

EXPRESSIONS OF RESISTANCE:
INTERSECTIONS OF FILIPINO AMERICAN IDENTITY, HIP HOP CULTURE, AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE

By

STEPHEN ALAN BISCHOFF

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of STEPHEN ALAN BISCHOFF find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

C. Richard King, Ph.D., Chair

David Leonard, Ph.D.

John Streamas, Ph.D.

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IDENTITY, HIP HOP CULTURE, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Abstract

By Stephen Alan Bischoff, Ph.D.
Washington State University
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Chair: Dr. C. Richard King

The unique relationship to colonization for Filipinos has challenged Filipino Americans in their identity development and understanding of Philippine history. Although American exceptionalism has been heavily indoctrinated into the Filipino diaspora due to the colonial education system in the Philippines, Filipino American youth have been able to still recognize themselves as a marginalized community in the U.S. due to their lower socioeconomic status and interactions with racism. By focusing specifically on Filipino Americans and the ways in which hip hop culture has been a site for expressing resistance through identity, my work will expose why hip hop culture has appealed to many Filipino Americans as a tool to resist and subvert oppression.

Studying Filipino Americans and hip hop culture exposes the democratizing ways that hip hop culture enables Filipino American resistance to be successfully expressed and recognized. Through qualitative interviews with Fil Ams with significant ties to hip hop culture and the Fil Am community, this paper examines how these Fil Ams perceive their work by incorporating their connections to Filipino and Filipino American communities. This paper examines the reciprocal impact between Filipino Americans and hip hop culture. It looks at how

Filipino American involvement in hip hop culture integrates a culture of resistance in identity development. From these intersections, the idea of *resistance* will be explored in terms of ideology and the community organizing efforts of both real and imagined communities. My analysis yields a better understanding of how Filipino Americans utilize hip hop culture. Through this work, it also uncovers how Filipino American youth are targeted through hip hop culture to counter the Americanized, white supremacist teachings of Philippine and Filipino American history. Lastly, my research explores how hip hop culture gets used to motivate and support Filipino American youth in their rejection of imperialism.

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Dedication

To my partner, Rachel a.k.a. Mahal Ko, and our two kids Isaiah and Zion.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

For a biracial Filipino American who was born in a rural town of 35,000 people in Eastern Washington, ethnic identity seemed challenging at times. Compounded from the realization that I appeared Mexican American and our region's predominantly white demographic was offset primarily by Mexican Americans, it was commonplace that people overlooked my Filipino American identity. Being a product of my mom being Filipino and my dad being white, it never seemed unusual that I was associated as being Filipino before white since I had inherited my mom's darker skin and hair color. Having relatives that lived in the Philippines and others in various cities across the U.S. didn't provide direct interaction with my Filipino brethren. It did provide moments in which I could hear my mom speak in her native tongue of Tagalog¹ and a sense of pride that I was related to these extended family members that I rarely saw.

Growing up, I had quite a bit of friends that I would see at school. But I never got to really interact with them outside of school because of my dad's strict rules that controlled any social lives that my siblings and I desired. Hanging out at home, music was one of the things which exposed me to the experiences of other people and other communities. Like many younger siblings, I took a lot of social queues from my older brother. His taste in music particularly drew my attention. I remember my brother playing cassette tapes of some popular rock bands of the 1980's that included Def Leppard. Although I don't remember the exact moment that he switched over from rock bands to hip hop artists, it significantly impacted my persona. Thinking back to the times that we shared a room together leads me to memories of

¹ Tagalog is the national language of the Philippines. The other national language of the Philippines is English.

waking up to songs like “Hai Love” by Kwamé and “Harmonize” by Nice and Smooth. As my brother got more into hip hop culture with the music, the attire, and the language, I began to develop my own tastes within hip hop too. Hip hop was being marketed to young listeners like me. I welcomed it. I listened to various subgenres in hip hop but was drawn more to what was referred to as *East Coast* hip hop although *Gangsta* hip hop was the new pop music at my school and nationwide. Hip hop culture allowed me to latch onto it and relate as a person of color. My vernacular incorporated words and themes that were socially attached to Black people. The intertwinement of hip hop culture and Black culture made me question my *authenticity* in engaging with hip hop culture since I didn’t identify as Black. Still, it was a space of comfort that I aligned myself with because of its role in exposing me to non-White cultural expressions and themes that were not as pressing in my environment. Afrocentric references and imagery in the music videos I watched encouraged my pride as a brown person in America; it reaffirmed my identity as a Filipino American even though I didn’t grasp what that really meant to me. Hip hop culture and my curiosity of identity encouraged me to discover what being “Filipino” meant to me. It was not easy since I didn’t have anyone to explore it further with me except my siblings who were at the same juncture.

My hometown didn’t have a substantial Filipino American community. But my mom seemed to know every person that was Filipino who was living in the area. Of the few that did identify as Filipino, there were typically Filipino women with white husbands similar to my own parents. There are only a few occasions that I recall any Fil Am youth who were close to my age. This left me without anyone to carry on conversations about being Fil Am or multiracial. I still continued to formulate my identity based on the cultural elements that I saw around me and the influence of hip hop culture and other popular culture media. My expression of ethnic

identity superficially manifested in ways such as wearing and displaying Filipino symbols like flags or wearing a basketball jersey given to me from my cousin in the Philippines. Partnered with knowledge of a few Tagalog words and seemingly random Filipino references, I thought I was highlighting my Filipino identity in a hip hip context. My understanding and expression of identity would remain stagnant throughout high school and into my first year of college. It wasn't until after a year-and-a-half at a small liberal arts school and transferring to a much larger university that I began to make substantial constructions on my ethnic identity.

Once I had transferred to my new school, I experienced a lot of transitioning in learning about myself. My roommates on campus—friends since high school—were not able to provide that same type of personal growth for me and my experiences as a person of color. I was eager to visit the cultural centers on campus through which my partner had been involved. She took me to one center that focused on the retention of Asian Pacific American students. My unofficial mentor during my first semester on campus was a student leader for the school's Filipino American Student Association (FASA). He used hip hop slang along with cultural references that drew my attention and encouraged me to connect further. Visiting the student center changed my life because of my inner yearning to relate with other students along ethnic lines; it was something that I hadn't gotten growing up through my first year of college. After I attended my first FASA meeting, my friendships would grow. It left me excited and enthusiastic albeit insecure about my own Filipino American identity since I didn't know many of the Filipino cultural references that seemed second nature to the other members. Growing my friendships with more Fil Ams and students of color spurred my interest in issues of race and ethnicity. It significantly expanded my access to Filipino history and Filipino American culture.

Soon after that first meeting, I was strongly encouraged to attend the upcoming Washington State Filipino American Student Alliance (WSFASA) Conference that drew close to 300 students from various schools across Washington for a weekend of learning, engagement, and connecting. Deciding that this event would really grow my relationships outside of my partner, her friends, and my roommates from high school, I was immersed in friendship and personal growth. From the amount of students in attendance to workshops that addressed Filipino and Filipino American issues such as identity, representation, and cultural history, the conference left me desiring to learn more while being critical of myself and my own personal narrative.

My own critical consciousness expanded from that time in my life. The awareness that I continued to develop was enhanced by the types of expression that I was seeing from my peers. Seeing performances at that WSFASA conference in 2000, I was impressed by the art form of spoken word from a group based out of Seattle, isangmahal arts kollektive. Its similarities to hip hop performance aligned with my love for hip hop culture. In the next few years, I was exposed to other emerging and some established hip hop artists with strong connections to Filipino and Filipino American identity. The words and representations that I was consuming from these artists and other parts of the aesthetic forged my ethnic identity along with other complex intersections that were dependent such as class and gender. Enamored with identity politics and deconstructing my personal experiences, I continued to cultivate my understanding in the way that I thought, acted, and lived. The presence of Filipino American artists who participated in hip hop culture and other cultures to which I was drawn gave me inspiration.

Reflecting on my relationships I had made finishing up my undergraduate experience and that continue to the present, the most meaningful engagements for me incorporated elements of

Filipino American culture and hip hop culture. Whether it was through the music, language, or style, hip hop culture appeared to embody many of the social issues that would casually come up in conversations with my peers. Since hip hop's prevalence and relevance during the early 2000's had already been cemented globally in popularity, it was not surprising that hip hop culture regularly offered germane discussion pieces. Hip hop culture endorsed my learning and my relationship to any social topic. My identity continued to thrive in large part due to the intersections of Filipino American and hip hop culture. At the time, I was naïve to how my identity development would manifest in my interests, actions, and self-awareness. The negotiation process of sorting through my own contradictions using a heightened critical consciousness supported my ethnic identity development as a Filipino American. I was prodded to grapple with my miseducation and elements of *colonial mentality*² that I had already begun to recognize.

The inspiration and admiration that I have gotten from Fil Am hip hop artists as well as my own peers continue to prompt me in my personal goals and growth. This research project is a culmination of many things that have motivated me to work for social justice and other causes. It incorporates various individuals that are influential figures in the Fil Am communities they live in as well as a larger imagined community of Fil Ams.

Studying Fil Ams and Hip Hop Culture

“Well, a lot of people within government and big business are nervous of Hip Hop and Hip Hop artists, because they speak their minds. They talk about what they see and what they feel and what they know. They reflect what's around them.”³ –Afrika Bambaataa

² EJR David and S. Okazaki, "Colonial Mentality: A Review and Recommendation for Filipino American Psychology," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2006).

³ Dave Cook, "Interview W/ Afrika Bambaataa Hip Hop's Ambassador," in *Davey D's Hip Hop Corner*, ed. Dave Cook (1996).

As a globalized culture with regional nuances, hip hop culture continues to produce messages of resistance and overtures to action. Pancho McFarland's research on Chicanos and hip hop surmised that "[r]especting youth cultural production and consumption can create open intergenerational communication pathways."⁴ Filipino Americans face a similar disconnect in the generational gap between youth balancing Filipino cultural values and traditions of elder family members with American values surrounding them in school, media, and their environments. Filipino American youth must navigate the "acculturative stress" in negotiating their bicultural needs.⁵ Although American exceptionalism has been indoctrinated from generation to generation due to the colonial education system in the Philippines, Fil-Am youth have been able to still recognize themselves as a marginalized community in the U.S. due to their lower socioeconomic status and interactions with racism that other communities of color face. When Fil-Am youth recognize their marginalization, it helps them to identify a power difference that unfairly positions them to be subjects of imperialism. Whether Filipino Americans are cognitive of their marginalization, the continued adoption of a colonized education makes the bicultural negotiation difficult. The challenge of negotiation has had a profound effect on many Filipino American perspectives on American society seen prominently in the adoption of a bootstrapping attitude towards class mobility. The inadequate and backwards understanding of meritocracy in a capitalist system dangerously misleads disadvantaged individuals to think that their circumstances are natural. Brian Barry notes that "Once we add the notion that the privileged can pass on competitive success to their offspring only through 'natural advantages', however, we get a very different picture of the process."⁶ For Filipino immigrants coming to the

⁴ Pancho McFarland, *Chicano Rap: Gender and Violence in the Postindustrial Barrio* (Univ of Texas Press, 2008).

⁵ Kevin L. Nadal, *Filipino American Psychology: A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice* (AuthorHouse, 2009), 56.

⁶ Brian Barry, *Why Social Justice Matters* (Polity Press, 2005), 111.

U.S. from an overwhelmingly poor country, the normalization of everyday inequities coupled with a colonized education is problematic; Filipino Americans are led to believe that they are victims of their own circumstance without historical context. Many Fil-Am youth are left with the challenge of decolonizing this mindset as well as their parents' aspirations of assimilation for their offspring. If Filipino American youth are to overcome these challenges, they depend on educational resources that help them assess their political economy and how it developed.

My research findings and interests have led me to identify a significant reciprocal impact between Filipino Americans and hip hop culture. My study looks at how Filipino American involvement in hip hop culture integrates cultures of resistance and oppression. It expresses how the various engagements in hip hop culture allow Filipino American youth to subvert the colonized education passed on to them through the formal education system along with family members that have already been indoctrinated. Although youth have the power to think for themselves, the formal educational system in the Philippines and within the U.S. combined with family teachings strongly influence youth and their worldview. This examination uncovers how Fil-Am youth share attitudes and expressions that counter the Americanized, white supremacist teachings of Philippine and Filipino American history. The ways in which they get informed can be from multiple places including people, music, and other media. My research will determine how hip hop culture motivates and supports these youth in their rejection of imperialism.

In using the term *resistance* throughout this project, I use it in a flexible manner. Later on in Chapter 5, I allowed my interviewees' to infer their own reflective understanding of the term. In the earlier chapters, I use the term in a broader sense to indicate conscious and unconscious subversion of oppressive conditions and social constructions promoting racism, classism and a white supremacist power structure.

Considering how resistance to systems of oppression becomes adopted by Fil-Am youth is critical to understanding the current state for Fil-Am opposition to colonial and neocolonial social injustice. My research examines the larger connections between Fil-Am identity and activism. My analysis is not limited solely to identity development concerns for Fil-Am youth. Instead, my work expands on the scholarship of E. San Juan Jr. when he stated that “Molecular micropolitics favored by acolytes of ‘new social movements’ cannot hide the salience of the overarching narrative of the anti-U.S. imperialist struggle that continues today to unfix all academic perversions and bureaucratic stereotypes of the Filipino people.”⁷ His quote highlights the critical importance of collective resistance against U.S. imperialism for Filipino Americans on multiple levels. E. San Juan Jr. has also drawn attention to the ways that Cultural Studies deserve critique. He suggests that it is problematic that some scholars uphold “popular/mass culture as intrinsically subversive of the exploitative mode of production” when Pierre Bourdieu “argued convincingly that culture legitimates social inequality.”⁸ For hip hop culture, it is not necessarily exceptional in its status as a popular culture. However, preliminary research shows connections between hip hop culture and community organizing. This complicates hip hop culture’s position and calls for further study. Researching the relationship for Filipino Americans and hip hop culture would expose the democratizing ways that hip hop culture has enabled Filipino American resistance to be successfully expressed and recognized.

The “Specters of United States Imperialism” continue to plague the people of the Philippines and its widespread diaspora.⁹ While neocolonialist policies exacerbate the wealth disparities in the Philippines, Filipino Americans deal with imperialism in the *belly of the beast*,

⁷ E. San Juan Jr., *After Postcolonialism: Remapping Philippines-United States Confrontations* (Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2000).

⁸ ———, *Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference* (Duke University Press, 2002), 222.

⁹ San Juan Jr., *After Postcolonialism: Remapping Philippines-United States Confrontations*.

the U.S.¹⁰ With second- and third-generation Fil-Am immigrant youth, many have gotten an inculcated colonized education passed on to them from their elders often leading to a mentality beleaguered by U.S. exceptionalism. Instead of questioning why their parents and family members had to immigrate away from the Philippines, many Fil-Am youth are indoctrinated in their assimilation process by U.S. society and their parents. For U.S. society, assimilation benefits the normalization of whiteness, patriarchy, and wealth disparity. For many parents of Fil Am youth, assimilation is promoted to alleviate any struggles that those parents and elders may have had to endure. This is not to deny the various levels of resistance that Filipino parents have necessarily employed in their own colonized experiences. However, assimilationist goals promote hegemonic narratives. Identity development remains a prevalent concern for Filipino American youth because of the historical incongruence between perspectives on Philippine history between the colonizer and the colonized.

Amado Guerrero¹¹ provides a foundation for understanding how Filipino immigrants in the U.S. bear goodwill towards their American colonizers and sets up their offspring for ethnic identity questions. Despite its publication date, Guerrero's prescient analysis proves relevant to today. Understanding the dilemma for Filipino American youth and the development of their critical consciousness requires the context that his work, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, develops.

Renato Constantino's work addresses the generational conflict between Filipino parents and their children who desire to do activist work and support activist causes. Since my research draws attention to the obstacles of organizing Filipino American youth, familial differences

¹⁰ "No Rest for the Weary," in *Blue Scholars* (Seattle: Blue Scholars, 2004).

¹¹ A pen name for Jose Maria Sison.

certainly play a major role in how youth gain awareness and understanding of social issues.¹²

The work by Constantino underscores the generational conflict for Filipino Americans although he wrote it over a generation ago. Looking at the ways that hip hop culture plays a part in reworking Filipino American identity exposes the ways that Fil-Ams interface with themes of resistance in a contemporary context.

Cohesively unifying Filipino American identity with liberatory notions of decolonization can productively develop a culture of resistance; it is a culture that repudiates white supremacist practices while spurring alternative ways of thinking that affirm self-worth and pushes for equitable social systems. As Shawn Ginwright identifies for African Americans, “Our understanding of culture must both free us from racist African images and avoid restrictive views of what constitutes African-centered identity. For African American youth, neither perspective captures the nuance, complexity, and authenticity of their everyday lives.”¹³ As Filipino American youth encounter their own experiences with racism and the effects of colonization and neocolonialism, it is important to note their similarities to the experiences of Carlos Bulosan and Philip Vera Cruz.¹⁴ If this history is not remembered or associated with the experiences of Filipino Americans today, the colonizers’ historical records favor U.S. exceptionalism by not recognizing a pattern of white supremacy and imperialism.

There are a handful of resources that collectively contextualize hip hop culture’s history. In the past decade, Jeff Chang’s Can’t Stop Won’t Stop¹⁵ continues to serve as a reliable source in academia to teach hip hop history. This text’s appeal lies in the way that Chang organizes a freestyle interwoven story of hip hop that similarly coincides with the creativity of the culture.

¹² Renato Constantino, "Parents and Activists," *Graphic* (1971).

¹³ Shawn A. Ginwright, *Black Youth Rising: Activism and Radical Healing in Urban America* (Teachers College, 2010).

¹⁴ San Juan Jr., *After Postcolonialism: Remapping Philippines-United States Confrontations*, 54-55.

¹⁵ J Chang and DJK Herc, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (Picador USA, 2006).

Michael Eric Dyson and Cornel West are two other outspoken scholars that have supported the merits of hip hop culture. They have brought more academic credibility to Hip Hop Studies with their books, guest speaking, and public personas. They have brought attention to the stereotypes of hip hop culture and demystified the quick judgments while also responsibly questioning hip hop culture and its respective players. Their work contributes to my research by providing examples for how hip hop can be interrogated. At the same time, I respect the lived experience and analytical work through music, speaking, and writing by artists like the legendary hip hop emcee, KRS-One. Seeing the messages of hip hop artists as educational texts alongside traditional scholarly texts inspires a cohesive understanding of hip hop culture as a pedagogical tool.

Methodology

In completing this dissertation project, I relied predominantly on interviewing people most relevant to my project. Additionally, I supported my interviews with an analysis of prior research while looking at various forms of visual media. A key part of my approach was implementing the lens of historical materialism and critical race theory. Although my second chapter is dedicated to documenting Fil-Am youth and identity development, a historical materialist perspective would necessarily include a trajectory for examining how identity moves to action.

Interviewing people that utilize hip hop culture as a tool for organizing social justice action provides primary source perspectives about their efficacy. The interviews exposed my interviewees' impetus for using hip hop culture while also giving self-critical reflections on its impact. Since it was my goal to better understand my interviewees' experiences and motivation,

interviews provided the optimal approach to getting this information.¹⁶ Utilizing narrative interviews, my research delves into the reasoning for how my interviewees interact with hip hop culture as well as how they feel their engagement affects other Filipino Americans. Narrative interviews also expressed the positionality for my interviewees and their own draw to hip hop culture. My awareness of Filipino American involvement in hip hop culture along with my familiarity with most of my selected interviewees aided me in building rapport and eliciting rich interview sessions. In developing trust with my interviewees, openness played an important part of describing my own positionality to them. Additionally, my rapport with each interviewee enabled me to communicate using language, references, and empathy to support candid responses.¹⁷

To assist me in conducting my interviews, I relied on an interview guide to help me maintain an “informal, flexible approach” that aligns well with the dynamics of hip hop culture.¹⁸ Aside from referencing the use of freestyle performance in hip hop to describe my use of an interview guide, my interviewees’ freeform styles seemed more receptive to an adaptable interview process in which guided questions could still be altered. It was my intention to complement my interviewees’ creativity with questions that appropriately encouraged open-ended responses while still offering pertinent insight to my research. My interview guide comprised directive and non-directive questions. The decision to combine both types of questions came from my desire to support interviewee responses that would help describe their investment in hip hop culture and ethnic identity while still offering specific details for parts of my project. With interviews providing the largest contribution to my research process, I

¹⁶ David and Amir Marvasti Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications Ltd, 2008), 147-48.

¹⁷ Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc, 2002), 188-89.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194-95.

supplemented insights gained from them with ethnographic and archival research. This helped to contextualize my research and evaluate ways that Filipino American communities are utilizing and changing with hip hop culture in comparison to other populations.

Another supplemental component to my interviews was relating hip hop pedagogies and their capacity to relate to youth culture. While the challenge of connecting with youth is not a new concern, Filipino Americans must be aware of how youth are responding to different teaching approaches in order to reconcile generational differences. Hip hop culture has been interdependent with youth culture in expressing the creativity, challenges, and optimism of youth. If youth are listening to music with critical revolutionary pedagogy¹⁹, they show the capacity to subvert U.S. imperialism and white supremacy.

