists that come from poor communities of color, hip hop in the mainstream has allowed a way to escape the societal pitfalls that often entrap these populations. Hip hop's rise into the mainstream has complicated some social dynamics in how it has well represented these communities. Todd Boyd posed a question that gets at some of these dynamics in his book *Young, Black, Rich and Famous*, "Can people in the mainstream accept the fact that there are those who want what they have to offer, but who want no part of what they are about?"⁹⁶ Boyd's question brings up the nature for hip hop and what it has to offer the mainstream. It also considers the economic realities that come with it without having to sacrifice someone's moral standards to get it. For progressive hip hop in Seattle, the goal is to uplift communities rather than simply the individual in gaining exposure and sales. The approach still looks to disregard conforming to the same institutions that support an inequitable system. But, it is different in that the Blue Scholars and the Massline Media group look to change the mainstream by educating and motivating towards more revolutionary thought.

A key to involving Filipino American youth into social activism through hip hop is the use of status systems. In making critical thought the trend and part of popular culture, it makes the choice for youth easier and something that can address questions of identity. This has been why the Seattle hip hop scene and Filipino American youth show some unique characteristics with the rise in fan base for Massline Media and Blue Scholars in particular. Having the ability to relate to the experience of Filipino American youth and the effects that the complex history of

⁹⁶ Todd Boyd, *Young, Black, Rich, and Famous: The Rise of the N.B.A., the Hip Hop Invasion, and the Transformation of American Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 16.

colonization has had upon them provides a method for youth to educate themselves while dealing with issues of identity.

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