Gathering information on how Filipino Americans utilize hip hop culture, I interviewed some of the most prominently identified Filipino Americans in hip hop culture. From emcees to a couple of deejays to other people involved in hip hop culture, the selected people that provided their narratives and insight covered some of the *elements* of hip hop. The contributions to hip hop culture by Filipinos/Filipino Americans and vice versa have only recently gained more attention by other scholars.²⁰ Antonio Tiongson Jr. has written in particular about Fil Am youth and deejaying. Mark Villegas' research elaborates on the topic of hip hop culture in the Philippines as well as cross-cultural connections for Filipino Americans and other communities hailing from nations that have been an American colony. Michael Viola has written about Fil-Am hip hop emcees while employing a lyrical analysis. Eric Tandoc has produced a recent

¹⁹ 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>.

²⁰ 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); Antonio T. Tiongson Jr., "Filipino Youth Cultural Politics and Dj Culture" (University of California-San Diego, 2006). See Mark Villegas at the University of California-Irvine, Michael Viola at the University of California – Los Angeles and filmmaker Eric Tandoc.

documentary that highlighted the connections between Fil-Ams and Filipinos through hip hop culture by following the Fil-Am emcee, Kiwi, on his exposure trip to the Philippines. Aside from the other glimpses into Fil-Am youth culture and hip hop culture, only a handful of scholars like Lakandiwa Deleon and Dr. Oliver Wang have established additional research on the subject. The lack of attention in academia to the historical and contemporary significance of the relationship of Filipino Americans with hip hop culture echoes the trend for other studies of music culture and society since ethnomusicologists continue gravitating towards a “given musical tradition.”²¹

Chapter Overview

In my introductory chapter, I cover my methodological approach while detailing how it has been shaped. It starts by including my own experiences at the intersections of identity development, Filipino history, hip hop culture, and critical consciousness. Chapter one also clarifies some of my key terms and theories which I use in later chapters. Historical materialism is highlighted to explain to readers how my methodological approach aligns with my theoretical perspective. This helps to set up the historical context for Fil Am youth culture that is done in my second chapter.

Within Chapter 2, I summarize some of the expressions of Filipino American youth culture that have countered the impact of U.S. colonization. It situates my research by briefly historicizing Filipino American youth culture and the ways that *colonial mentality*²² has been challenged. By looking at the impact of imperialism on the Philippines and its continued effects within Filipino Americans, I examine how Fil Ams have worked towards recognition and

²¹ Laurent Aubert, Anthony Seeger, and Carla Ribeiro, *The Music of the Other : New Challenges for Ethnomusicology in a Global Age* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), xi.

²² David and Okazaki, "Colonial Mentality: A Review and Recommendation for Filipino American Psychology."

representation in the U.S. as a specific ethnic community and with the broader categorization as Asian Pacific Americans. The latter part of this chapter examines how Filipino American youth culture has been informed and expressed. Investigating the cultural expressions by Fil Am youth leads to the chapter closing by summing up how they tie into hip hop culture. Using hip hop as a tool for teaching and activism has a longer standing history while being global in scope.

My third chapter illuminates hip hop culture's utility towards social justice issues. Chapter 3 starts by discussing the circumstances for the formation of hip hop and its connection to the community. Hip hop's reciprocal relationship with youth culture is discussed. Additionally, hip hop culture's ability to inform identity for various ethnic communities is examined. Key considerations in Chapter 3 involve the extensive examples of hip hop culture's role in social justice projects. I present hip hop's validity in promoting ideologies of resistance that counter oppressive conditions. Similarities in the ways that hip hop culture empowers groups and communities across the world support hip hop culture's accessibility. Although there are different positionalities and contexts for the people that embrace hip hop culture and produce it, those using it towards resistance have recognized that hip hop is much more complex than what popular media displays. All of the negative representations such as sexism, individualism, and hedonism are oppositional to the values of equality, community, and social justice in the Chapter 3 examples. The chapter ends by introducing some illustrations of Fil Am community organizing through hip hop culture and their efforts for anti-oppression which is the focus in Chapter 4.

Considering how identity formation for Filipino Americans happens within hip hop culture, Chapter 4 further substantiates my research project by discussing what it has meant to be Filipino American. I present the long standing relationship for Filipino Americans and hip hop

culture while positioning the unique colonial history for Fil Ams within those intersections. Analyzing limited media representation for Fil Am involvement in hip hop, this chapter challenges the connotations of hip hop culture solely being Black culture by positioning hip hop as a popular medium for Black expression along with acknowledging its roots being in Black and Latino culture. Reaffirming the distinction that hip hop culture is one avenue of Black cultural expression allows for a stronger incorporation of other communities into hip hop's history by seeing it as a medium for their cultural expression as well. This allows for relationships to be made between non-Black community experiences with Black communities as well as the exploration of hybridized identity formation based on a community's history. In particular, communities of color face nuances that change their positionality to resisting hegemonic ideologies in the U.S. An example can be seen with Filipino Americans. Sizeable Filipino American communities did not become established in the U.S. until the 20th century although there have been Filipino immigrants that date much further back. Their historic subjectivity can change the way they adopt and view hip hop culture versus a Mexican American or a Black American. These intricacies for Fil Ams and expression through hip hop culture can be different in comparison to another community.

Chapter 4 examines Fil Am involvement in social activism efforts involving hip hop culture and the community building that has taken place. Bringing together the ways that hip hop culture has informed Filipino American identity and vice versa, the chapter elaborates on the investment that Filipino Americans have made in hip hop culture while building on a culture of resistance that invokes the colonized history of the Philippines. The messages and actions that promote resistance to oppression by Filipino Americans provide a basis for what my

interviewees have endorsed in their work. Synthesizing the history of Fil Am and Filipino empowerment with hip hop culture informs the presentation of interview material in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 presents the themes and other findings from qualitative interviews with various Filipino Americans that are hip hop culture artists or have experiences that link them closely with Fil Am hip hop culture production. The questions that interviewees responded to involve each person's own introduction to hip hop culture, their understanding of activism, and past engagement in community organizing. Their interviews expanded on these responses to gauge their perceptions of Filipino Americans and hip hop culture, how Filipino Americans understand ideologies of resistance, and how Fil Am identity relates to resistance.

Aside from examining the relationship between Filipino Americans and hip hop culture, this chapter will document a more detailed relationship that showcases the appeal of expressing resistance through hip hop culture for Fil-Ams. Responses from interviewees invoke a strong sense of resolve in decolonization work. Educating, learning, and advancing Fil Am communities and other oppressed communities are underlying messages that interviewees have incorporated with their hip hop culture involvement.

My concluding chapter will summarize the intersections for Filipino Americans, hip hop culture, and work towards social justice. By highlighting how Filipino American identity formation relates to developing ideologies of resistance, this section brings together the history for Filipino Americans and colonization with hip hop culture's usage to address the continued impact of colonization and neocolonization today. Some of the areas for future research development will be covered in this final chapter along with their potential for informing the discourse of social justice and decolonization efforts. Chapter 6 reiterates the power of hip hop

culture despite its many critiques along with the resilience of Fil Ams in connecting their own history to social justice concerns today.

Selecting Interviewees

The people I have chosen to interview are recognized as major influences of Filipino American identity through hip hop culture at a regional level and on varying levels nationally. Although they represent hip hop culture, their alignment with Filipino American issues and popular culture has meant that they impact Filipino American youth. While the art and styling of interviewees may relate to Filipino Americans and their history and experiences at times, the audiences for performances and content are not solely Filipino. One of my interviewees and his group, Geologic of the Blue Scholars, face a different experience as they have grown with their audience demographics. Their audience at concerts comprises a good portion of white youth compared to earlier in their formation. White audiences for other hip hop artists are not a new phenomenon. For Fil Am hip hop artists, this dynamic of a white audience proves interesting when the artists' content incorporates elements of Fil Am identity and history, two areas that have been subject to White American narratives and standards. Still, the Blue Scholars maintain their music label autonomy despite the prospects to sign with a more established company with wide media distribution.²³ Navigating the contradictions of the hip hop industry remains a difficult task for the emcees trying to sustain a living off of their artistry. Who is consuming their music and how they are consuming it does not align with the ways that artists may have originally intended. My interview questions compare how Filipino-American utilization of hip hop culture builds communities, both real and imagined. My interviews provide insight about

²³ George Quibuyen, *Interview* (Seattle, WA: 2007).

the ways that hip hop culture motivates Fil-Am youth to collective action like the group Sudden Rush in Hawai'i has instigated Hawaiian youth to push for sovereignty.²⁴

Sustaining a livelihood off of the labor that artists invest into hip hop culture remains a difficult path. Contradictions abound in the music industry for artists that have a more critically conscious approach. From creative license to marketing and image, these are only a few areas that get critiqued in hip hop culture. *Authenticity* and how it gets constituted in hip hop often confines rising artists in terms of the audience they can reach and the ways that artists' production gets consumed. Incorporating community connections for Fil-Am hip hop artists in my analysis yields a better understanding of how these artists perceive their work. The adage "art for art's sake" is not adopted by my selected artists. These artists recognize their positionalities and purposely incorporate strong elements of imperial resistance into their artistic production. My analysis will expose this connection and how it reflects Filipino American youth identity formation.

²⁴ Adria L. Imada, "Head Rush: Hip Hop and a Hawaiian Nation "On the Rise"," in *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip Hop and the Globalization of Black Popular Culture* (Pluto Press, 2006).

Chapter 2

LET'S GET FREE:

A History of Expression in Filipino American Youth Culture While Battling Colonial Contradictions

Obscured Philippine History

Growing up, identifying as *Filipino American* has always given me a strong sense of pride despite the lack of other Filipino Americans to share in it. There were few opportunities to have my identity validated as I had desired. Despite my limited awareness of Philippine history and Filipino Americans through my mother's lens, I still represented my diasporic community to the fullest superficial extent. My identity as a Filipino American felt empowering aside from any negative labels associated with the Philippines and so-called *third world countries*. It was a part of my history and identity that no one could take away.

The source of all my pride in identifying as a Filipino came from my admiration of my mom and my relatives that worked so hard to make a living out of extreme hardship. As a product of their determination, I have been defensive of Filipinos and Filipino culture. It wasn't until high school that I got challenged in an unexpected way. A vastly different perspective of the Philippines and being Filipino from a much younger youth riled questions in me one summer. Working on a local farm as one of the older supervisors for young twelve to fifteen year olds, one of the youth I oversaw was a boy with two Filipino parents. He presented himself as a second or third generation Filipino American that had limited knowledge of the Philippines

much like me at his age. During one of our conversations in one of the fields, we casually discussed our identity in being Filipino. Other than an affiliation with the term “Filipino American,” there were few similarities I saw in us once he half-jokingly revealed his disdain for the Philippines and its lack of *first world* amenities. It irritated me so much to hear him associating the Philippines with dirtiness, poverty, and in an overall negative light. Although I don’t remember what I said to that kid, I do remember giving a swift repugnant response tinged with disbelief and contempt at his opinion. While I have experienced other instances growing up in which I felt drawn to defend Filipino and Filipino American culture, my exchange that day remains vivid in my memory. In retrospect, I feel that it remains so poignant to me because I had to defend Filipino culture from another Filipino American. At that time with my understanding of race, I labeled him as *white-washed*²⁵. I perceived him as a youth who lacked the appreciation for the struggles Filipinos have endured. Now that I have developed my comprehension of race further, I would characterize my interaction with the youth in the strawberry field as two Filipino Americans dealing with the pressures of assimilation and colonial mentality²⁶ in very different ways.

Nothing stands out when I try to recall Philippine history throughout my K-12 education. A big reason why is because there was no material that ever covered the Philippines. As I proceeded to grow intellectually past high school, I continued on my path of ethnic identity development. After high school, I attended a small, liberal arts college. For a year-and-a-half at this school, I didn’t feel engaged with its student body. Outside of my collegiate sports commitment, there were few people that shared interests with me. The biggest of these interests

²⁵ This term has been often used within communities of color to describe a person of color’s perspective and personality as being assimilated to white ways of understanding. It is often used in a negative manner since it signals a loss of culture in comparison to the broader ethnic and cultural community of the individual.

²⁶ Kevin Nadal, *Filipino American Psychology: A Collection of Personal Narratives* (AuthorHouse, 2010), 103.

was hip hop culture. At this private college that seemed overwhelmingly dominated by more affluent as well as predominantly white students, my campus environment and experience did not reflect the people and culture that I felt connected to through hip hop culture and other people of color. Interest in hip hop music existed on campus, but in a way that I felt was *inauthentic* at the time. I perceived the majority of hip hop enthusiasts as appropriating the culture instead of understanding it or the people producing it. After transferring from that school to another university for a multitude of reasons, I was content with my decision at the very least because I knew I was leaving a space that really neither embraced me nor inspired me to grow as a person and in my identity.

Colonial Mentality

“The eradication of our culture may have started outside of our community, but because of colonial mentality, we are now promoting this cultural holocaust ourselves.”²⁷

-E.J.R. David

With their immigration to the United States, many Filipino Americans have also brought their colonial mentality. Colonial mentality is the “attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors” that “[reject] anything Filipino and a preference for anything Western or American.”²⁸ Sustained colonization over many centuries has not been erased for Filipinos with a continued legacy of neo- and post-colonial apparatuses. Impacts on the Philippine economy and education have arguably been the sectors contributing the most to colonial mentality in Filipinos and Fil Ams. Given the Philippines’ longstanding history of imperialist subjection, the continued effects of colonization are expected. The unique colonial history of the Philippines sets it apart from other Asian countries. Two particular defining differences that continue on throughout the Filipino

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

diaspora are the predominant following of Catholicism and the ability to speak and understand the English language.²⁹ Religion and language profoundly affect the Filipino American experience and how Philippine history gets accounted. In the face of violent as well as more ulterior subjugation of Filipinos for centuries, the Filipino people's defiance to foreign imperialists remains shrouded knowledge. The indoctrination of Filipinos has left Filipinos and their broader diaspora unaware of the historical opposition to imperialism while promoting colonial mentality. For Filipino Americans, an introspective look at colonial mentality and its effect on individuals as well as the community can encourage a desire to question identity. Interrogating ethnic identity can provide a foundation for Filipino Americans to better understand their identity politics by building stronger national pride and an understanding of their positionality.

Many Filipino American youth negotiate their identity politics amidst intense pressure to maintain aspects of Filipino tradition while managing the challenges of assimilation. Balancing the cultural citizenship of both communities often incorporates elements of colonial mentality. Without recognizing colonial mentality and addressing it, the pressure to appeal to the dominant white culture in the U.S. denigrates the value of Filipino American culture and its associated history. The film *The Debut* (2000) captured common challenges for Filipino American youth by highlighting parental pressures and the lure of acceptance into white culture. Popularly known by Filipino American youth, *The Debut* gained notoriety in the Fil Am community not only for its Fil Am celebrity cast but its relatability. The story centers on the main character, Ben, and his family's preparation for his younger sister's *debut*—a Filipino tradition celebrating a woman's transition to adulthood when turning the age of eighteen. At various times in the film, the dual pressures of maintaining Filipino tradition and assimilation into white American culture

²⁹ David and Okazaki, "Colonial Mentality: A Review and Recommendation for Filipino American Psychology," 6.

are highlighted. *The Debut* emphasizes the desire for Fil Am youth to express and ponder identity; the process promotes an understanding of Filipino history and cultural norms. Sorting through identity politics can have a powerful impact on Filipino American youth by working against the passive subjugation of colonial mentality. Recognizing the longer imperialist history for Filipinos contextualizes the current obstacles for Filipino American identity development—particularly in Fil Am youth. Each new generation of Fil Ams is a post-colonial product. The dominant narrative of Filipino history for Fil Ams gets told by the colonizer. Taking a historical materialist approach, understanding the lasting ramifications of U.S. imperialism underscores the areas to direct decolonization efforts.

The Impact of Imperialism

The imperialist influence of the United States and its predecessor, Spain, in colonizing the Philippines, scarred the cultural practices and ways of thinking for the Filipino people. The legacy of colonization afflicts the Philippine diaspora as a scourge to national progress. U.S. imperialism continues to dictate the life opportunities for Filipinos and the Filipino diaspora. From the increasing numbers of Filipinos leaving the Philippines to work abroad to the subjugation of Filipinos worldwide, imperialism promotes its own machinations by diminishing the political economic power for the vast majority of Filipinos. A lasting impression has been made that necessitates Filipino Americans to push for redress. Reflecting on public degradation spectacles such as the Filipinos on display at the St. Louis Expo in 1904, E. San Juan Jr. states that “if we continue to delude ourselves that we are not objects of racist interpellations [...] then history might repeat itself.”³⁰ Since San Juan wrote that in 1994, Filipinos and Filipino

³⁰ Jr. San Juan, E., *Allegories of Resistance* (Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines Press, 1994), 13.

Americans continue to struggle through the stereotypes and racism that imperialism imbued against and within them.

Prior to colonization, Filipino cultural values appeared very different in structure and practice. By being a “gender-neutral country,” the Philippines was more respectful to women than after colonization.³¹ In addition, Filipinos “were less likely to compare themselves negatively to outside cultures” before colonization.³² This meant that they did not harbor an ill perception of themselves. The various ways that colonization infiltrated Philippine society overtly and inferentially obfuscated pre-colonization Filipino ideals. Exploring the prominent ways that colonization has lasted in the Philippines and the Filipino diaspora illuminates its stronghold.

Education

One of the most profound effects on the Filipino psyche has been the colonized educational system in the Philippines. The U.S.’ last piece of colonial control on the Philippines before its transition into a neocolonial site was the educational system.³³ Today, the Filipino diaspora continues to be impacted by the prior American control of the Philippine educational system. A signifier of the Philippines lasting subjugation to American power is seen with the overwhelming prevalence of English being spoken along with its recognition as an official language with Tagalog. Renato Constantino identified English as one of the causes to the Philippines’ educational underdevelopment. Constantino argued that using English in the school systems and Tagalog in all other spaces meant that both speaking and writing in each language lagged in their growth. E. San Juan Jr. said that “American English became an instrument of

³¹ Kevin Nadal, *Filipino American Psychology: A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice* (Bloomington, Indiana: Authorhouse, 2009), 42.

³² *Ibid.*, 43.

³³ Renato Constantino, "The Miseducation of the Filipino," *Graphic* (1966).

political and ideological domination throughout colonial rule (1898-1946) and neocolonial hegemony (1946-present).”³⁴ By accommodating English usage to such a large extent when cultural dialects are more widely used, the Philippines acquiesce to foreign power.

Accompanying the impacts of English is the longer history of Catholicism and its large following in the Philippines. The incorporation of Catholicism from earlier Spanish colonization promoted the notion that Filipinos needed Spain’s civilizing mission. Conceptualizing Spain’s colonizing effort as necessary for the betterment of the Philippines and its people suggests colonization is necessary and divinely perpetuated. Changing the Philippines’ predominant religion primed Filipino subjectivity to further colonization from Spain and later the U.S. as Catholic ideologies embedded into Filipino education.

The impact on the educational system continued and left by U.S. colonization has made it ever pressing for educators to teach more applicable content addressing the material conditions that the majority of Filipinos endure. Invoking a Philippine nationalist pedagogy can promote decolonization and resistance. While there are educators in the Philippines that resist colonial narratives and teach against it, the Philippine economy continues to promote Filipino emigration. The continued trend for Filipino skilled labor to leave the Philippines because of their low socioeconomic standing and better work opportunities abroad hinder the implementation of a nationalist pedagogy in the Philippines. Glorified as “national heroes,”³⁵ Filipino laborers abroad that are sending money back to family in the Philippines are recognized for their important economic contributions that prop up the wealthy. Because of the poverty levels in the Philippines, many current-day Filipino laborers have been forced to leave their homeland in

³⁴ E. San Juan Jr., *Toward Filipino Self-Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 37.

³⁵ Pauline Eadie, "Philippines Overseas Foreign Workers (Ofws), Presidential Trickery and the War on Terror," *Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations* 25, no. 1 (2011).

much the same way that the first wave of Filipino immigrants came to the U.S., attempting to work, save money, and return home.

Immigrant Stories

Arguably the most famous Filipino American writer, Carlos Bulosan represents many experiences for Filipino American immigrants through his writings. America is in the Heart is Bulosan's autobiographical book that documents his journey to the U.S. and his struggles with society, finances, and relationships. His book highlights how racism and power dictated Fil Am immigration during the first half of the twentieth century. Recognizing the importance of Bulosan's story that aptly described very similar experiences for other Filipino immigrants to the U.S., we can draw many connections to Filipino immigrants today. Labor opportunities abroad and a rampant poverty in the Philippines have promoted and sustained the biggest export of the Philippines, its people. Like Bulosan, Filipino immigrants today may have aspirations to return to their homeland. But, the family dependency on remittances back to the Philippines from their family members abroad leaves little possibility for imagining a family living together. The cycle of sacrificing dreams and hopes for other family members' aspirations have become normalized for Filipinos across the Diaspora. Countries in the Middle East are common destinations for Filipino immigrants in addition to the U.S..³⁶

As skilled labor leaves the Philippines, the morbid reality that many overseas workers return in caskets is a culmination of the derogatory perceptions and treatment of Filipinos globally. Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) leaving the Philippines daily while "five or six a day"³⁷ come back dead is a contradictory situation that Filipinos are willing to test because of dire economic need. Deciding to be an immigrant is not much of a choice when conditions in the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Jr. E. San Juan, "Interrogating Transmigrancy, Remapping Diaspora: The Globalization of Laboring Filipinos/As," *Discourse* 23, no. 3 (2001): 56.

Philippines have been at an unreasonable point. The normalization of immigrating away from the Philippines without understanding colonization's historic and contemporary role obliges the wrongs committed by the U.S. and Spain.

Cultural Hybridity and American Exceptionalism

Dealing with years of pacification, propaganda, and continued neocolonial dependencies, Filipinos now work through cultural hybridity and American exceptionalism. It is not to claim that these social challenges do not face resistance by Filipinos. However, Filipino Americans are unique in the larger Filipino diaspora because of their positionalities living in the country of the colonizer. Combining the embedded exceptionalism in American society with Filipinos' implanted feelings of exceptionalism towards the U.S., Fil Ams face tough challenges when considering the difficulties of decolonization. Many instances throughout the last century have shown the Philippines to back U.S. policy—especially initiatives involving the U.S. armed forces. From the enlistment of Filipinos during World War II in the U.S. military to the more recent Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), the Philippines' government has been subject to puppetry with the backing of U.S. foreign policy. Although the U.S. military left the Philippines in 1992, the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) allotted the U.S. the freedom to have military presence in the Philippines once again in 1998.³⁸ When the U.S.' War on Terror made the Middle East its target region, the Philippines became the second front for the U.S. to combat terrorism.³⁹ Not only has post-colonialist policy hindered the Filipino diaspora's connection to a Philippine nationalism, agreements like the VFA implore further policing and a clear power difference for Filipinos and the United States. Militarization has regularly played a large role in Filipino lives over the duration of U.S. intervention at the end of the 19th century.

³⁸ "Philippines," ed. U.S. Dept. of State (2011).

³⁹ San Juan Jr., *Toward Filipino Self-Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization*.

With the immigration wave to the U.S. following World War II, the proliferation of interracial Filipino Americans heightened the identity development challenges that cultural hybridity posed. Along with an extensive history of militarized interactions with the U.S., Filipinos engaged with joining American soldiers given incentives of citizenship—a valuable offer that could provide better socioeconomic options. The ironic and contradictory condition for Filipinos aligning with the same forces that have pacified the Philippines points out the efficacy of American colonialism. It has also left a strong sense of American exceptionalism throughout the Filipino diaspora. The second- and third-generation population for Fil Ams continues to grow in addition to the consistent influx of new immigrants. Falling under the categorization of Asian Pacific Americans, Fil Ams mediate multiple cultural pressures in their identity development. Amongst other influences, the ethnic identity development for Fil Ams involves the negotiation of a colonized history, colonial mentality, and American racial politics. Moving between cultures puts an undue pressure on Fil Ams that encourages hybridized understandings of ethnicity. Fil Ams have had to form their own niche amongst other ethnic communities that dominate the Asian Pacific American narrative.

Post-World War II, Filipino American youth began to identify more broadly as Asian Americans rather than solely Filipino American. In particular, Filipina American youth emerged with their consumerism to define themselves and justify their cultural citizenship. Fil Am youth women were influenced by ethnically based media outlets as they balanced the pressure of assimilation while maintaining nationalist pride in the process. Identifying with other Asian American women in displaying cultural hybridity, Filipina Americans played an important role in shaping youth culture and the formation of what *Asian American* meant.⁴⁰ It is not to say that

⁴⁰ Shirley Jennifer Lim, "Hell's a Poppin': Asian American Women's Youth Consumer Culture," in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity and Ethnicity*, ed. Jennifer and Min Zhou Lee (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Filipina Americans are more assimilated than their male counterparts. They provide different examples in which they have constructed cultural hybridities such as the formation of Asian interest Greek sororities. There are multiple more examples today in which Asian American men have gotten into this trend and formed Asian interest fraternities. The shift for Filipino Americans from being forced to identify as a distinct ethnic community to a larger and diverse one affected how youth culture changed and how to express ethnicity. The pressures of assimilating in white American culture while retaining an ethnic identity are shared on a broader scale for Filipino Americans. However, Asian American youth identity has remained in relationship to white Americans. “As the Asian American population becomes increasingly more diverse [...], one of the challenges that Asian American youth face today is not only how they will define themselves vis-à-vis white Americans but how they will build a culture and a community among themselves.”⁴¹ The compartmentalization of Asian Pacific Americans inadequately addresses the breadth of experiences for the population it attempts to aggregate. Between the Model Minority Myth and Asian Americans being viewed as the perpetual foreigner, many Asian American youth simultaneously balance their cultural citizenship between their ethnic community and the majority white community in the U.S.. Viewed as the Model Minority and as a perpetual foreigner place white America as locus and non-white America as the “other”.

As mentioned before, the movie *The Debut* demonstrates the complexities of satisfying familial and community ethnic identity pressures while managing the desire to be included in the dominant white culture—specifically for Fil Am youth. Ben struggles to keep both cultures separate and apart from one another as seen when his white friends ask to come inside his house for the first time while picking him to go hang out. He hesitantly allows his peer to use the

⁴¹ Ibid., 111.

bathroom while hurrying him along while managing the questions of his other friend. The symbolism in this scene speaks to the desire of acceptance by white America and overcoming the “othering” process. Additional stereotypes that are specific to Fil Ams constrict expectations for Fil Am youth and their ability to break free from the associated judgments.

Filipino American Stereotypes

The stereotypes and generalizations for Filipino Americans provide an obstacle for Fil Ams to overcome in the U.S.. Presumptions about Filipino American culture hinder the development of autonomy and identity while deterring any connections to Philippine history. Along with other Asian Americans, Fil Ams deal with the “Perpetual Foreigner”⁴² stigma in the U.S. in which they are never assumed to be from the United States or “American.” Despite having a heightened awareness of the de facto white American culture due to a history of colonization, Fil Ams still face the challenge of stereotypes and its hold on self-identity. Many Fil Am stereotypes are based on Fil Am community subcultures that may promote camaraderie and unity but lack the depth of connection to social issues. Forming and refashioning identity requires a connection to history. Although ethnic identity gets often essentialized through language, food, and fashion, *identity* invokes a deeper sense of self. For Filipino Americans, ideas of *identity* have been skewed by the years of foreign imperialism inundating the Philippines with commercialism and American exceptionalism. The next generation of Fil Ams will face further disconnect from a Filipino narrative of Philippine history if there is no intervention to pass on that history or if the next generation lacks motivation to learn it. As products of the Philippines’ imperial history, Filipino American youth have to navigate through a different set of racial politics in the U.S. as they sort through their identity development and the Philippine history that has produced their positionalities. Understanding Fil Am youth culture can provide

⁴² Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (Basic Books, 2003).

important information as to how connections can be developed between Fil Am youth and Philippine history.

Collective Communities

Forging spaces that built on Filipino American cultural expression became a means to understand how the growing diaspora is correlated to the neocolonial oppression of the Philippines and the longer standing effects of colonialism. From Filipino American community centers and Filipinotowns, Filipino American youth have utilized their geographic proximities to foster their cultural connection. However, their formation stems from racialized U.S. immigration laws, overt racism, and social support for one another throughout the early 20th century. Some immigration laws were broad in targeting Asian immigrants while others specifically targeted Filipinos. The communities that initially formed were male dominated due to immigration restrictions geared to have a perceived stronger workforce that would want to return to the Philippines following their labor commitments in the U.S. Young men looking for better economic opportunities for themselves and for money to send home continue to this day but with women being the gender of choice for jobs. Fil-Am communities were necessarily formed for Fil-Ams to support one another through language and culture while in a hostile foreign place. Filipino American communities have continued to provide a backing for sharing language, food, and camaraderie as well as other cultural aspects today. One of the key differences between the eras is the difference in first-, second-, and third-generation Filipino immigrants already established in the U.S. This longer establishment of communities contributes to a broader experience for the Filipino American community with assimilation. Identifying

particularities in Fil Am assimilation call upon looking at positionality for Fil Ams within American society—including how Fil Ams are commonly categorized as Asian Americans.

Filipino Americans have been labeled as the “Forgotten Asian Americans.”⁴³ Classifying Filipino Americans under the Asian American category is challenging due to the unique geography and historical experience with colonization for the Philippines. Categorizing Filipino Americans as Pacific Islanders has the same difficulties as well. While the experiences for Filipino immigrants to the United States closely mirrors that of the other predominant Asian American ethnicities for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean communities, the Filipino experience gets subsumed into the “Asian American” category with its nuances forgotten.

Within the demographic of Asian Americans, an ethnic identity already labeled as monolithic and rendered mute by white Americans, Filipino Americans experience a complex and layered relationship with assimilation. It has exacerbated the legacy of American colonization of Filipino Americans so that the levels of hybridity within the community have made it difficult to move past the generic surface level aspects of culture in such things as food, fashion, and traditional dancing. Contributions of Filipino Americans have faced being overlooked or misrepresented by even their own fellow Asian Pacific American community. An example of this was during a national meeting of the Association of Asian American Studies (AAAS) when the book *Blu’s Hanging* was set to be awarded for literary merit. Boycotting and opposition to the award came about from the stereotyped portrayal of a Filipino American character in the book. The AAAS retracted the award in light of the resistance that the book garnered. Recognizing *Blu’s Hanging* with an award shows that Fil Am oversight can happen on many levels. While the book’s author has her right to free speech, the characterization of her Fil

⁴³ Nadal, *Filipino American Psychology: A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice*, 7. Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans, a Pictorial Essay, 1763-Circa 1963* (Seattle, WA: Dorothy Cordova, 1983).

Fil Am character symbolized the larger issue of misunderstanding Fil Am and challenges that they face. As with Filipino American history, distinguishing the intricacies of Filipino American youth culture is necessary since it risks being subsumed and conflated solely as Asian American youth culture. Balancing the commonalities between Filipino American youth culture and Asian American youth culture is important to acknowledging the historical context for Fil Am youth culture's participation.

Filipino American Youth Culture

Filipino American youth culture has been researched more closely dating back to the 1920s. At that time, the zoot suit era drew many a young Filipino American man into the culture. Although associated under the broader categorization of Asian American, Filipino American enclaves grew their own youth culture. As with other Asian American men that had come to the U.S. for job opportunities and the hope of working towards the *American Dream*, labor divisions contributed to the formation of Fil Am youth culture. "Asian American (usually ethnic-specific in the pre-1965 era) youth culture formed as a response to the contradiction between the democratic promise of American national belonging and the practices of racial segregation and exclusion."⁴⁴ Divisions in early Asian American communities were goaded by divide-and-conquer labor tactics that pitted these communities against one another in order to drive the cost of their labor down and stunt the formation of unions. Scholarly work on early Asian American youth culture centers on "clubs, beauty pageants, and consumer culture."⁴⁵

The continuation of limited scholarly work on Filipino American youth culture today reflects the absence of Filipino American scholarly work as a whole. But two of the most

⁴⁴ Shirley Jennifer Lim, "Asian American Youth Culture," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2008): 213.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 212-13.

currently identifiable areas of Filipino American youth culture revolve around Fil Am youth interaction with hip hop culture and gang culture. Both of these spaces have provided support for a population struggling to find their acceptance as a contemporary immigrant population. Both hip hop culture and gang culture have validated Fil Am youth identities while providing a platform to express themselves. An important aspect of youth culture is found in the processes of expression and the collective value systems to which youth perceive in imagined communities. The expression of a youth's identity reflects communication methods that are meaningful to them. If the older generation of Fil Ams and Filipinos are to build relationships promoting critical consciousness and mutual understanding, focusing on expression is crucial for opportunities of communication.

Expression

“There is a special pattern to the blind spots in dominant American culture that produces the structural invisibility of Filipino America, and contemporary Filipino American art and expressive culture consequently have generated wily strategies of misdirection and indirection that demand an especially heightened awareness of acts of coding, masking, and mimicry.”⁴⁶

Finding a voice amidst a population struggling to find its identity has produced different methods of expression. Vocal and visual forms of expression reflect on the newer Filipino American generations with a stronger rejection of racism and oppression. An imagined community encourages Fil Ams to express their identity. From spoken word to graffiti pieces, the tension of cultural citizenship remains as apparent as it did in the 1920s.

A challenge for the Fil Am community as with many other communities of color in the U.S., representing the various meanings of Fil Am culture faces heavy critique—especially in popular culture. The value placed on perception feeds the desire for Fil Am representation to

⁴⁶ Sarita Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xxxii.

showcase all of the positive aspects of the imagined community. White privilege in popular culture and in most aspects of American culture allows the representation of whiteness to be varied and independent of such careful criticism. Apl.de.ap, a hip hop emcee from the popular group The Black Eyed Peas, exemplifies such challenges. As a spotlighted figure, he has faced pressure to draw attention to his Filipino American ethnicity and the issues plaguing the Filipino diaspora. Such requests are unthinkable for the dominant white American culture and its accompanied white privilege.

For Filipino American youth culture, involvement in dancing, gang culture, as well as rhythm and blues reveals historical connections with hip hop culture. While there is more depth to the youth culture for Filipino Americans, the research on Fil Ams with dancing, gang culture, and rhythm and blues provides some of the strongest connections.

Dancing

Dating back to the 1920s, the attraction of dancing for Filipino immigrants to the U.S. has been documented. The era of taxi dance halls were spaces that many Filipino American men spent a solid portion of their free time spending some of their wages. Noted as being “splendid” dancers, Filipino American men gained a reputation for their prevalence at taxi dance halls and their dancing ability.⁴⁷ Taxi dance halls represented many things in that the dancing ability for Filipino American men could be looked upon as assimilationist but also as spaces of resistance. The ability for Filipino American men to showcase their notable skills in American dancing styles had been seen by some as a way to “demonstrate his knowledge of American ways and his ‘all too rapid’ assimilation into American society.”⁴⁸ At the same time, dance halls were spaces where females were present; it allowed Filipino American men the chance to dance with

⁴⁷ Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, ""Splendid Danicing": Filipino "Exceptionalism" In Taxi Dancehalls," *Dance Research Journal* 40, no. 2 (2008).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 24.

predominantly white women, a taboo condemned by the white American majority. Interacting with women in itself could be considered an act of resistance with immigration law preventing Filipinas to come to the U.S.. A Filipino immigrant, Salvador Roldan, attempted to marry his white female partner by claiming Filipinos did not fit into anti-miscegenation law designations. After getting the clearance, California law was quickly altered to make sure that it prevented this from happening again.⁴⁹ The intentional limiting of Filipino immigration to men actively prevented the establishment of Filipino families and longer term stays for a work force intended to be temporary. Taxi halls were spaces of support for Filipinos as well as spaces of resistance against racist laws and sentiment. Dancing was an outlet of expression in the midst of their long days filled with manual labor.

Filipino Americans and American dance styles still have a strong link today. Breakdancing and other hip hop cultural forms of dance have many Filipino American participants. The phenomena of Fil Am participation has drawn more attention in the past decade with popular culture shows like MTV's *America's Best Dance Crew*, or ABDC, and FOX's *So You Think You Can Dance?* showcasing many Fil Am contestants. From the internationally known Jabbawockeez dance crew to many other crews having Fil Am members, the prevalence of Fil Ams in the hip hop dance scene had a national television platform through these shows. Apparent dominance from the majority Asian American crews on ABDC even led to a rumor circulating on blog sites and online forums that the show would be limiting the amount of Asian Americans in a crew for their sixth season.⁵⁰ Corporatization and commodification of Asian American talent supports the capitalist function of each show's networks. At the same time, the recent spotlight on contemporary dance forms calls attention to

⁴⁹ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 34.

⁵⁰ "Is Abdc Banning All-Asian Crews? (No)," in *Angry Asian Man* (2010).

Fil Am youth's participation, talent, and expression to counter the long standing invisibility for Asian Americans in popular American culture. Dance—specifically hip hop dance forms—provides an alternative means of expression for Fil Am youth that differs from other problematic modes such as gang culture. However, looking at the connections for Fil Am youth and gang culture must be acknowledged for the ways that gangs accommodate and support its constituents.

Gang Culture

Gang culture similarly supports youth through acceptance, support, and familial elements. The parallel nature of hip hop culture and gang culture are alike in that they have formed out of oppression and social exclusion. Changes in Fil Am gang culture from their start in the 1970s shows a more recent influence from “mainstream popular culture, specifically hip hop.”⁵¹ Initial participation in gang culture for Fil Ams and in starting their own gangs came about from a need for protection. In Los Angeles, many Fil Am gang members from the 1970s and 1980s came from difficult family structures and/or trying socioeconomic conditions. Generalizations about gang culture often omit the material conditions that spurred the participation of youth in the first place. The context for gang involvement illuminates a desire for inclusion, safety, and self identity.

Bambu, a Fil Am emcee from Los Angeles, raps about the social function of gangs by saying, “I recognize the need to organize disenfranchised Black and Brown bodies.”⁵² Recognizing gang culture as a response to disenfranchisement changes the stereotypical perception that gangs are simply unruly criminals. Organizing a population that has sought for acceptance amongst their conditions allows them the opportunity to focus on their oppressive situations and how they can change them. It also communicates the lack of positive organization

⁵¹ Bangele D. Alsaybar, "Deconstructing Deviance: Filipino American Youth Gangs, "Party Culture," And Ethnic Identity in Los Angeles," *Amerasia Journal* 25, no. 1 (1999): 132.

⁵² Bambu DePistola, Interview, November 28 2011.

for Fil Am youth. The relationship between Filipino Americans and gang culture signals a rift between Fil Am youth and their acceptance into white American culture. Participation in gangs impels examination of Fil Am youth's motivation beyond solely the elements of crime and violence. Instead, gang formation and gang life can be explored "as a site for ethnic identity construction."⁵³ Bangele D. Alsaybar's work on Fil Am youth and gang culture references the connection between gangs and the Filipino *barkada*, a Tagalog word referencing closely bonded communities forming at a young age for Filipinos.

Evidenced by dancing and gang culture, a reciprocal relationship has existed between Fil Am youth culture and hip hop culture. Aside from these two mediums of identity expression and formation, the musical genre of rhythm and blues has also been an outlet for Fil Am interests. Rhythm and blues intersects with hip hop culture in many different aspects as hip hop culture continues to flourish. Over the last few decades, Fil Am youth have fervently produced and patronized rhythm and blues. Intersections between rhythm and blues and hip hop are frequent throughout the history for both popular cultures.

Rhythm and Blues

As the "Golden Era" or "Golden Age"⁵⁴ of hip hop continued to produce dramatic shifts in the creativity of hip hop music and its widespread popularity during the late 1980's and early 1990's, the genre of rhythm and blues enjoyed heavy consumer success as well. The Filipino American community saw multiple artists emerge and experience some notoriety for their musical talents. Rhythm and blues' close association with hip hop culture lies not only through

⁵³ Alsaybar, "Deconstructing Deviance: Filipino American Youth Gangs, "Party Culture," And Ethnic Identity in Los Angeles," 118.

⁵⁴ James Peterson, "'Dead Prezence': Money and Mortal Themes in Hip Hop Culture," *Callaloo* 29, no. 3 (2006): 907. Peterson references a common time period that many hip hop fans reference. He highlights the Golden Age of Hip Hop as being from 1987-1993 when hip hop music was beginning to really expand commercially and in its style.

musical styling but also the communities of color producing both. For Filipino Americans, it allowed a more realistic opportunity commercially compared to hip hop culture being racialized as black culture. Hip hop culture “opened the doors for some Filipino American [R&B] artists”⁵⁵ during a time when hip hop music incorporated a heavy amount of R&B into songs. It was an era that helped bring Filipino American artists into the Asian American popular music scene as well as some limited visibility on the national mainstream stage. Some of the most popular Fil Am R&B artists such as Jocelyn Enriquez, Kai, and Pinay had a dedicated arena to perform within the Asian American community.⁵⁶

Today’s group of artists that are Filipino American or have multiethnic ties that include Filipinos have built on the artists from the 1980’s and 1990’s to land larger music contracts with bigger labels. Bruno Mars, an R&B artist with ties to Filipino and Puerto Rican lineage, has had over a million albums sold with Atlantic Records. Cassie released her debut album in 2006 with in conjunction with Bad Boy Records and was able to sell 321,000 copies of her album. Aside from the representation at a national level, the emergence of Filipino American artists is important to Fil Am youth interested in R&B and hip hop culture. Judy Patacsil’s research on Filipino role models highlighted the studies that explained the correlation for the academic success for students of color and the prevalence of ethnic and gender related role models.⁵⁷ The popularity and visibility for Filipino American R&B artists promoted the medium of music for expression.

⁵⁵ Dino-Ray Ramos, "Do You Miss Me?: Revisiting Filipino American R&B Music of the 1990s," *HYPHEN*, July 20 2011.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ N. Judy Patacsil, "Kapwa - Embracing Our Shared Identity: The Influence of Role Models on Being Filipino American" (California School of Professional Psychology/Alliant International University, 2007).

Inroads to Hip Hop

With hip hop culture's establishment and growth, the complementary relationship between Filipino American youth culture and hip hop culture became more apparent. As a culture that was born and nurtured in urban environments, hip hop was suited to be taken up by Fil Am youth. Although New York has been the focal point of hip hop culture's origins, hip hop culture developed in other spaces across the U.S. as hip hop's appeal spread quickly from its epicenter. Hip hop culture has permeated lower socioeconomic neighborhoods with its accessibility and appeal. Fil Am communities have been rooted in similar spaces mostly along the West Coast. Fil Am youth's relationship to hip hop culture was primed by the youth culture that they have established for themselves going back to the first wave of Filipino immigrants. Connections to hip hop culture for dancing, gang culture, as well as rhythm and blues promoted Fil Am youth's participation in hip hop culture and contribution to its growth.

Being products of a colonial history, Filipino Americans experience colonial mentality and struggle in their ethnic identity development. Fil Am youth culture allows optimism and hope for decolonization efforts since Fil Am youth negotiate the contradictions of their cultural experiences. Communicating to Fil Am youth and educating them about the relevance of their Filipino history can be accomplished by understanding what appeals to Fil Am youth. Hip hop culture's appeal deems it important and noteworthy for reaching Fil Am youth. Fil Am contributions to hip hop are represented across hip hop culture's history. As hip hop culture continues to grow globally as a popular culture force, its acceptance and accessibility make it a medium with a broad reach. Both positive and negative messages can be conveyed to consumers and not solely problematic imagery that is commonly perceived in the U.S.. The connection that hip hop has developed to social justice internationally highlights the scope of how hip hop can

not only educate but inspire action for positive social change. Hip hop culture has shown that it can be a tool for social justice and decolonization. Examining hip hop culture's history in the U.S. along with its global impact highlights the potential for Fil Am youth given the intersections between Filipino American history and hip hop history.

Chapter 3

I AM HIP HOP:

The Power and Potential of Hip Hop in Identity Development and Social Justice

Hip Hop Beginnings: Born of Fire

Hip hop culture's culmination as a formidable and identifiable culture has its roots in many places. The geographical areas where hip hop culture experienced rapid growth and a noticeable following were Jamaica and the Bronx, NY. During the 1970's, the Bronx was the space in which hip hop culture was born. After the building started for the Cross-Bronx Expressway through the 1950's and 1960's, the push by urban builder Robert Moses pushed the financially prosperous parts of the Bronx out while also discouraging new financiers to come into the communities he desired to clear for building the expressway. The people left in the neighborhoods surrounding the expressway would continue to fall into harder times with high unemployment rates and desperate measures taken for some people.⁵⁸ Unemployment for youth was at an even higher rate in comparison to adults. In a landscape of poverty, gang proliferation, and eager youth, hip hop culture swelled with growth after DJ Kool Herc pushed hip hop forward in the early 1970's. Getting better at deejaying from small gatherings in high school, DJ Kool Herc would deejay house parties until the demand for something bigger led to block parties. Youth culture yearned for something new in the music scene. DJ Kool Herc's gatherings promoted an alternative to gangs while hip hop culture's continued development became the new music scene. From these beginnings, hip hop culture provided a conduit to express the creativity of the underserved people in these areas while also being a way to bring attention to the struggles and hopes for these neighborhoods. Hip hop culture's beginnings in the

⁵⁸ Jeff Chang and DJ Kool Herc, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York City: Picador USA, 2005).

Bronx provided communities a way to reaffirm their presence to the rest of New York City and resist being forgotten by geopolitical decision making. Robert Moses' decision to build a bridge that bypassed the need to develop communities in the Bronx left little support for the neighborhoods to rebound. While it may not have been the initial intention for hip hop culture to draw attention to social inequities, the yearning to communicate the various struggles developed hip hop culture's accessibility and power to educate. Out of hip hop culture's many converging influences to be initially formed, it was social injustice that prepared the grounds for hip hop culture to spring forth.

Hip Hop and Youth Culture

Hip hop culture and youth culture have been linked since DJ Kool Herc was doing house parties. While hip hop culture provided a creative and expressive outlet for the poor Bronx communities forgotten by New York City's development plans, the culture began to spread to other cities whose youth gravitated towards it. Hip hop culture's popularity continued to climb while crossing race and class boundaries at times. It remained a staple in poor, urban communities because of its reputation as street culture and its beginnings in those kinds of challenged communities of color. Harking back to the safe alternative spaces for fun that DJ Kool Herc's parties provided, youth continued to advocate for peaceful interactions in their communities as seen with the efforts to bring gangs together. Despite individual gang members that detracted from forming gang peace, hip hop culture was a common element that they shared. It was important in bringing together all of the various gangs covering the Bronx for the purpose of promoting coalition.

From those early days in the Bronx, the legacy of hip hop culture and youth culture working in alliance has continued. Youth have been most energetic and willing to embrace hip hop culture's organizing power and address concerns over large, complex social justice issues like poverty, climate destruction, racism, and labor exploitation. Looking specifically at Black youth, Shawn Ginwright stated that "Black youth identity draws from the legacy of resisting white supremacist notions of blackness and reclaiming an identity that is rooted in everyday struggles."⁵⁹ He connects Black youth and their search for identity to a struggle that has reified itself in different forms which have included a "revived cultural [form] such as hip-hop culture."⁶⁰

Hip hop and youth have a complicated relationship that goes beyond a simple popular culture affinity. Mindful of how hip hop culture maintains its accessibility and its reflection of our society's ills (either explicitly or in reflecting the problems with its own issues), today's youth should be given more credit in terms of their critical sensitivity to and interpretation of the music and the culture. The *post-hip-hop generation* of today, as M.K. Asante, Jr. coins it, wants a culture that reflects their reality and their struggles.⁶¹ Asante, Jr. uses the term *post-hip-hop* as a reference to the current time period; it is a time that is after the labeled *hip-hop generation* referencing "Blacks and browns born after the civil Rights and black Power movements."⁶²

Post-hip-hop is an assertion of agency that encapsulates this generation's broad range of abilities, ideals, and ideas, as well as incorporates recent social advances and movements (i.e., the women's movement, the antiwar movement, gay rights, antiglobalization) that hip hop has either failed or refused to prioritize.⁶³

⁵⁹ Shawn A. Ginwright, *Black in School: Afrocentric Reform, Urban Youth, and the Promise of Hip-Hop Culture* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004), 31.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ M.K. Asante Jr., *It's Bigger Than Hip-Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation* (St Martins Press, 2008).

⁶² Ibid., 1.

⁶³ Ibid., 7.

Asante Jr.'s use of the word *post-hip-hop* describes today's youth population that I reference. His work in examining the current generation participating in hip hop culture acutely describes where their needs are not getting addressed by popular media's representation of hip hop culture. It is a generation that has not experienced hip hop culture—particularly the variety of subgenres that emerged in the late 1980's and early 1990's—in the same context that the *hip-hop generation* has experienced it. Despite the glitz of today's mainstream hip hop music that inundates our national airwaves and feeds into negative, racialized stereotypes, more substantive hip hop exists which speaks to a subaltern voice and represents the need for social justice. Mainstream hip hop hasn't simply developed into a tool to preserve cultural hegemony. Critically conscious hip hop must not only navigate through the damaging messages of mainstream hip hop but also the other obstacles that maintain the marginalization of their messages. Hip hop fans can maintain some optimism about the potential of hip hop to organize and influence on a larger scale by reflecting on some of the major historical accomplishments in the U.S. when looking at iconic emcees like Chuck D of Public Enemy and KRS-One. Both of these individuals typify hip hop's potential with the ways that they motivate and support enlightened and empowered messages through hip hop culture. They have based their artistry in community building and addressing social injustice—especially in Black communities. A foundation for their messages was the importance of a strong Black identity supporting a cognitive awareness of how it has been shaped.

Hip Hop and Identity

Continuing to inspire identity development, hip hop culture still allots opportunities to express the feelings and struggles for individuals and communities. As when hip hop culture

started, youth gravitated towards the “coolness” of hip hop and its association with edginess and street culture. The conflation of hip hop culture as Black culture provides a troubling assumption by mass media outlets. Hip hop culture is a major element of expression for Black communities. But hip hop culture’s global rise has been indicative of its popularity across multiple ethnic communities within the U.S. Various research developments overlapping hip hop studies, cultural studies, and ethnic studies call attention to the ways that hip hop and identity have influenced one another.

Many other communities of color can relate to the Black experience with hip hop culture due to similarities such as shared urban environments and being cast as “others” in American society. In a comparable fashion to Ginwright’s observations on the intertwining of Black youth identity and hip hop culture, other communities of color see hip hop culture as a mode of expressing identity. Nitasha Sharma’s work with South Asian communities gives more depth to hip hop culture and identity by pointing out how Desi artists showcase a wide range of racial identities. This observation works against notions of a singular, narrowly constructed idea of racial identity. “Desi artists find hip hop their preferred vehicle of expression as many aspects of this culture exemplify these same notions of resistance empowerment.”⁶⁴ Hip hop culture has been the grounds for making connections between ethnicities and cultures despite constraining ideas of ethnic identity. Hip hop culture’s appeal to youth culture can even surpass media targeting a specific ethnic population. A case study of Caribbean college age youth by Arlene Dávila revealed an apparent opposition to “Hispanic media” with their media tastes “favoring instead urban lifestyle, hip-hop formats.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Nitasha Tamar Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness* (Duke University Press Books, 2010), 28.

⁶⁵ Arlene Dávila, *Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 208.

Music is a medium that connects feelings and memory. It is also a place where “[t]he sense of ‘self is locatable [...]’” according to Tia Denora.⁶⁶ She goes on to state that “Musical materials provide terms and templates for elaborating self-identity—for identity’s identification.” For the hip hop generation, hip hop music connects them to their youth, a formidable time when they were growing up and discovering themselves. The culture beyond hip hop music has grown to encompass nostalgia of its beginnings and aforementioned “Golden Era.” As hip hop culture has changed with commercialism and capitalism, realizing the relevance of hip hop in constructively shaping identity can be overshadowed. Nonetheless, hip hop culture continues to particularly influence identity building with youth despite hip hop’s troubling portrayals that continue to headline popular media.

Hip Hop and Social Justice

Discussions about hip hop culture’s power have included the difference of opinion on whether it can spearhead revolution or if it is the soundtrack for the revolution. Regardless of how one feels about it on that binary spectrum, there are enough examples to point out that hip hop culture’s presence has been around some important social justice organizing. Through a hip hop pedagogy or the direct inclusion of hip hop culture into organizing efforts, hip hop culture can be an effective means of engaging people for social justice causes.

Brian Barry argues in Why Social Justice Matters, social justice concerns equality of opportunity.⁶⁷ From Barry’s argument, it posits that oppression develops from unfair access to scarce resources. By viewing social justice as a move to balance the amount and types of opportunities to access resources, approaches to achieving social justice can be diagnosed. Hip

⁶⁶ Tia Denora, "Music and Self-Identity," in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, ed. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank, and Jason Toynbee (New York: Routledge, 2007), 145.

⁶⁷ B. Barry, *Why Social Justice Matters* (Polity, 2003), 164-65.

hop can inform the way that social justice is understood and approached. From other musical genres and their subcultures in the U.S., other examples aside from hip hop have addressed larger social justice issues. One of the most prominent examples is Western Rock music and the ways it spoke out against the Vietnam War.⁶⁸ Hip hop sets itself apart from other contemporary musical genres and many popular culture forms by displaying a dynamically adaptive power to expand and develop from within the U.S. into a global phenomenon. Examples of hip hop culture worldwide consistently show that hip hop provides discourse and actions that speak to and counter social injustices. In a guest blog to *The Washington Post*, Paul Butler introduced his book *Let's Get Free: A Hip Hop Theory of Justice* by stating "hip-hop artists represent a community that has borne the brunt of this country's mad rush to incarcerate." Butler presents what our American justice system might look like if shaped by the people who "are most likely to be arrested and most likely to be victims of crime."⁶⁹ Observing the same understanding of oppressed people in the United States together with hip hop's globalized popularity, hip hop culture shows how to identify and address social injustices such as socioeconomic disparity, racism, and gender inequality.

There is more depth to the relationship between hip hop and social justice worldwide aside from its historical geographic origins in Jamaica and the Bronx⁷⁰. That relationship, partially obscured by the capitalist influences exerted on hip hop culture, is more difficult to discern other than hip hop culture partaking in some of the ills reflective of an unjust society.⁷¹

Michael Eric Dyson observes in his book Know What I Mean? that hip hop's global influence

⁶⁸ John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (Pearson Education, 2006).

⁶⁹ Paul Butler, "If Hip-Hop Culture Reshaped Our Justice System..." *The Washington Post*, December 1, 2009.

⁷⁰ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (Picador USA, 2005).

⁷¹ Hip hop culture has many problematic elements that have been made to seem exceptional. However, issues such as misogyny, individualism, and violence are all symptomatic of a capitalist society. Hip hop culture has received blame for these types of issues although they permeate throughout U.S. society.

plays a significant, substantial part in changing the “colonizer,” in a general sense.⁷² Using hip hop culture as a tool can recognize a complex distinction between co-optation and re-appropriation when one thinks about the current state of hip hop business in relation to blackface and minstrelsy shows from the mid-to-late 19th century into the 20th century. But Dyson acknowledges that the “colonizer” picks up on the struggle and the voice experienced by the colonized and thus internalizes the experience for the oppressed into their understanding of social justice. If the “colonizer” relates to the narrative of the oppressed, there is hope that hip hop can change the conditions for the oppressed. Moving people to take action for social justice will call upon them to understand the context for why the injustice exists in the first place.

One of the most notable examples where hip hop and social justice have combined for a social movement occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Replete with mass appeal and centered on a cultural nationalist identity, it involved Chuck D and his group Public Enemy. Addressing issues that included police brutality, impoverished conditions, and other racist and classist oppression, Public Enemy channeled the discontent of black Americans in such songs as “Fight the Power” and “911 is a Joke.” Public Enemy played a pivotal role in supporting and working off of the resurgence in Afro-centric learning and culture evident in the U.S. during this period of social transition. Public Enemy stood as more than popular culture hip hop artists. They represented the new leaders and spokespeople for black people and black culture.⁷³ It appears that Public Enemy may have instigated a recurring trend for hip hop youth to look to their favorite hip hop artists to direct their politics. In holding them to this standard, Michael Eric Dyson stresses the need to hold all of the civic leaders of the black community to the same

⁷² M. E. Dyson and Z. Jay, *Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip-Hop* (Basic Civitas Books, 2007).

⁷³ Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, 275-76.

standard.⁷⁴ This is an important observation that must be maintained, critiquing unfair representations while also advocating on behalf of, and in solidarity with, other cultural communities outside our own. Failing to build coalitions will reinforce white privilege and exacerbate the social marginalization of the communities most affected by social injustices.

Hip hop culture in San Francisco has motivated some youth to question and critique their unhealthy environmental conditions that plague their community. Eric Arnold's article, "The Greening of Hip Hop" shows us how youth actively engage with their communities to ultimately improve their conditions.⁷⁵ Ecological oppression hindering poor communities carries over from the local scene in San Francisco to impoverished peoples globally. "These days, young people are organizing around community-sustainable platforms combining social justice with a burgeoning environmental awareness."⁷⁶ The Green Youth Media Center in San Francisco builds an educating partnership with the community's youth to address the ecological concerns of the two Superfund sites next to poor communities. Giving a voice to communities with little political economy comparatively aligns with hip hop's counterhegemonic elements. Efforts by Green Youth Media Center in San Francisco and the youth participating in their organization parallels to hip hop in that they provide a means for communicating what oppression feels and looks like for their youth. Hip hop culture gets used in a similar fashion by providing a means to communicate oppressive conditions.

One organizing effort that the U.S. and parts of the world is in the midst of today is the Occupy Movement. Crossing ages, classes, and ethnicities, the coalition for Occupy has maintained its broad base. Youth have been involved in supporting Occupy while hip hop

⁷⁴ Dyson and Jay, *Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip-Hop*, 100-01.

⁷⁵ Eric Arnold, "The Greening of Hip Hop " *Race, Poverty & the Environment*(2009), <http://www.urbanhabitat.org/cj/youth>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

culture has helped to spread awareness about it as well. Emcee Jasiri X produced a song and made a music video to complement it regarding the Occupy Movement. Titled “Occupy (We the 99),” Jasiri X talks about the injustices of the class divides in the U.S. His video utilizes imagery that inspires action. Fil Am hip hop artists have been active in the Occupy Movement as well. Geologic who also goes by the name Prometheus Brown, weighed in on the Occupy Movement by writing an opinion piece in the online Al Jazeera newspaper.⁷⁷ In it, he shared the challenges he was seeing across the various Occupy encampments across the U.S. as he was continuing on the Blue Scholars’ concert tour. Amongst the different cities, he pointed out how some people of color were setting up their own committees within the Occupy Movement to address the specific concerns that people of color were experiencing in Occupy given the overwhelmingly white leadership. Prometheus Brown encouraged readers to take the initiative in joining up with the Occupy Movement despite the challenges he mentions because of his feeling that Occupy was the start of something bigger in changing an oppressive system.

Prior to Prometheus Brown’s weighing in on Occupy, Vijay Prashad wrote an online article titled “Hip Hop Occupies.”⁷⁸ Prashad brings together the various hip hop ambassadors that have had varying roles in Occupy. He cites Boots Riley of the group The Coup and the famous Fil Am DJ Kuttin Kandi from the 5th Platoon Crew in their leadership roles in Oakland, CA and San Diego, CA, respectively.⁷⁹ For the Occupy Movement, high profile moguls such as Russell Simmons and Jay-Z have also had some limited roles. Hip hop culture has taken notice and brought more youth and hip hop participants to Occupy.

⁷⁷ Prometheus Brown, "Despite Flaws, Ows Deserves Our Participation," *AL Jazeera*(2011), <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/20111123162621715786.html>.

⁷⁸ Vijay Prashad, "Hip Hop Occupies," *Counterpunch*, November 14 2011.

⁷⁹ Referencing the all Fil Am 5th Platoon Crew is significant for their influence in deejaying. From New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area, 5th Platoon deejays have competed on many deejay circuits. Arguably the most high profile member of the seven members is DJ Neil Armstrong who deejayed for Jay-Z’s national tour in 2008 and 2009 and is a current global representative for Adidas.

Not too long before the Occupy Movement pushed forward with setting up camps and protesting full force, another collaborative social justice campaign was just finishing up when Troy Davis was executed. Jasiri X had produced another track titled “I Am Troy Davis (T.R.O.Y.)” that drew the attention of many youth. The amount of media attention garnered by the Troy Davis execution made people more aware of some of the challenges that Black people and people of color face today with unfair policing. Despite significant issues with the conviction of Troy Davis, his death penalty sentence was still enforced. Jasiri X’s song and video went viral on many social networking sites. Acknowledging their sadness, other hip hop stars P. Diddy, Russell Simmons, and Big Boi of the group Outkast all utilized Twitter.⁸⁰ Big Boi was one of the most active users of Twitter to provide updates on what was happening leading up to the execution as he was part of the demonstrations outside of Davis’ Georgia prison. Employing hip hop culture into mobilized efforts has brought more notoriety to efforts while connecting youth in their relationship to social justice.

Going Global

Similar to the initial formation of hip hop culture in the Bronx, hip hop culture’s global involvement outside of the U.S. has allowed oppressed communities to relate to one another with many of its messages and its prevalence. Hip hop culture’s accessibility provided a way for hip hop to reach its wide audience. While hip hop culture has been a great way to connect people, considering the different personal politics of how it gets interpreted by various hip hop communities can mean different contexts for interpretation. Hip hop culture continues to be associated with low culture, poor communities, and Black people. The global expansion of hip hop has fueled major growth in hip hop’s influence and use as an empowering medium. Chuck

⁸⁰ "Hip Hop Stars React to Troy Davis Execution," *BET* September 22 2011.

D identified his amazement at how much hip hop culture is growing in positive ways outside of the U.S. in 2004.⁸¹ Development abroad encourages an introspective questioning of hip hop culture's perceived stagnancy in the U.S. For many other countries, hip hop culture has been going through a growth pattern similar to when it first took hold in the United States.

The demonization of hip hop culture based on popular media representations and portrayals perpetuate cultural stereotypes. It draws attention to hip hop culture while dismissing society's role in promoting the overarching messages such as violence, misogyny, greed, and individualism. It renders the more positive contributions of the culture as invisible. Hip hop culture's positive impact on coalition building, creative expression, and community organizing consistently gets overshadowed by the areas of concern. Often, hip hop culture critique becomes synonymous with a black culture critique. Yet, the growth and reach of hip hop extends it beyond its initial origins as the exclusive province of black and Latino culture. Without taking away from hip hop's roots in Black and Latino culture from New York and the Caribbean, hip hop culture now encompasses the local scenes being practiced and accessed worldwide. Each local hip hop scene includes distinct pieces like musical style, dance, and topics. The local scenes still reflect strong counter hegemonic elements in spite of their particularities. Contemporary critical views regarding power get expressed in many artist circles locally, nationally and worldwide. Hip hop culture inspires its viewers, listeners, and fans to creatively address the need for social change with its discourse of resistance. New Zealand is one site where rap has been a medium to target Maori youth as shown by the group Moana and the Moa Hunters. Underrepresented and underserved, the Maori community in New Zealand represents less than ten percent of the greater population. Moana and the Moa Hunters have infused lyrics critiquing the lack of support for Maori people and musicians while encouraging youth to be

⁸¹ Chuck D, "Chuck D Guest Lecture," (Pullman, WA: Washington State University, 2004).

active in their preservation of the culture such as language.⁸² Hip hop culture has been a way for people to connect their experiences transnationally. As people identify with hip hop culture globally, there is an imagined community in which they participate. For those accessing hip hop cultures' ability to empower and promote expression there is a strong relationship to social justice. Mohammed Yunus Rafiq, a hip hop artist from Tanzania, remembers when hip hop first came to Tanzania and how it has been useful in joining youth with Tanzanian culture. "If our cultures are going to survive, though, young people have to take it from this generation to the next—and hip-hop is making this possible. We can be tribal, and at the same time, we can also be global!"⁸³ His participation in a panel with other hip hop artists representing indigenous communities throughout the world emphasized hip hop culture's importance to them locally and globally. Language preservation, anti-oppression work, and community empowerment are just a few areas that are getting addressed by these individuals and communities using rap and hip hop culture for connecting with other people, particularly youth.

Hip Hop and Social Justice Around the World

Slingshot Hip Hop is a film that ties the history of hip hop culture to its perceptions outside of the U.S..⁸⁴ Additionally, the film also showcases the potential of hip hop to inspire and educate. Following aspiring hip hop artists in Palestine and how hip hop culture binds these artists together, *Slingshot Hip Hop* is as inspired as it is inspiring in how the highlighted individuals resist difficult conditions around them daily. Their rhymes and artistry incorporate heavy themes of anti-establishmentarianism as one can imagine in an overwhelmingly policed

⁸² Tony Mitchell, "Kia Kaha! (Be Strong!) Maori and Pacific Islander Hip-Hop in Aotearoa-New Zealand," *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (2001): 280.

⁸³ Cristina Verán, "Native Tongues: Hip-Hop's Global Indigenous Movement," in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*, ed. Jeff Chang (New York: BasicCivitas Books, 2006), 281.

⁸⁴ Jackie Salloum, "Slingshot Hip Hop," (USA, 2008).

country that doubles as a warzone. Travelling multiple hours entailing long car rides and unguaranteed entry past checkpoints, some of the hip hop artists in Palestine are willing to dedicate their time for the slightest chances that they may be able to connect with artists in other regions or to perform at a show. Their passion for hip hop culture provides an outlet for dealing with their anger at the government, war, and other daily oppressive social conditions. Incorporating social critique into their lyrics, selected artists value the opportunity to bond with one another and their audiences.

Another example of a grassroots movement that has incorporated pieces of hip hop culture can be found in Bolivia. A group that connects with this movement is *Mujeres Creando* (Women Creating). Along with the hip hop movement in Bolivia, they provide a space of resistance. *Mujeres Creando* connects disfranchised groups along gender and sexuality lines. Providing resources like computer and internet access, a health clinic, and a safe space for people in domestic violence relationships, the home base for *Mujeres Creando* tries to address inequitable access to scarce resources. One of the methods employed by *Mujeres Creando* in rebelling against a patriarchal and heteronormative government and society includes public graffiti.⁸⁵ It connects to hip hop as one of its elements. But it also connects in how it speaks to the censored needs of marginalized people. Graffiti provides “a means of directly communicating with society”⁸⁶ while pushing to “create new theoretical parameters for the possibility of women’s and men’s participation in resistance and creative response to political and social injustice.”⁸⁷ The type of graffiti that *Mujeres Creando* creates is not like the elaborate tags that one would commonly see in the U.S.. Instead, their graffiti is more succinct with single

⁸⁵ B. Dangl, *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia* (AK Pr Distribution, 2007).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

words and short phrases that agitate public spaces. Their graffiti boldly communicates the community's unmet needs and their recognition of the injustice.

Mujeres Creando relates to hip hop culture's ingenuity. As hip hop pioneer and philosopher KRS-One described the meaning of hip hop in his song *Hip Hop Lives* with another hip hop legend, Marley Marl:

*Hip means to know
It's a form of intelligence
To be hip is to be up-date and relevant
Hop is a form of movement
You can't just observe a hop
You got to hop up and do it
Hip and Hop is more than music
Hip is the knowledge
Hop is the movement
Hip and Hop is intelligent movement
Or relevant movement⁸⁸*

KRS-One speaks to the connection that hip hop has to movement at the basic physical level but more importantly on a broader social level. Furthermore, “[h]ip-hop is about seeing the something in what we are often told is nothing.”⁸⁹ This relates to the work and the goals that *Mujeres Creando* with the Bolivian hip hop movement have to do with a hip hop approach to social justice. Youth that desire to involve themselves as social change agents “are turning to hip-hop to express themselves and fight a battle outside of street protests and political elections.”⁹⁰ As quoted in Benjamin Dangl's book *The Price of Fire*, the young and popular hip hop artist *El Alto* saw hip hop as a way to “[...] preserve our culture through our music” and to be a “political voice for young Bolivians. [...] ‘With this style of hip-hop, we are an instrument

⁸⁸ KRS-One, "Hip Hop Lives," (2007).

⁸⁹ J. Chang, *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop* (Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 262.

⁹⁰ Dangl, *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia*, 171.

of struggle, an instrument of the people.”⁹¹ Rumored to be a casualty of state violence, *El Alto*’s perspectives on hip hop live on through this movement to which he strongly supported.

We can connect *Mujeres Creando* and the hip hop social movement in Bolivia through their usage of hip hop culture elements to break from the traditional outlets for resistance such as protesting. Without taking away from the method of protesting, there is an acknowledgement by these communities that something more is needed to bring attention to their issues. Seeing the gap in leftist politics in the U.S., the spectrum in far left politics and more moderate left politics differs along the lines of having a transformative vision for society versus having the ability to relate to a broad range of people. Implementing progressive political methods in the U.S. should draw these ranges together to maintain the imaginative vision while connecting and identifying with members of society.⁹² Bolivia and other places engaging revolutionary and imaginative politics provide inspiration for others aiming to curb social injustices through a progressive vision. Traditional methods of resistance will be enhanced by tactics that navigate the changing political landscape.

The social movement in South Africa incorporates hip hop in a way that maintains a balance in critical pedagogy. Hip hop in South Africa has been traced back to the 1980’s. Shaheen Ariefdien and Nazli Abrahams, two scholars interested in hip hop pedagogy and social justice, have written about South Africa and hip hop culture. “We want to see the beauty and interconnectedness in all things while still being mindful of the inequalities, challenges, boundaries, and contradictions of our daily lives.”⁹³ They acknowledge and respect hip hop for

⁹¹ Ibid., 171-72.

⁹² Stephen Duncombe, *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (New Pr, 2007).

⁹³ Shaheen Ariefdien and Nazli Abrahams, "Cape Flats Alchemy: Hip-Hop Arts in South Africa," in *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*, ed. Jeff Chang (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 263.

its “transgressive nature” and ability to “jar conventional boundaries.”⁹⁴ The challenge that may be difficult for hip hop enthusiasts in South Africa is that in spite of the respect and admiration for U.S. hip hop culture, there are also feelings of contempt for its “links to structures that are largely responsible for the devastating conditions in Third World countries.”⁹⁵ Like Bolivia, the South African hip hop movement has utilized a hip hop approach that speaks to their societal ills of poverty and underrepresentation. By drawing youth to its aesthetic, hip hop culture also provides a much more effective means of educating youth compared to traditional classroom teaching methods. Expanding the boundaries for education beyond formal classrooms and schools enables youth to connect in meaningful ways.

Along with the history of hip hop in the United States, one must be mindful of how the culture has expanded globally into an accessible medium to resist inequalities. For examples of the resilient and rebellious nature of hip hop, we can turn to places like Bolivia and South Africa to show us how it has given a platform to youth. In thinking about the influence of the hip hop movements abroad in Bolivia and South Africa and their relationship to race, it is important to not fall into the trap of a U.S.-centric view of race. Different dynamics based on demographics and racial formations in other countries such as Japan teach us that there are varying interpretations of hip hop culture that complicate our understandings in the U.S. For instance, Japanese hip hop culture gets interpreted in a fairly homogenous landscape with few foreigners and immigrants that are not of Japanese ethnicity. This contributes to a very different perception of skin color and foreignness. If we do not acknowledge differences in racial perceptions, we may miss out on the ways that hip hop speaks to race, class, and gender. One such example of how this complication plays out can be seen with the use of blackface by some Japanese hip hop

⁹⁴ Ibid., 269.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 266.

followers. Authenticity and identifying with the black American experience in a sense of honor influence this decision. While authenticity becomes a slippery slope and identifying through blackface invokes memories of an ugly American history of minstrelsy, we can point to an extreme disconnection from that history. It is not tolerable despite their desire to identify with that Black American struggle remains. Compared to the primary consumers of hip hop culture in the U.S. who are white suburban youth, this careful distinction means a difference in how each sees them connected to the struggle for black and brown communities.

From these examples, there are inferences to a hip hop ethos. Situations that draw upon a hip hop ethos in social justice don't require hip hop artists or performances to reinforce the approach. By using the core element of hip hop knowledge, the approach is already included as a part of hip hop. Hip hop culture supports the aforementioned understanding of finding something out of nothing. This can be applied in working for social justice.

Having an understanding of the reciprocal relationship between hip hop and social justice provides consumers of hip hop the opportunity to draw from components demonstrating a hip hop pedagogical approach. The tie between hip hop culture and community organizing in the global examples I have discussed signals a key unifying component. There are numerous overlaps between hip hop and social justice issues after examining the history of hip hop culture in the U.S.. Hip hop issues that have faced critique and continue to face scrutiny center on issues of lyrical misogyny, male chauvinism, and minstrelsy. These concerns are reflections of larger societal problems that extend beyond hip hop culture or even the confines of the U.S.. Addressing social ills at the local level provides a framework for a stronger and clearer connection to global social justice concerns. Along with this similarity, a consistent theme has been the influence of youth in these movements and the ways that they have embraced hip hop

culture to express themselves and communicate their concerns. The last core component drawing together the bond of hip hop to social justice is the push for interconnectivity between the local and the global. We can no longer be solely grounded in our immediate conditions if we are to combat injustices being waged globally. Through accessibility and an imaginative opposition to social injustice, a hip hop approach proves itself a viable option for the oppressed.

Hip Hop Culture

Hip hop culture offered an alternative space with more positive influence as opposed to the more prevalent gang life.⁹⁶ In the heavily Fil Am populated Los Angeles area, Lakandiwa de Leon noted that in the late 1980's, "DJ crews not only helped promote the party scene, but they also created an important cultural space that became pivotal to the formation of a Filipino American youth culture, community, and identity."⁹⁷ Growing from the 1970's when mobile DJ crews were starting to develop in the Filipino American community, Fil Am youth culture continued to embrace hip hop culture as a mode of expression and community builder. Hip hop music inspired Fil Am youth to examine their "cultural roots" and "[develop] their own cultural forms."⁹⁸ As Filipino American youth and hip hop culture grew together, Fil Am youth pushed hip hop with new dimensions such as the advent of turntablism, the art of using the turntable to make sounds along with various techniques. Hip hop has been a vehicle for Fil Am youth to express themselves in a powerful way through the culture as well as through newer cultural forms. DJ culture allowed Fil Am youth to connect to the broader hip hop culture and explore their own cultural identity as Filipino Americans. De Leon documented how Los Angeles has witnessed in the past decade the latest generation that is "seeking to build on the foundations of

⁹⁶ J. Lee and M. Zhou, *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity* (Psychology Press, 2004), 192.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 203.

past generations and bridging the gap between hip-hop culture and progressive Filipino cultural ideology.”⁹⁹ Fil Am youth culture’s relationship with hip hop accentuated not only the ways in which Filipino Americans express themselves, but also how Filipino Americans can *progressively* build their own cultural doctrines.

Fil Ams and Social Justice

Today, there are some great examples of how hip hop culture has connected local issues to transnational concerns. Along the West Coast of the U.S., there are multiple Filipino American hip hop artists conveying similar messages to fight for national democracy in the Philippines. Blue Scholars, a hip hop group hailing from Seattle, WA, has ties to the local organizing efforts of AnakBayan-Seattle. Affiliated with the umbrella organization Bayan-USA, AnakBayan-Seattle primarily organizes youth by educating people about the history of injustice in the Philippines and its effect on today’s Filipino and Filipino American population. Another Filipino American artist out of San Francisco, CA is Kiwi. His ties to the Filipino American community in San Francisco come from his organizing efforts with AnakBayan-East Bay. Yet another example of the intertwined relationship between community organizing and the hip hop culture is from Los Angeles rapper Bambu. Kabataang maka-Bayan is the organization in which Bambu primarily organizes youth and students about Filipino and Filipino American social issues and how they relate to other communities.

Blue Scholars, Kiwi, and Bambu provide a different way to view how hip hop culture continues to embrace the challenge of organizing communities around social justice concerns. Beyond their participation in community organizations, there have been collaborative efforts to raise money for these groups utilizing their hip hop artistry. Geologic and Kiwi have partnered

⁹⁹ Ibid., 204.

to do shows at various college campuses called the People Power Tour and the Stop the Killings Tour. The People Power Tour is a reference to the movement during the late 1970's in the Philippines when Filipinos rebelled against the blatantly corrupt President, Ferdinand Marcos. The People Power movement in the Philippines successfully got Marcos removed. Stop the Killings was a series of shows aimed at spreading awareness about the political killings of activists in the Philippines. Both of these tours also spread awareness about the issues plaguing the Philippines while raising money to support community organizations working to change these conditions. Using their popularity as a platform, these artists worked to educate and motivate action for social justice.

Chapter 4

HIP HOP CULTURE AND FILIPINO AMERICANS:

A Reciprocal Relationship in Identity Making

Filipino American youth may draw upon many of the same forms of adaptation, negotiation, and resistance of the parent culture, but they do so in new and sometimes transformative ways (Clarke, 1976). Although in some instances, Filipino American youth may accept their parents' strategies of invisibility, their lived experiences in American society also inspire them to perform acts of resistance in their attempt to reconcile their history and present situation. As young people grapple with the ambiguity of their experiences, the new strategies of adaptation, negotiation, and resistance play themselves out through their affiliations, practices, and cultural production.¹⁰⁰

'Digging in the crates' of the Filipino American experience and exposing unclaimed cultural spaces—such as those found in gangs and hip-hop—illuminate the ways in which the younger-generation Filipino Americans transcend cultural limbo.¹⁰¹

-Lakandiwa de Leon

A challenge for ethnic community building for American immigrant communities of color is how hybridized cultural traditions get understood and negotiated. Identity development models help to explain the complicated experiences for different communities. Filipino Americans bear a unique experience in their adjustment to the U.S. because of the colonial history of the Philippines along with the social stigmas for Filipino Americans. While building nationalist sentiment for Filipino Americans can deter coalition work with other communities, identifying with the Philippines' history of struggle can motivate Fil Ams to battle oppressive social conditions. Getting lost in identity politics, however, can leave Fil Ams without material ways to progressively push beyond apathy and into awareness and action against the oppression caused by the American empire. Targeting youth for politicization has been a goal for many social movements. The next generation of Filipino American youth shares a linkage to Filipino

¹⁰⁰ Lakandiwa M. de Leon, "Filipinotown and the Dj Scene," in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity and Ethnicity*, ed. Jennifer and Minh Zhou Lee (New York: Routledge, 2004), 194.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

history disfigured by the U.S. and colonization. Identifying as “Filipino American” is a process that questions the dominant population while promoting self-reflection. For Fil Am youth and most other American youth, popular culture plays a major influential role in determining interests. Popular culture also plays an important role in the ways that youth develop their own value systems amongst family members and with friends.¹⁰² Tapping into a widely accepted popular culture—such as hip hop—would promote an effective communication tool if used appropriately. Filipino Americans and hip hop culture have a bond that has not been widely documented although Fil Am participation in hip hop culture production and consumption has existed since hip hop’s beginnings. One factor that has prevented visibility for Fil Ams in hip hop culture has been the tightly held perceptions of hip hop *authenticity*.

In knowing that hip hop culture has a history rooted in Black and Latino culture, we also know that hip hop culture represents a global community of participants and producers. Hip hop culture often gets used synonymously with Black culture—American Black culture. Participants in hip hop culture can quickly recognize the connection between hip hop and Black communities since *authenticity* in hip hop is tightly linked with race. The linkage between hip hop and Blackness grew over the years with the lyrics of emcees and the imagery of hip hop culture reflecting popular issues and experiences surrounding Black identity. Chuck D—hip hop pioneer and icon—attested to hip hop culture’s ability to speak about Black people by famously calling hip hop the “Black CNN”.¹⁰³ Hip hop identity is so strongly linked with Blackness that a hip hop identity for non-Black participants infers that these non-Black individuals are attempting to *act Black*. Since American racial dynamics continue to operate in a Black-White context, the

¹⁰² M. Milner, *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids: American Teenagers, Schools, and the Culture of Consumption* (Theatre Arts Books, 2004).

¹⁰³

contributions to hip hop by non-Black people of color—and hip hop culture’s reciprocated impact on these communities of color—are not widely known.

Non-Black hip hop culture producers have gotten some recognition over the years. For Filipino Americans, their popularity in deejaying carved a niche of awareness. It was not until the turn into the new millennium that Fil Ams have received more acknowledgements in other parts of hip hop culture. But hip hop identities for Fil Ams and non-Black communities of color get situated within a Black framework regardless of ethnic identity. Demystifying the notion that hip hop culture is solely Black culture is necessary to see that hip hop culture informs the identity for other non-Black people as well. As hip hop culture continued to grow primarily from the contributions of Black people and capitalist opportunity began to direct parts of hip hop culture, the investment in Blackness pushed for racializing hip hop. For predominantly poor communities, the financial opportunity in hip hop culture provided a way to better one’s socioeconomic conditions in a medium used heavily for Black cultural expression. While the means of production remained in the hands of white ownership, the exploitation of hip hop culture continued a longer history of white people profiteering on Black labor. Through the political economic divide for hip hop culture’s means of production, looking beyond its rigid social ties to Blackness enables a person to see hip hop as a broader cultural force. While non-Black communities of color do not have the same level of challenges as Black people because of hip hop’s *authenticity* being branded as Blackness and popular media’s negative connotations, cross-ethnic solidarity can be formed in addressing similar subjectivities.

Popular perceptions of hip hop culture stigmatize Black people in the U.S.. Other people identifying in hip hop face social stigma as well because of their defaulted association with Blackness. From male chauvinism to violence and hyper-sexualization, stereotypes of hip hop

culture translate to stereotyping Black people. Typecasting Black people and hip hop culture as a lower class and uneducated culture overshadows the more positive messages and imagery that get little recognition. The entrepreneurial effect on hip hop culture makes it difficult to discern which pieces of hip hop culture remain comparable to being the “Black CNN” or a Black Entertainment Television (BET) soap opera. Cultural productions in hip hop that reinforce negative portrayals reflect our wider society’s collateral interest in maintaining race, class, and gender divisions. Hip hop culture proves an easy target for denunciation because it remains a high profile social influence. Delving past oversimplifications of ethnic participation in hip hop culture requires the examination of hip hop’s integration with the historical context for that community.

Contemplating hip hop culture’s intersections with Filipino Americans—and non-Black communities of color—requires mapping the ethnographic landscape for Fil Ams while cognitively recognizing positionalities with Black people and Black culture. Remembering hip hop culture’s roots in the Black and Latino peoples in New York and Jamaica is important. It is also important to recognize hip hop’s roots in lower socioeconomic classes. Recognizing hip hop’s growth in multiple, overlapping communities asserts that hip hop culture did not simply grow in one ethnographic region; hip hop culture grew across the U.S. and spread overseas. Hip hop’s association with low culture relates to the larger numbers of lower socioeconomic communities and people of color in the production and participation of hip hop. For Fil Am youth during hip hop’s early development, they were located primarily along the west coast of the U.S. in urban areas. Accessibility to hip hop for Fil Am youth and other people of color made it easy for hip hop culture to take hold.

As Lakandiwa de Leon noted in his research of Fil Am deejay culture in Southern California, hip hop culture, along with gang culture, has been an outlet for Filipino American youth to “transcend cultural limbo.”¹⁰⁴ The “limbo” that he mentions is in reference to the complexity of cultural citizenship for Fil Ams given how Filipino history has been appropriated to justify imperialist interests. Deejay culture for Fil Ams often gets the bulk of attention when examining the history for Fil Ams and hip hop culture. Although attention to deejaying is deserved for Fil Am history, it is not the first time that hip hop culture has been utilized for identity expression. For example, Joe Bataan’s contribution to music and to hip hop gets overlooked. The Sugarhill Gang and other early hip hop artists emerged into the public limelight slightly sooner and overshadowed Bataan’s popularity.¹⁰⁵ Bataan directly showed how the music and culture synchronously worked with his own identity as exemplified by his album title *Afro-Filipino*. A multiethnic artist, Bataan represented the first Asian American to record a hip hop song. Regarding his hit song “Rap-O, Clap-O”, he “claimed that the song was recorded prior to the release of both the Fatback Band’s ‘King Tim II (Personality Jock)’—recognized as the first rap record—and the Sugarhill Gang’s ‘Rapper’s Delight,’ the first breakout rap hit.”¹⁰⁶ His claim to these two precedents highlights a longer presence for Filipino Americans in hip hop culture.

The influence of Fil Am hip hop culturists greatly expanded from Joe Bataan’s early contributions to their visibility today. It is not to say that the visibility has reached an omnipresent level. But the emergence of Fil Am culturists into more notoriety encourages the next generation of youth with either strong or developing ties to Filipino American identity.

¹⁰⁴ de Leon, "Filipinotown and the Dj Scene."

¹⁰⁵ Oliver Wang, "Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity, and the Asian American Mc," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

Recognizing the role of the emcee and its power to communicate messages, the “rising generation of politically conscious Filipino American emcees”¹⁰⁷ provides a medium to shape the perspective of Fil Am youth. Anthony Kwame Harrison observed the power of performance when witnessing a live show that included the artist Kiwi. Harrison recalls that “what particularly stood out for me that first time was the extent to which his hip hop performance was so consciously Filipino”¹⁰⁸ after seeing Kiwi in 2002. Tying performance to identity rooted not only in hip hop identity but also Fil Am identity invokes the histories for both cultures explicitly and implicitly. The emergence of “politically conscious” Fil Am emcees promotes confidence and a sense of belonging in hip hop culture for Fil Am youth that had previously been more discreet with the lack of recognizable Fil Am hip hop artists. The role of emcee enhances the longer impact of Fil Ams in other areas of hip hop culture. It opens up conversations such as Filipino history, cultural nationalism, and identity for Fil Am youth dealing with cultural hybridization and cultural citizenship. Expanding on these identity issues strengthens self-love and personal understanding. At the same time, they can be pitfalls to collective action and pan-ethnic collaborations by emphasizing one’s own ethnic affiliation. Hip hop culture’s advocacy for inclusion despite the prevalent notions of *hip hop authenticity* can provide support for pan-ethnic coalitions.

Going through childhood with symbols of Filipino culture in the household, language, food, and other signifiers of Filipino identity makes it very apparent for Fil Am youth that their ethnicity differs from the majority. Although the lifestyle may be normalized in the household, youth culture and systems of popularity get created in their experiences with peers and in the public sphere. These value systems do not necessarily make sense or align with what parents

¹⁰⁷ A.K. Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (Temple Univ Pr, 2009), 132.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

and other generations may see as important elements. An interesting dynamic for many rap artists and their audience is the generation that they represent. For the Filipino American interviewees that are examined more closely in Chapter 5, they fall into the *hip-hop generation* as described earlier. They are able to connect with youth despite their generational differences. Relating to youth comes from the interviewees' effective usage of hip hop culture to encourage youth self-expression while communicating critically conscious messages. Wielding hip hop culture as a tool for organizing and communicating with youth can transcend Fil Am generational gaps by relating to the experiences of youth and their value systems. Along with developing pride in identifying as Fil Am, many of the Fil Ams interviewed in Chapter 5 have also addressed topics and issues that overlap into other ethnic communities.

Shared Geographic Spaces

The communities where Filipino Americans in the U.S. have established themselves have played a part in the shared culture that Fil Ams have with other ethnic communities. Many areas that have high percentages of Filipino Americans have also been highly populated with Black people. Proximity and interaction between both communities supported many similarities that are more notably associated with black communities in the U.S. Some aspects of the shared culture include rhythm and blues music, gang culture, and also car culture. For non-Black people involved in all of these subcultures, the prevailing assumption in the U.S. is that those individuals and communities are trying to *act Black* without the context for why non-Black people are immersed in these respective subcultures.

Deeper connections between Filipino American and Black communities go beyond rhythm and blues, gang culture, and car culture. Social movements during the 1960's and Third World struggle are two major connections that bond the Fil Am and Black experience together.

Although the figureheads and the people associated with the Civil Rights Movement are predominantly Black, the coalitions formed in struggle highlight the plight of people of color. Social justice was needed for Filipino Americans as it was for Blacks. This tradition of supporting one another explains the shared cultures we see more recently between both communities today. It is not the more prevailing reasoning that Fil Ams and non-Blacks are simply appropriating culture although this does occur. The challenge of examining Fil Am youth culture is to recognize the overlapping experiences that Fil Ams have shared with other communities and not fall into the trap of exclusively bonding cultures to ethnicity.

Ethnic Identity and Community Building

Filipinotown in Los Angeles and Manilatown in San Francisco are two enclaves that typify the type of sociogeographic settling for many Filipino Americans. Urban metropolises whose Filipino American communities have established their roots for quite some time continue to attract other Fil Am immigrants with the way that these areas provide an emulation of life in the Philippines including people, language, food, and other Filipino signifiers. Aside from these more defined regions of *Filipinoness*, the imagined communities for Filipino Americans influence how they are able to sustain a strong relationship to other Fil-Ams. The regular occurrence for Filipinos to leave the Philippines to alleviate financial burden maintains the enclaves of Filipino Americans across the U.S. Leaving one's homeland out of necessity instead of want is a key difference that supports why Fil Ams would want to stay connected to their Filipino communities. Fil Ams that are leaving the Philippines because they lack realistic wage earning options signifies that they are not actively seeking to abandon their country.

Many hindrances exist in the Filipino American community that prevents transformative and progressive community building. These hindrances exist along class, gender, and generational lines. Many of these distinctions get carried over from the hierarchical reasoning in the Philippines. From regional lineage to skin tone complexion, the undertones of entitlement have carried on from the colonial influence in the Philippines to the U.S.

The generational gap for Filipino Americans has been exacerbated by the range of experiences with assimilation and integration into American society. Challenges brought on by our colorblind society are drastically different from the “separate but equal” mentality in the middle of the twentieth century. Bringing together the elder and younger generations of Filipino Americans requires a better understanding of how adapting to life in the U.S. has changed and stayed the same over the past century. Finding a common ground for understanding between Filipino Americans remains a huge obstacle since one of the biggest hindrances to shared dialogue is that of the “crab mentality.” The “crab mentality” references the way that crabs in a bucket will react individualistically to save themselves by stepping on the other crabs. At the same time, crabs will pull the others down in order for their own benefit. Negative feelings towards other Filipino Americans’ success have infiltrated the Filipino American culture. Colonialism and capitalism support the competition between Filipino Americans since it halts any collective effort to overthrow socioeconomic inequities.

The establishment of colonial mentality within Filipinos has complicated and confused Filipino American identity formation. Valorization of whiteness is reified prominently when looking at the profitable industry of skin whitening creams—a product that can be found in most markets. It coincides with the standards for beauty in the Philippines and the Filipino diaspora.

Hip Hop and Identity

Hip hop has helped to inform people's identity since its growth in the 1970's Bronx. As hip hop culture continued its influential growth in the American public sphere, its growth worldwide allowed other communities the same outlet of identity. Intricately tied to one another, identity formation and expression powerfully support confidence and self-awareness in individuals as well as for communities.

Nitasha Sharma showcased how hip hop culture has bonded South Asian Americans to Black communities despite the differences in socioeconomic relations.¹⁰⁹ Hip hop culture has been the medium for the negotiation of South Asian ethnic identity and American popular culture. It has not been solely limited to South Asian Americans as there are other immigrant communities—overwhelmingly of color—who have participated in hip hop culture as a means of re-forming their identity. But the ways in which hip hop culture is a tool for identity formation and critical consciousness does have its intricacies and differences related to the historical events and relationships for global communities with the U.S. Similar experiences with U.S. imperialism and colonialism—in the case of the Philippines and Puerto Rico—bond people in struggle. Yet, there are nuances in positionalities and in the possibilities for different ethnic communities. Through the examination of how people linked in race and class struggle can build coalitions through hip hop culture, we can be better positioned to understand its power to uplift different ethnic communities while acknowledging differences.

Hip hop can be a difficult medium for understanding one another—especially in regards to lyricism. “One of the communication elements that resists white supremacy and co-optation

¹⁰⁹ Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness*.

has been the self-conscious incomprehensibility of hip hop lyricism.”¹¹⁰ Coded language rooted in Black history has in itself been a method for cross-cultural relations in addition to intercultural communication. Language enables a sense of belonging for hip hop participants irrespective of their positionality to hip hop culture.

Understanding hip hop culture and its use in other spaces outside of the U.S. particularly exhibits its organizing power within oppressed socioeconomic communities. Acknowledged already, *Slingshot Hip Hop* documents the growing following of hip hop culture in one of the harshest geopolitical spaces in the world, Palestine.¹¹¹ The movie represents a prime example of how hip hop culture can bring people together despite extreme living conditions. While following the lives of the Palestinian emcees, the film depicts hybridized hip hop culture including Arabic lyrics, call-response performances, and a war torn backdrop. Because of the resentment towards Western culture due to its negative impact on Palestine and the entire Middle East, hip hop culture gets criticized for being American.¹¹² Aside from that, the lyrical content reflects the political perspectives of their environment. The highlighted artists discuss the challenges they face in a police state. But they remain unified in their collectivity.

Hip Hop and U.S. Communities of Color

Non-Black communities of color in the U.S. relate to hip hop culture in similar ways that Black communities do. It is not my intention to imply that every community of color is distinctly bonded and essentialized through hip hop culture; however I do wish to imply that the

¹¹⁰ Imani Perry, "My Mic Sound Nice: Art, Community, and Consciousness," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*

ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2012), 511.

¹¹¹ Salloum, "Slingshot Hip Hop."

¹¹² Usama Kahf, "Arabic Hip-Hop: Claims of Authenticity and Identity of a New Genre," in *That's the Joint!*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2012).

significance of “authenticity” in hip hop along racial lines makes race and ethnicity easily identifiable markers in examining hip hop history’s participants. From Chicano/a to Desi to Puerto Rican, different communities incorporate their ethnicities into their participation or have it demarcated for them.

Chicano/as in California provided their own unique interpretation and expression of hip hop culture as evidenced through car culture, Spanglish, and gang culture. *Authenticity* in hip hop has revolved around race, class, and gender; Black, lower socioeconomic status, and male are the associated perceptions of authentic hip hop culture producers. A different determinant that undergirds race, class, and gender comes from the idea of “keeping it real.” Documenting the challenges of real life creates an expectation that hip hop culture brings an uncut and edgy presentation of the urban lifestyle. Portraying the hardships of your community presents an understanding of struggle. Misrepresenting one’s self and/or community can leave hip hop participants feeling unsatisfied and unsupportive.

Identity politics provide opportunities for people of color in the U.S. to negotiate their own self-understanding with the dominant white American culture. Popular culture forms are outlets to express identity exploration, especially youth culture. It is important to note that engaging with questions of identity do not necessarily yield a productive understanding of self. For Filipino Americans, the contradictions of historical narrative or lack thereof, complicate the identity formation process.

Referring once again to the movie *The Debut*, it highlights the negotiation of assimilation and cultural citizenship for its main character, Ben Mercado. Living in a community with a high percentage of Fil Ams, viewers can see that Ben differs from his older sister in that he has not readily adopted any accepted Filipino cultural traditions and his closest friends are White. His

character expresses feelings of shame towards Filipino culture as well as being unwilling to share his Filipino identity with his White friends. The basis for Ben's internalized oppression does not get related to the Philippines' colonization, but it does get traced back to the generational differences between Ben and his dad, Roland. The story relates to the experiences for Filipino American families dealing with the struggles endured as immigrants attempting to sacrifice their labor for their children's future.

Generational rifts in the Filipino American community often result from the difference in social pressures. For Filipino American parents that immigrated to the U.S., many were forced to seek higher paying job opportunities to support family back in the Philippines. The normalization for Filipino peoples to move abroad in search of work counters the Americanized ideal for having a nuclear family. Although divorce rates are high in the U.S., the idea of the nuclear family is still upheld as the standard for normal. Second generation Filipino American youth do not get to reconcile their parents' sacrifices into their own experiences of privilege. Later generations of Fil Am youth undergo similar challenges of acceptance in U.S. society dealing with institutionalized racism except they are further removed from the adverse conditions most Philippine citizens face.

Although there are privileges that second generation and later generation Filipino Americans experience, there continues to be a rift between older and newer Fil Am generations over activism. Despite the experiences that elder Fil Ams had during the Ferdinand Marcos regime in the Philippines from the late 1960s to 1980s, contrasting approaches to activism with Fil Am youth today remain evident as first cited with Renato Constantino in 1971.¹¹³ In the same spirit as Constantino, I do not want to label the difference in Filipino American generations as merely a "generation gap." Such an ambiguous reference as "generation gap" conjures ideas

¹¹³ Constantino, "Parents and Activists."

of clearly delineated age groups while reducing difference solely to age. Constantino's nationalist insight into parent-children relationships in the Philippines examines the components of generational difference when it comes to activism. He points out that parents with activist children must come together across differences in order to push for progressive social change. Constantino identifies fundamental differences in the framework for solving problems that both generations recognize. His work befits the social landscape for Filipino Americans today with evident rifts between parents and youth that go beyond "mere rebellion against authority."¹¹⁴ Since reconciling Filipino history for Fil Am youth leads to distorted American exceptionalism in the accounts of a colonial past, it leaves Fil Am youth with incongruent understandings of their material worldview. For Fil Am youth that may not necessarily be looking to consciously engage in the political struggle of anti-racist work, Constantino is confident in their path when he states:

Activists know that every aspect of life has a political dimension; even the relation with one's parents is part of the overall political struggle. Parents whose children are not activists may view developments with more detachment but they are still puzzled and apprehensive. Many of the uncommitted among the young, if they are honest and patriotic, will eventually join the movement for revolutionary change because of the flow of history cannot be denied. Consequently, no one can remain wholly untouched by the problem.¹¹⁵

With the continued engagement of new Fil Am youth in progressive organizations linked to the Philippines' struggle, the "movement for revolutionary change" remains relevant today. Finding productive outlets to feed their curiosity and organize with others is more accessible for Fil Ams today with multiple groups striving to involve youth.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Filipino Americans and Social Activism

The ways that Fil Am youth born after the Vietnam War are influenced and made aware of social issues has changed along with their understanding of social activism. Immigration laws changed and allowed a new wave of Filipinos to enter into the U.S.. E. San Juan Jr. points to the absence of the older generation of Filipinos, or “Manongs,” for guidance and the increased emphasis on being the “model ‘multicultural American’” as strong factors steering social action away from collectivity.¹¹⁶ In light of this change, there are active organizations in the U.S. that connect themselves and the challenges for Filipino Americans to the struggle in the Philippines.

Of those organizations attempting to progressively connect the continued struggles in the Philippines, three U.S. based organizations work in conjunction with their larger umbrella organizations in the Philippines. One of the prominent community organizing groups targeting Fil Am youth is the Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP) or the Union of Democratic Filipinos.¹¹⁷ Emerging in the 1970’s, the KDP has built on a tradition of activism for Filipino Americans while incorporating youth activists with the elderly Manongs. Its largest organizing effort was put into the anti-martial law movement brought on by former Philippines’ President, Ferdinand Marcos, during the late 1970’s. A mix of old and young members, the KDP still lacked wider recognition and backing of the larger contingent of followers on various civil rights projects. The KDP’s “strategy for community empowerment was two-fold: to intervene in U.S. anti-racist struggles, and organize support for the Philippine national democratic revolution including militant opposition to the Marcos regime.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ E. San Juan, *Toward Filipino Self-Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization* (State Univ of New York Pr, 2009), 141.

¹¹⁷ F.W. Ho and C. Antonio, *Legacy to Liberation: Politics & Culture of Revolutionary Asian Pacific America* (AK Press, 2000), 31.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

Another organization is BAYAN-USA. The organization has a direct linkage to the Philippines' parent group, BAYAN-Philippines.

BAYAN-USA is an alliance of progressive Filipino groups in the U.S. representing organizations of students, scholars, women, workers, and youth. As the only international chapter of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN-Philippines), BAYAN-USA serves as an information bureau for the national democratic movement of the Philippines and as a campaign center for anti-imperialist Filipinos in the U.S.¹¹⁹

The connection for Filipino Americans to other communities is important. The last sentence of their description identifies BAYAN-USA as a "campaign center for anti-imperialist Filipinos in the U.S." It allows the organization to stress coalition from nationalism.

One last group that stands out for its efforts primarily targeting women is GABRIELA USA comprised of Babae (San Francisco), "FiRE (New York / Filipinas for Rights and Empowerment), Pinay sa Seattle (Seattle), and SIGAw (Los Angeles / Sisters of Gabriela, Awaken)."¹²⁰ As affiliated organizations linked to GABRIELA Philippines, these groups are in direct solidarity with transnational efforts to address Filipino injustices.

Community organizing efforts led by many Fil Am interest groups recently pushed forward a civil rights project. Filipino World War II veterans had contracts entitling them to receive benefits following their service. Youth activists collaboratively worked with older Fil Am organizers to spread awareness and legal action reinstating those benefits. A broad based coalition, Fil Am organizers educated others about the inequities continuing today for an aging population that only has a few still alive. Families of deceased Filipino WWII veterans were targeted as beneficiaries for reparations as well. The collective effort of the newer Filipino American generation with Manongs highlighted a connected struggle for justice. The push for

¹¹⁹ "About Bayan-USA," http://bayanusa.org/?page_id=2.

¹²⁰ "Babae - Gabriela-USA," http://www.babaesf.org/?page_id=5.

veteran benefits symbolized the potential of the Fil Am community to fight concertedly for a social justice issue.

Filipino Americans and Hip Hop

An emergence of Filipino American emcees over the past decade brought more light to the engagement and contributions for Fil Am hip hop artists. It has been the visibility and popularity of the emcee that has aided in the recent recognition. Further back, Fil Ams have been connected with hip hop culture through all of the original four elements of the culture. Of the limited amount of Fil Am hip hop artists still today, something apparently seems influential to guide many of these artists to use hip hop culture as a tool of *resistance*. Different parts of hip hop culture have attracted Fil Ams to participate in it and produce it. With a more deeply seated relationship to hip hop, the more recent notoriety of Fil Ams in hip hop culture should not be simply reduced to an appropriation of Black culture. Hip hop culture is a part of Black culture and often gets used interchangeably with it; however, it essentializes Black culture and disclaims Fil Am relations with it. Having a recent advent of Fil Am artists involved in hip hop culture the past decade, the topic that my research explores is how their emergence developed. *Conscious* hip hop has proven to be lucrative. But, a Fil Am population with little recognition in hip hop culture has produced a much higher amount of socially conscious art in comparison to Black artists. Dismissing it as coincidence appears abrupt considering the subjective status for the Philippines to the U.S.; the population differences between Fil Ams and other communities of color stands out when thinking of this trend.

From the San Francisco area, Filipino American emcee, Kiwi, has been one of the pioneers for socially conscious lyrics bringing awareness to Filipino and Fil Am oppression.

“Kiwi is one of the forerunners in a rising generation of politically conscious Filipino American emcees.”¹²¹ Kiwi still performs today although not as actively compared to his time with the Native Guns with Bambu and DJ Phatrick.

Blue Scholars’ Geologic and Sabzi have enjoyed enough success and popularity as independent artists that they have been able to sustain themselves financially through their music and work. Without a record label and their distribution avenues, other primary jobs are usually needed. Their decision to maintain most of their autonomy and control resists the conventional capitalist avenues utilized to keep producing music. Now living in Seattle, the Blue Scholars’ music gets tabbed as the sound for hip hop in the Pacific Northwest amidst other artists. They have been big proponents of the local scene as products of it and do many songs that reference Seattle, WA.

Resistance and Refashioning Self

Filipino Americans—and many other immigrant communities—have been dealing with double consciousness since the first Filipinos landed in the U.S. from trade ships during the 15th century. The challenges of racism in America and the class pressures to support family members in the Philippines pushed the waves of Filipinos throughout the 20th century to live in enclaves. Carlos Bulosan’s personal account of moving to the U.S. highlights a common lifestyle for Filipino men in America during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Bulosan’s account of migrant living, white supremacy, and the yearning for family and acceptance describes the pressure of adapting to the U.S. while also maintaining a personal identity rooted in Filipino culture. Developing an understanding of resistance and what it meant in America at the time was learned

¹²¹ Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification*, 132.

both on personal and community levels. For the simple goal of survival, resistance was understood intuitively and through learning from others' experiences.

Opposition to Hip Hop Culture

Despite its positive impacts on Filipino American youth, hip hop culture continues to be demonized by some as a distraction. The National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) recently produced a study that looked at ten urban communities and their Filipino American K-12 youth. In the research findings, one of the reasons for poor academic performance in the Seattle area was that “[t]oo many Filipino kids are involved in hip hop and prefer dancing and singing to studying and earning academic awards.”¹²² Despite helping Filipino American youth to push their expression forward, hip hop culture faces condemnation. The negative assumptions about hip hop culture should come as no surprise since hip hop regularly receives critique about its problematic themes. It is even more concerning that the blame for hip hop often has racialized inferences most often targeted at the Black community in the U.S. NaFFAA’s report on Filipino American youth lacks a juxtaposed pro-hip hop culture perspective on how Fil Am youth are utilizing hip hop progressively. Instead of incorporating the cross-cultural relationships that Fil Am youth develop with other ethnic communities, the NaFFAA report unknowingly attacks the connection that Fil Am youth have made with each other and other communities of color. Rather than dismiss this one sentence in a lengthy report, it needs to be challenged because of the implications. NaFFAA’s findings signal a sentiment towards hip hop culture for many older Filipino Americans. Lacking the understanding of youth culture is a prevalent relationship dynamic for older adults in the U.S. However, the suggestion of hip hop culture as a distraction to “studying and earning academic awards” invokes the

¹²² A. Barretto Ogilvie, "Filipino American K-12 Public School Students: A Study of Ten Urban Communities across the United States," (Washington, D.C.: National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA), 2008), 126.

racialization of Filipino Americans and where they fit into Asian America. Since hip hop culture gets racialized as Blackness and Black culture, the association of Filipino American youth with hip hop culture debunks much of what the Model Minority Myth represents. Stereotyped images of the dedicated pupil excelling in school and surpassing other ethnic communities are challenged with hip hop culture according to this report. Instead of “wedging” Asian American and Black communities apart, hip hop culture highlights a different narrative that goes against Model Minority Myth characteristics.

Throughout its existence, hip hop culture has been a reflection of many other cultures as well as our larger U.S. society. Growing in its connection to community, hip hop faces the same challenges as other popular cultures that become mainstream cultures.

Filipino Americans, Hip Hop and Social Justice

A common debate regarding hip hop and revolutionary thought revolves around the role that hip hop music plays with education and action; whether it is the catalyst or the soundtrack to the *movement*.¹²³

Resistance

The Philippines has endured the onslaught of imperialism for over 500 years. From Spain’s “discovery” of the Philippines to the United States’ continued colonization and militarization of the Philippines, defiant objection to foreign rule has been present since initial foreign colonization efforts in the Philippines. The power of recounting the history between the Philippines and the U.S. dominantly remains an American perspective, especially with U.S.

¹²³ The *movement* or *revolution* references an abstract understanding of social consciousness and actions to address social justice.

educational system indoctrinated in the Philippines.¹²⁴ The so-called *benevolent assimilation* perspective of U.S. foreign relations in the Philippine gets retold.

Representation

“Represent” is a theme that connects individuals and groups in hip hop to larger communities whether it be neighborhoods, cities, countries or other elements that evoke pride. Whether it is for a physical or an imagined community, *representin’* in hip hop culture elicits a strong drive to earn respect for an individual and their affiliation with a community. Acceptance, rejection or lack of recognition from a group can spur people to carve out a space in which they can reciprocate acknowledgement for their ideas and actions.

For hip hop culture, the more popular engagement for Filipino Americans was through the element of deejaying. The appeal of deejaying for Filipino Americans stems from a documented history of participation particularly in California. Filipino American mobile deejays established an identifiable association of Filipino American youth to hip hop culture.

Expression

Finding spaces that support the expression of Filipino American issues and feelings can be challenging. However, there have been some prominent groups to bring out the concerns for Filipino Americans in the U.S.

In Seattle, WA, the legacy is strong for the isangmahal arts collective. In Tagalog, “isang mahal” roughly translates to “one love” in English. Arguably the most popular former member of isangmahal, George “Geo” Quibuyen of the hip hop duo Blue Scholars furthered his lyrical artistry and ability to express through spoken word. Although not limited to only Filipino American participation, isangmahal was readily identifiable in the Filipino American community. Reaching out to other artists in the Seattle area and many other communities such

¹²⁴ Constantino, "The Miseducation of the Filipino."

as Chicago, New York, and areas in Los Angeles, isangmahal inspired many other artists to courageously express their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. After attending an isangmahal show or interacting with established members of the collective, it should not come as a surprise that one of their taglines, “love is love,” fits their group well. Despite a notable population of Filipino Americans in Seattle, spaces of cultural expression still lacked.¹²⁵ isangmahal helped to build community and work against the misunderstanding between generations for many Filipino Americans. “Filipino Americans, like all immigrant groups, face enormous pressure to fit into society. The pressure to assimilate new values and to let go of established ties can tear apart individuals, families and communities. Building connections across generations and perspectives is one way to help to keep this from happening.”¹²⁶

Relationship to Hip Hop in the Philippines

With such a limited amount of scholarship on Filipino Americans and hip hop culture, it is not a surprise that an even smaller amount of work is done on hip hop in the Philippines. While there have been many American cultural traditions, symbols, and nostalgia left in the Philippines from colonization, hip hop culture has not taken hold as it has in the U.S. The association of hip hop culture in the Philippines with low culture and Black Americans has been the aspect that has caught on for Filipinos. The production of hip hop culture in the Philippines gets widely perceived as inauthentic with the same authenticity framework for hip hop culture here in the U.S.¹²⁷

“Bridging the Gap” – From the Philippines to the U.S.

¹²⁵ K. Knight and M. Schwarzman, *Beginner's Guide to Community-Based Arts* (New Village Pr, 2005), 89.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷

The album title “Bridging the Gap” from the hip hop group Black Eyed Peas appropriately describes what their Fil Am group member apl.de.ap represents for hip hop culture. apl.de.ap is well known in the Fil Am community because of the pop culture stardom that the Black Eyed Peas have received. He has used his status to create a few songs and music videos that highlight Filipino and Fil Am experiences he has also welcomed criticism for not using his popularity for more critically conscious purposes. Limited Fil Am pop culture icons force the few with Filipino heritage to be revered. Fame for these few people encourages higher standards in the ways they represent the Filipino and Fil Am community. A link for Philippine hip hop culture and the Fil Ams in hip hop culture, apl.de.ap’s song references a childhood in the Philippines and his immigrant story that tells of American challenges.

As expected, the narrative of struggle in the Philippines takes on a different tone compared to in the U.S. Although the struggle is interconnected, Fil Am youth are not aware of it. Popular culture carries a heavy impact when evaluating what topics and issues influence youth. The relevance of popular culture in youth status systems indicates its power. Fil Am youth experience similar pressures in their status systems. At the same time, popular culture is not directly reflecting and deconstructing the experiences for Fil Ams and their identity development let alone transnational struggle. The lack of Filipino American leaders at the national level has left leadership to the smaller local levels. Generational challenges in the Fil Am community have pushed youth to navigate their cultural citizenship with popular culture not necessarily providing answers. Popular culture’s power to influence has been rarely utilized in progressive and positive ways. When it has been productive in inciting community action, it is difficult to credit popular culture in addition to preventing cooptation. Seeing the fruits of progressive popular culture usage invites further exploration in directing its power. As apl.de.ap

and the Black Eyed Peas have gone on to other projects and moved into the limelight of their popularity, the *underground* hip hop scene has ushered in new emcees to push forward politically charged messages.

Reciprocity in Identity Making

Connections between Filipino Americans and hip hop culture have existed since hip hop culture's early beginnings. Rather than seeing the history between the two starting at that point, it is necessary to see the trajectory for their convergence dating further back in Filipino American history. Similarities between Filipino Americans and other immigrant communities of color have led to shared experiences and hybridized cultural traditions. Synonymously associating hip hop culture as solely being Black culture inhibits the history of struggle that communities have shared since hip hop culture was born out of that same coalition.

Beyond informing identity, hip hop culture has permeated the experiences of many Filipino Americans in terms of their perspectives, approaches, and mentality. Filipino Americans battle the overbearing colonial narrative of U.S. nationalism. By developing their own nationalism rooted in the critical consciousness and self expression of Filipino identity, the latest generation of Filipino American youth has continued a legacy of American popular culture involvement.

Chapter 5

FIL AM, HIP HOP CULTURE, AND RESISTANCE

As the prominence of Filipino Americans in hip hop culture has risen since the turn of the 21st century, there have been other popular culture icons which have cropped up in the U.S. They have contributed to building pride in identifying as Filipino. Examining hip hop culture and the recent Filipino American artists involved with hip hop culture production provides an opportunity to explore their impact as well as their perspective on their emergence and notoriety. My research project seeks to uncover any relationships that might exist between Filipino Americans, hip hop culture, and “resistance.” Of the Filipino American hip hop emcees to gain significant recognition beyond their local communities, a higher percentage of Fil Am hip hop artists incorporate “conscious” messages in their artistry or community involvement. Are there related reasons that have spurred on their presence? If so, what factors have influenced their shared success with such messages?

Other communities of color in the U.S. have substantial connections to hip hop culture outside of Black populations. Undeniably, Black communities’ roles in growing hip hop culture into worldwide recognition are easily identified. However, lesser profiled communities have had complementary roles in hip hop culture’s acceptance and usage. Nitasha Sharma’s work, *Hip Hop Desis*, offers some direction in the way she looked at the involvement of desis in hip hop culture.¹²⁸ Pointing out that the participation by desis in hip hop culture cannot be simply described as an admiration of “Black cultural expressions,” Sharma notes that the subjectivity of desis as “foreigner” is beyond their own control. For white Americans, the decision to participate and associate with what American society deems low culture is a choice. Just as

¹²⁸ Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness*, 21.

Sharma's work uncovered the layers of desis and hip hop culture, the unique subjectivity for Filipino Americans underscores the needs for further investigation.

Through qualitative studying, this research displays how Fil Ams in hip hop culture are linking their artistry with a voice of resistance. Hip hop culture's relevance in U.S. popular culture makes it an important area of study. But the negative social aspects of hip hop culture continually make it dismissible as a legitimate agitator for social justice in the eyes of many in the American public. As the noticeable engagement of Fil Am youth and hip hop culture spurs moves for social justice, should people pushing for social justice take notice? Do Fil Ams even recognize or care about hip hop culture's influence on their thinking and learning? How do various Fil Am artists relate their experiences in their art? All these questions relate to the ways that Fil Ams engage with their colonial history and rail against oppression.

Of the Fil Ams interviewed in this research project, there were various individuals chosen to complement the Fil Am artists playing a more direct role in utilizing hip hop culture. The artists have enjoyed success in terms of their media exposure, album sales, and fan base. All of the chosen interviewees have interwoven relationships and connections to one another. Geographically, all of the interviewees currently live along the West coast of the U.S. with only one, DJ Kuttin Kandi, having lived the majority of their life elsewhere. There are other hip hop culture producers that identify as Filipino outside of the ones chosen for this study. But the participants in this research have substantial experience and knowledge in the intersections of Filipino American community organizing, hip hop culture, and youth culture. Exploring the aims of the culture producers, the texts that they are producing and the reception of what they

have produced are incorporated elements in each interview. These three aspects of hip hop culture align with how Cultural Studies functions to examine various operations of culture.¹²⁹

Interviewees

Eleven people participated in interviews typically lasting between one to two hours. As mentioned, the participants have various connections to hip hop culture. Of the eleven, four are predominantly labelled as emcees. Two are deejays; one of them with world recognition and one with localized popularity and connections to performance arts groups. Another participant is an apparel designer. Two interviewees were co-founders of a performance arts group. Two others helped develop the same performance arts group with one of them also having been an emcee. As a whole, the group of interviewees in this project has a broad reach across the aesthetic of hip hop culture. With a combined participation of five emcees, their lyrical messages containing elements of resistance have made them easier to distinguish for this research since their lyrics provide a readily available text to study.

The emcee's position remains the most prominent when looking at hip hop culture since they possess the current focus of hip hop culture. For audiences, lyrics are an easy medium to identify with while emcees have been built into icons for the culture. Deejays provided the focal point for hip hop participants when the culture first developed because they controlled the music and the sounds to which crowds were drawn. Highlighting the role of the emcee allowed for marketing the music and the culture because of lyrical content. Transitioning focus from deejay to emcee has lasted to today with emcees garnishing the majority of attention which has allowed them to be more noticeable. However, their connection to community outside of emceeing sets

¹²⁹ Douglas Kellner, "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture," in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011).

these interviewees apart from others.

Candice “DJ Kuttin Kandi” Custodio

Candice Custodio-Tan is better known in hip hop culture as DJ Kuttin Kandi. Born and raised in New York, Kuttin Kandi moved to San Diego between five and six years ago. In moving from one coast to another, she made the transition to be closer to her partner and to work on her own inner development. Globally recognized for her accolades as a DJ champion, Kuttin Kandi doesn't do as many DJ gigs as she had been doing when she was still living in New York City. However, she knew that moving to San Diego was going to be a welcome transition in her life to work on other projects and interests in her life. She is affiliated with the world famous 5th Platoon crew along with the renowned all-female DJ crew called Anomalies. A couple of years ago, Candice was in line to be the Chair for the now defunct GabNet-USA when she was elected to the position of Chair-Elect. Given their direction and needs, she ended up stepping down from that position. GabNet-USA developed into a new organization called Affirm. Candice was looking forward to helping with that organization but had other pressing commitments. When she's not working at The Women's Center at the University of California-San Diego, Candice dedicates time to her various writing projects, community organizing, and occasionally deejaying amongst other things.

Ian “Daps” Dapiaoen

Ian Dapiaoen, more commonly known as Daps, has been a part of the Seattle hip hop scene for quite some time. Aside from deejaying in his free time as DJ Daps1, Ian has worked with various community organizations and entities in Seattle. A member of isangmahal arts collective, Ian helped organize events through his own performance and in doing work behind

the scenes. Ian was involved with the University of Washington Filipino American Student Association when he was an undergraduate student where he worked with friend and an interviewee for this research project, George Quibuyen. Dapiaoen now does community organizing in one of the most challenging lower socioeconomic areas of Seattle, White Center. Like other hip hop deejays, Ian possesses a keen awareness of music knowledge with a notable awareness of Seattle's scene.

Bambu DePistola

Bambu DePistola, an emcee in his thirties, was raised in Los Angeles, CA. Part of the Beatrock Music label, Bambu has produced a lot of music that bluntly critiques both micro- and macro-level conditions of oppression. He gained a lot of attention when he was with fellow Filipino American emcee, Kiwi, along with their deejay, DJ Phatrick, as the Native Guns. Since their decision to focus on their solo careers in 2007, Bambu has steadily produced more albums with his latest release being *Paper Cuts* in early 2010. Amongst his concert performances, Bambu spent the end of 2011 on the lineup for the Cinemetropolis Tour with the headliners being the Blue Scholars.

Angela "El Dia" Dy

Currently studying in Nottingham, England, Angela Dy was once a member of isangmahal arts kollektive. Starting at age 14, spoken word was a medium that Angela could really express herself. She passed on her gift of writing and expression as a former leader of the YouthSpeaks Seattle program that is affiliated with the larger organization based in San Francisco, CA. Between 2007-2008, Angela's participation in the hip hop duo 1st Quarter Storm with Katrina "Rogue Pinay" Pestano got some attention locally in Seattle, WA, her hometown. Their group's name references one of the largest revolutions in Filipino and world history when

a movement led by university students pushed for the overthrow of President Ferdinand Marcos through demonstrations.

Bobby Gaon

A founding member of isangmahal arts kollektive, Bobby Gaon has been involved with various organizations focusing on Filipino American and Asian American youth. After finishing his Master's degree in Social Work at Eastern Washington University, Bobby Gaon has been working in the Seattle community. From growing up in San Diego and South Carolina and then moving to Bremerton, WA, Bobby has migrated according to his Navy dad's stationing. Although hip hop was not the first music culture that he began listening to at a young age, he was quickly attracted to it once he was introduced. As one of the first managers for the hip hop group Blue Scholars, Bobby extended his involvement in the Seattle hip hop scene. He has worked to expose Seattle to multiple Fil Am DJs that are widely recognized including DJ Vinroc, DJ Shortcut, and DJ Rhettmatic. In Bobby's current employment position, he is a case worker focusing on at-risk youth involved in gang culture.

Jojo Gaon

Jojo Gaon has worked with various organizations over his lifetime. His list of accomplishments include the founding of the Filipino American Student Association at Washington State University, assisting in the creation of the Washington State Filipino American Student Alliance (currently the Northwest Filipino American Student Alliance or NWFASA), co-Founder of isangmahal arts kollektive, and aiding in the establishment and growth of YouthSpeaks-Seattle. Jojo possesses one of the broadest networks in the Fil Am community of Seattle. With a background in counseling, Jojo has worked with various organizations and programs to do direct counseling along with educational outreach. He formerly worked as the

Men's Coordinator and the Youth Director for the Asian & Pacific Islander Safety Center located in the International District of Seattle. Gaon now works as Domestic Violence Director for the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of King and Snohomish County which includes Seattle.

Kiwi Illafonte

Kiwi Illafonte is another emcee in his thirties. Recognized by his peers, Kiwi was referenced by other selected interviewees as being the first Fil Am emcee they knew who had gotten substantial attention in the Fil Am community. Currently living in San Francisco, CA, Kiwi now works for an agency called Streetside Stories as a Teacher-Coach for their Teaching and Storytelling Program. As one half of the emcees in Native Guns, Kiwi gained more exposure as an artist. After Kiwi and his cohorts in Native Guns, Bambu and DJ Phatrick, pursued independent projects after 2007, he has been involved in various organizations and groups. He is the current Deputy Secretary for Bayan-USA, an organization that is an extension of Bayan, an organization in the Philippines that is "struggling for genuine freedom and democracy" for the Philippines.¹³⁰ He is also working on a new solo album, part of a new band called *Bandung 55*, and coordinating a young men's program for an organization called Reproductive Justice.

Zar Javier

Founder of Pnoy Apparel, Zar Javier helps to design clothing that reflects their motto of "Know History. Know Self." With his close friends, Pnoy Apparel continues to grow. Based in San Diego, CA, Pnoy Apparel started the Shirt the Kids Foundation to complement their business. Shirt the Kids aims to send shirts to the Philippines for poor youth. Pnoy Apparel has partnered with multiple Fil Am musical artists and celebrities to put on Shirt the Kid fundraising

¹³⁰ "Bayan," <http://www.bayan.ph/site/>.

events in locations that include San Diego, Los Angeles, Fresno, New York/New Jersey, and the United Kingdom. Some of the artists that Pnoy Apparel has worked with in putting on these events have been interviewed for this research as well. The styles of Pnoy Apparel's clothing promote Filipino pride in their designs while using symbols and references to Filipino and Filipino American identity.

George "Geo" Quibuyen

The popularity of George Quibuyen and his participation in the hip hop group Blue Scholars has grown immensely from the group's beginnings. Their recognition and following has grown from solely a local, Seattle, WA fan base. With self-identified Persian DJ Sabzi, George gets recognized beyond Filipino American supporters. George, more commonly known by the nicknames Geologic, Geo, and Prometheus Brown, helped start Blue Scholars in 2002 and has since been working to see it grow as well as other side projects and collaborations. Born in Hawaii and raised in Bremerton, WA, Geo was an early member of the isangmahal arts collective as well as an active member of Anakbayan-Seattle. He continues to support community organizing groups today which include Arts Kollektive based in Seattle. Geologic has also put together photography events that have included his own work aside from other numerous projects.

Rocky Rivera

From the San Francisco Bay area, Rocky Rivera is an emcee with blunt charisma in her performance and personal style. With a journalism degree from San Francisco State University (SFSU) in 2005, Rocky has written for various publications including *The Rolling Stone*. She is an alumnus of League of Filipino Students (LFS) at SFSU. It is a group with connection to the primary organization located in the Philippines. Rocky has participated and supported other

community organizing groups that have had a particular emphasis in the area of social justice and education. In thinking of her music, Rocky tells listeners to “[t]hink Lauryn Hill meets Public Enemy with West Coast beats”¹³¹ when she self describes it.

Freedom “Free” Allah Siyam

An educator and a community organizer amongst other things, Freedom Siyam was born and raised in Seattle, WA. At the age of 34, Free continues to live in Seattle working with various community organizations. He was a member in isangmahal arts kollektive soon after the group’s creation in 1997. He has performed spoken words at various events through isangmahal. As an undergraduate student, Free was instrumental in the growth and in the planning of the annual conference for the Washington State Filipino American Student Alliance (WSFASA). WSFASA would later be renamed Northwest Filipino American Student Alliance (NWFASA) with its geographical expansion which saw the incorporation of other higher education institutions from Oregon and even some attendees representing schools in California and Nevada. Since graduating from college, Freedom has continued his work by helping in the establishment of AnakBayan and founding Bayan-USA. Both of those organizations are “pro-people, anti-imperialist, and pro-freedom Filipino organizations.”¹³² He has worked with all of the other interviewees in some capacity through their established friendships and/or community organizing ties.

Interconnectedness

For the emcees selected for this study, they all have connections to community building, ethnic identity, and popularity within the Filipino American community. Of the current popular

¹³¹ Rocky Rivera, "Rocky Rivera's Tumblr," <http://rockyrivera.tumblr.com/bio>.

¹³² Freedom Siyam, Interview, July 19 2011.

Filipino American hip hop artists, the ones I have interviewed have emerged in the past decade with their notoriety. As mentioned already, there are some deep connections between all of the interviewees. Various Fil Am based organizations are central to their initial introductions and with their continued relationships. Aside from Jojo Gaon being an older brother to Bobby Gaon, they collaborated with others to co-found isangmahal arts kollektive in Seattle, WA. Some early contributors to the group whether in performance or in organization were Angela Dy, Ian Dapiaoen, and Freedom Siyam. Angela continued to perform with isangmahal and would later run the organization YouthSpeaks-Seattle with close ties to isangmahal. DJ Kuttin Kandi has been friends with Jojo and Bobby through isangmahal and through the Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) Spoken Word & Poetry Summit. Through isangmahal, Kuttin Kandi heard about and discovered Bambu DePistola. She would go on to bring Bambu out to New Jersey to perform because she felt so strongly about his work and talent. Fo Kiwi Illafonte, he was introduced to organizers of the Washington State Filipino American Student Alliance (WSFASA) as they planned their annual conference along with their guest speakers and performers through Freedom Siyam. Ian Dapiaoen was also an organizer of the WSFASA conference in which he first met Kiwi. Bambu DePistola and Kiwi would combine later to form the group Native Guns along with DJ Phatrick. Rocky Rivera was active at San Francisco State University's League of Filipino Students (LFS) as well as participated in a quartet of Filipina American emcees. Rocky is a part of the Beatrock Music label which has other affiliated Fil Am artists including Kiwi and Bambu. Zar Javier's apparel company and Shirt The Kids campaign has drawn together various performers that are predominantly Fil Am hip hop artists as well as some that are more closely associated with the R&B music genre. Of those artists, his Shirt The Kids fundraisers have included Bambu along with Geologic performances. Bambu and Geologic

have recently worked together to produce a full length album released in 2011 titled *Prometheus Brown and Bambu Walk Into a Bar*. Geologic has also joined the Beatrock Music family very recently in December of 2011.¹³³ Interviewees were highly familiar with one another through hip hop culture along with their work with respective organizations.

A Space of My Own

Analyzing the connection between Filipino Americans and hip hop culture, participants in this research project agreed that there have been some great contributions to hip hop culture from Filipino Americans. At the same time, links were drawn between Fil Am culture and Black culture. Jojo Gaon, co-founder of isangmahal arts kollektive, shared that the development of isangmahal was to provide a space of expression. Primarily known for spoken word performances at events, isangmahal also showcased other types of expression including dance and musical performances. For Blue Scholars' Geo, isangmahal arts kollektive allowed a comfortable venue for him to express himself without having the feeling of being judged based on his appearance. Prior to isangmahal arts kollektive being founded in 1997, the open microphone sessions were easily noted as being predominantly black or white spaces according to isangmahal co-founder, Bobby Gaon. He stated that:

there was no safe space for us Filipinos. The venues out there were for either Whites or Blacks. Of course, we'd feel more comfortable doing the Black open mic scene. But, then again, it wasn't our space. So, we need to create our own space. That's when isangmahal arts kollektive was born.¹³⁴

Creating that space by the co-founders of isangmahal supported a recognition that Filipino Americans have stories to tell and need to express their experiences, especially Fil Am youth. It also suggested that even though Fil Am youth would share spaces with other markedly black

¹³³ Christian Bustos, *Beatrock Music 2-Year Anniversary Celebration* (2012), Video Clip.

¹³⁴ Bobby Gaon, Interview, July 7 2011.

spaces, there was still enough interest to have a forum that catered to the Fil Am experience. Of all of the interviewees, four of them were non-founders, yet active participants in isangmahal for many years. In addition to Geo, Angela Dy, Ian Dapiaoen, and Freedom Siyam contributed to isangmahal's growth. They all recognized the empowerment they gained in learning more about self-expression or from simply having the venue to share pieces about themselves while connecting with other Fil Ams. Kuttin Kandi offered a similar draw to share in ethnic identity with other Fil Ams. Familiar with the influence of isangmahal, Kuttin Kandi remembers her own experience growing up in New York and attending a dance club that was overwhelmingly Fil Am. She was evidently surprised and excited at the sheer numbers of Fil Ams that she would get to interact with at a club called the Village Gate. It continuously drew her to regularly attend and participate with other Fil Am youth. Kuttin Kandi recalled that her Filipino friends that had taken her there didn't realize the impact that sharing ethnic identity and hip hop culture meant to her. In retrospect, Kuttin Kandi says that she would have explained to those friends today that "you just don't understand what this is like for me. To know my own people. We may not be talking about our culture at a party, but just being around my own people. You just don't know what that fucking feels like for me."¹³⁵ Going from an imagined community to a more tangible community proved to influence Kuttin Kandi immensely. For isangmahal, their creation offered a similar connection for their shows' attendees.

Sharing culture, experiences, and love through isangmahal arts kollektive impressed Freedom Siyam. After first seeing performances at a Washington State Filipino American Student Alliance (WSFASA) Conference, Freedom said that being a witness implored him to engage with these people and this type of creativity in some way. He would later attend an isangmahal open mic show. As he attended more and interacted more with participants,

¹³⁵ DJ Kuttin Kandi, Interview, September 9 2011.

Freedom remembers the organization introducing him to new ideas as well as some Filipino Americans being “interested in educating other Filipino Americans about our rich culture.”¹³⁶ Absent from American history books, Filipino American and Filipino history is commonly omitted. Engaging in Socratic learning through performative art could address some of the assimilationist rhetoric and understandings of Filipino and Filipino American history by Fil Am youth. Employing ethnic identity development, popular culture appeal, and encouraging self expression have empowered performers of isangmahal and participants at their shows. Presenting Filipino American culture through a lens of power in a medium that is both intimate and appealing encourages the audience to relate through their own understandings of identity. For a population whose history and culture has been co-opted through colonial and neocolonial rhetoric, isangmahal arts kollektive helped to validate Filipino American identity and culture for people producing and consuming their presentations.

Challenged Identity Making

Working through personal identity politics was an important part of each interviewee’s development. In processing their understanding of themselves, they had mentioned that they experienced challenges early on as youth which pushed them to question their ethnicity. Aspects of Filipino culture were sometimes ridiculed directly and sometimes unintentionally. Initial reactions from participants influenced them to be quieter about speaking up or revealing elements of their identity. These types of microaggressions promote White American hegemonic ideals and many first generation parents’ hopes of assimilation by discouraging confidence in non-White ethnic identities.

¹³⁶ Siyam.

For Ian Dapiaoen and his experiences with people challenging his identity growing up, he feels that the suppression of one's voice contributes heavily to perpetuating racism today.¹³⁷ It wasn't until his college years that Ian got the type of support he desired and built substantial confidence in his ethnic identity through shared community with other students. His participation and leadership in putting on the Washington State Filipino American Student Alliance (WSFASA) conference allowed Ian to collaborate with other college students around the Pacific Northwest in setting up workshops for his peers. The most popularly attended and most indelible workshops have been those focusing on Filipino American identity. Its popularity could signal many things. Two probable factors of influence could be that many Fil Ams are not engaging with meaningful identity politics earlier in their lives or that their comfort in identity politics hasn't built further critical analysis. Interrogating Fil Am identity politics assists an individual to gain confidence in whom they are by looking at the context of the larger community. However, many individuals may lack the awareness and knowledge to address the greater community's struggles. Regardless of whether an individual does possess the awareness of their community's struggles, identity politics remain the foundation so that a deeper critical consciousness can be formulated to address challenges.

Identity politics is a site of contestation for many Filipino Americans developing critical consciousness since the narrative of Filipino history has suppressed the Filipino perspective. Maintaining many cultural traditions, many Filipino American youth are exposed to Filipino culture without any connection to the roots of colonial resistance for Filipinos. In addition to Filipino American identity, the politics and rhetoric of ethnicity in the U.S. aggregates Filipino Americans into the larger categories of Asian American or Pacific Islander American. With the progress that has been made collectively in the U.S. with broader ethnic coalitions, anti-

¹³⁷ Ian Dapiaoen, Interview, July 7 2011.

oppression and social justice work has benefitted. Specific struggles in the Filipino American community still reflect a strong need for representation that should not be lost.¹³⁸

Ian recalled an experience he had with a local anti-racist group in Seattle, WA in which he felt compelled to represent the larger umbrella of Asian Pacific Islander American in addition to the more specific Filipino American identity. Amongst the group of predominantly white individuals, there were some assumptions being made about the Asian Pacific American community that Ian distinguished as potentially problematic if those assumptions were not contextualized. Recognizing the similar social obstacles that America continues to perpetuate for the larger group of Asian Pacific Americans, Ian wanted his voice to be heard in representing his ethnic community. Fluidity in cultural citizenship between Asian Pacific American (APA) and Filipino American has allowed Asian Pacific American concerns to encompass many issues in the Filipino American community. Those moments when the larger APA community has not represented the needs of Filipino Americans have required that Filipino Americans assert their voice.

A common experience for research participants for their ethnic identity development was related to their label as the “invisible Asian Americans.”¹³⁹ Some interviewees shared their identity being challenged by others that naively or purposely associated them with being another ethnicity. Jojo Gaon commented that he would get referred to as Chinese when he was growing up in South Carolina. Although he would correct his peers, he went through a time period where he felt it was easier to just accept it. Zar Javier’s experiences growing up in San Diego included the common misperception that he was Mexican. At the same time, the recognition that he wasn’t Mexican by the youth in his surrounding Chicano/Latino community made him a target

¹³⁸ San Juan Jr., *Toward Filipino Self-Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization*, 156.

¹³⁹ Nadal, *Filipino American Psychology: A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice*, 7. Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans, a Pictorial Essay, 1763-Circa 1963*.

for being bullied. Ian Dapiaoen felt discouraged to mention his ethnicity in high school after various jokes about the Filipino food he had brought for class one day. He added that there were “lots of jokes throughout those years about dogs” in reference to the common stereotype of Filipinos being “dogeaters.” The wide range of possible ethnicities that Filipino Americans get mistaken for in the U.S. supports a general lack of understanding of Fil Ams and the Philippines while maintaining stereotypes. Challenges to identity development such as those mentioned afford popular culture some influential leeway to build identity. Hip hop culture’s saturation in popular culture and relation to Filipino American youth culture provides a medium with great potential for identity development. The pervasiveness of hip hop culture and its relation to communities of color makes it an appealing culture that Fil Ams can be drawn to since the topics and imagery speak to their concept of status.

Hip Hop as Identity Builder

It was widely acknowledged amongst the interviewees that hip hop culture assisted in developing their identities. Hip hop culture’s rising popularity encouraged interviewees to take advantage of its accessibility. Although deejaying has become closely associated with Fil Am hip hop participants, it still is arguably the most expensive and least accessible. With Kiwi being credited as the first Fil Am emcee that many other interviewees had heard about, he turned to emceeing because of its accessibility after having tried the other three original elements of hip hop. Kiwi’s relationship to hip hop and his Filipino roots was recently documented in the film *Sounds of a New Hope*.¹⁴⁰ Eric Tandoc, a Fil Am filmmaker, documented Kiwi’s experiences in hip hop culture and a recent exposure trip to the Philippines is covered. His venture to the

¹⁴⁰ Eric Tandoc, "Sounds of a New Hope," (Philippines, USA2008).

Philippines reiterated his view of hip hop as being “like survival.”¹⁴¹ *Sounds of a New Hope* does a solid job of showing the similarities and differences between hip hop culture in the Philippines and in the U.S. An important message it showed was that as within larger society, socioeconomic class determines who has access to resources for producing hip hop culture. Youth are limited to certain pieces of hip hop culture because of their financial means. In spite of such hindrances, hip hop culture still remains inviting and available for access and culture production. At the very least, hip hop culture allows for easy consumption with its social saturation.

Every interviewee explained their initial introduction to hip hop culture and whether hip hop culture influenced their identity. Amongst their different experiences, hip hop culture’s aesthetic and popularity enticed involvement at a young age for the research participants. Their responses were summarized well through Ian Dapiaoen’s comments about hip hop’s allure stemming from being “cool” and being “validated” through multiple and prevalent forms of media.¹⁴² By resonating with youth, hip hop remains popular in society since youth culture often determines popular culture. Since the teen years that interviewees were first really immersed in hip hop culture, it has evolved into a more consolidated and narrow media representation in the U.S. that highlights rampant individualism and materialism. As it continues to be associated with lower culture, hip hop culture’s popularity has made it a multi-million dollar industry. Despite the increasing co-optation of hip hop culture for capitalist desires, the narrative of struggle in hip hop culture can still be found. According to Dapiaoen,

...hip hop folks will come from a place where they’ve been marginalized or alienated. That’s where hip hop was birthed from. So, when you have folks talking about being disadvantaged or being broke, feeling alone and all that stuff and that’s being messaged,

¹⁴¹ Kiwi Illafonte, Interview, October 14 2011.

¹⁴² Dapiaoen.

you sort of connect with that because it's like 'oh, someone's actually talking about some real stuff.'¹⁴³

Agreeing with Ian's perspective, Geologic credited hip hop culture as coming from a "working class perspective."¹⁴⁴ While hip hop being referenced as the "Black CNN" may be contested, the relatability to the music and the culture for interviewees is clear. Hip hop culture gave interviewees various types of support and comfort in listening and participating in the culture. From motivation to learn more about themselves to speaking to the oppressive conditions that they were familiar with in their own life, hip hop culture offered substance with its entertainment.

One person that does not ascribe to the idea that hip hop culture is the "CNN of the hood" is Rocky Rivera. As a culture that is open to interpreting in different ways, Rocky sees hip hop as being multi-faceted in its uses. For her, hip hop culture is the "cornerstone" to relate to different things while also helping her to "find a voice."¹⁴⁵ But, it is something that she sees urban youth using in their own ways to work out their own identity. Bambu DePistola confirmed the impact of hip hop culture on his own eagerness to uncover his identity. Seeing how symbols of Afrocentrism were bringing Black Americans to reflect on their lineage and their own identity, Bambu asserted that it pushed him to find out if he "fit into this genre."¹⁴⁶ Remembering that there was no one around for him to provide a Filipino point of view on his identity building, Bambu cited that there are Fil Am hip hop culture producers today. The visibility of Fil Am hip hop culture producers has added a dimension that Bambu sought as a youth. His experiences highlight how Fil Am representation in hip hop culture producing can

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ George Quibuyen, Interview, July 7 2011.

¹⁴⁵ Rocky Rivera, Interview, October 24 2011.

¹⁴⁶ DePistola.

heighten hip hop culture's effects on identity development. As an artist that integrates Filipino and Fil Am history into his lyrics and image, Bambu is now a hip hop culture producer that influences other Fil Am youth today that he desired at their age. Seeing other Fil Ams represented in hip hop culture and representing their Fil Am identity in their artistry was not accessible to him.

Hip Hop as a Tool

There was some regularity for interviewees to reference hip hop culture as a tool for reaching out to the Filipino American community, especially the youth. Despite having the personal investment in hip hop music and hip hop culture, interviewees were still open to other cultural forms for outreach. Regardless of how impactful hip hop culture was in each of the interviewees lives ever since a very young age, every one of them was cognitive of hip hop culture's limitations today along with all of its potential.

When asked if hip hop was important to addressing some of the common struggles for Filipino Americans, Bambu quickly agreed and stated that he thought "hip hop is the strongest medium right now to utilize" and that "When giant corporations jump on it, you know it's powerful." However, Bambu also recognized that hip hop is "not real, [...] concrete change." It can be a "catalyst [to] educate ourselves, [...] activate, and organize." Yet, he states that one "can replace hip hop with anything" since it is a tool. Bambu offered more insight on how he viewed hip hop culture as a tool. Ultimately, it was for increasing awareness and educating the masses for the purpose of getting others to go out into the community and organize folks. Bambu was quick to mention that using hip hop culture for organizing is what seems appropriate

now. But, he specified that other mediums should be used if they were more appropriate. Hip hop culture provides the most relevance and salience for Fil Am youth at this time.

As a “culture of resistance” to Jojo Gaon, hip hop culture cannot provide that same perspective to youth if they don’t have a foundation to view it in that way. “You have to have a good framework of anti-oppression, period. And if not, then it doesn’t work. That’s not a good formula.”¹⁴⁷ Jojo related his own childhood experiences and view of hip hop as his *soundtrack* when thinking about how youth can develop an understanding of resistance. Jojo sees Fil Am youth learning about the idea of resistance from their families. His assessment implies that resistance is a theme in Filipino American identity development, not necessarily within hip hop culture.

Hip hop culture has other similarities to Filipino history and culture such as innovation from limited resources. For instance, DJ Kool Herc’s role in hip hop saw him organize block parties even in back allies so that he could still practice his deejaying while having friends over to party.¹⁴⁸ Pointed out by Geologic, the Philippines comprise many examples of repurposing materials and using other cheap items. He mentioned the example of the Philippines’ primary source of public transportation, the jeepney. They are old World War II jeeps that have been left behind and decorated with garish objects. Geologic sees hip hop culture in a similar way because of the way that hip hop culture has reappropriated music and culture. Resistance to the oppressive conditions afflicting Filipinos is “embedded” according to Geologic because “it’s so recent.” Relating to the Filipino struggle and the developed resistance, Geologic also sees hip hop culture as a complementary tool for Filipino Americans and that recently, “hip hop has

¹⁴⁷ Jojo Gaon, Interview, July 18 2011.

¹⁴⁸ Chang and Herc, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*.

become a vehicle to acknowledge it.”¹⁴⁹ A big part of the appeal that Kiwi found in hip hop music was its accessibility. He recognized that “you don’t really need a band. Just get like two turntables and put a whole show together from just two turntables and a microphone.” Kiwi also references his participation in graf writing and the feeling of it being accessible. “[E]ven before I knew the history of hip hop, I just felt like this form of survival.”¹⁵⁰ His reiteration of hip hop culture being accessible compared to other popular cultures promotes its preference with lower socioeconomic communities and individuals. Used as a tool to reach Fil Ams, hip hop culture appears to be the optimal culture given the significant amount of Fil Ams living in poorer conditions.

Responses from this study conjured up the work of Renato Constantino when he proposed the need for developing “counter-consciousness” for Filipinos to respond to the deeply seated workings of colonial mentality.¹⁵¹ His analysis of decolonization efforts proposed in 1969 links with the larger Filipino diaspora today. Filipino American engagement with hip hop culture has nurtured Constantino’s idea of counter-consciousness through the examination of self-identity, coalitions with other oppressed communities, and advocating for social justice. Respondents had differing views on the level of influence on developing ideologies of resistance although they did agree that hip hop culture has those messages embedded into it historically. Partnered with their recognition that Fil Am ethnic identity development involves themes of resistance, it suggests that the combination of Fil Am ethnic identity development and hip hop culture would produce stronger ideologies of resistance. Involving practices into these

¹⁴⁹ Quibuyen.

¹⁵⁰ Illafonte.

¹⁵¹ Renato Constantino, *Neocolonial Identity and Counter-Consciousness: Essays on Cultural Decolonization* (White Plains, NY: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1978), 278.

ideologies of resistance would also be a desirable way to educate Fil Am youth about tangible ways of productively using these perspectives.

One project in particular that shows how hip hop culture can be used to educate and sponsor a cause has been the Shirt The Kids events put on by Pnoy Apparel. The Shirt The Kids (STK) Foundation was organized after an initial fundraising event turned into a much larger project and passion. Bringing together musical artists and educating attendees about the STK mission, the event looked to raise money to send brand new shirts to poor children in the Philippines. A pet project of Pnoy Apparel's founder, Zar Javier, along with his friends that help him run Pnoy Apparel, the STK idea was created after Zar visited relatives in the Philippines with his dad.¹⁵² Although trips to the Philippines happened every couple of years for Zar and his dad, there was something that triggered his consciousness to recognize the poor conditions for the kids he would regularly see around him during his trip in 2008. As his desire to do something shaped his idea on the flight home, Zar envisioned the potential for this passion to help which would lead to benefit shows for STK. The shows that STK has organized have brought together predominantly hip hop and R&B Fil Am artists to perform. Zar made the connection that hip hop can be something to motivate people to take some type of action.

[...] hip hop can be so powerful. [...] Hip hop is a vessel to gather people around. And I know that everyone has a big heart and wants to do great things by helping out the less fortunate. But, sometimes there needs to be a catalyst. And hip hop can be that catalyst. [...] hip hop can be used to inform others about certain situations in different countries.¹⁵³

Humility was constantly shown throughout Zar Javier's interview. His passion to help others was evident and even directly communicated at times. Making connections with as many businesses and groups as he can, Zar wants to network Pnoy Apparel and himself widely. Each

¹⁵² Zar Javier, Interview, August 26 2011.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

piece that Pnoy Apparel produces bears some representation of Fil Am or Filipino culture on it. Zar Javier and Pnoy Apparel's STK project bare the challenge that Fil Ams growing their own consciousness face. Educating one's self and others about the larger scale conditions of oppression can overshadow the basic necessities that reality poses for oppressed peoples. STK directly combines the educational piece of spreading awareness to others with the simplicity of providing clothing for children whose material conditions are a product of many years of oppression.

Projects like STK link Fil Am musical artists to a cause that incorporates ethnic identity. As mentioned before, all respondents are currently affiliated or have been affiliated with one or multiple community organizations that focus on fostering critical consciousness into action. For the emcee participants, they have put their ideologies into practice. They were still very much involved in some aspect of community organizing no matter how busy they have been with their music. Respondents as a whole agreed that their ideological perspectives informed their usage of hip hop and messages infused within it.

From Hip Hop's Golden Era to Today...

Hip hop's golden era was mentioned by multiple respondents. For many of them, their age and relationship to hip hop culture would classify them as the Hip Hop Generation.¹⁵⁴ With respondents' ages being in the 30's, many of them have a special relationship to hip hop's "Golden Era." The Golden Era commonly references the time period of the late 1980's and early 1990's when hip hop proliferated in styles and popularity.

After reminiscing about fond feelings and experiences from their youth and how hip hop was present in their lives, interviewees identified differences in the way that hip hop culture is

¹⁵⁴ Asante Jr., *It's Bigger Than Hip-Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation*.

getting articulated today for urban youth. For Jojo Gaon, he feels that the messages and feelings that he experienced with hip hop culture are not as readily accessible nor searched for by this new generation of youth. He has even taken it upon himself to make a “time capsule” of some sort that includes musical selections and hip hop culture paraphernalia for his own preschool-aged son. Jojo recognizes the connection that hip hop culture’s history plays into today’s hip hop artists and scene. It is a recognition that he thinks has gotten lost without any real desire for today’s youth to find it. As he works with youth regularly in his profession, Jojo Gaon does not see that same interest that captured him growing up and helped him in his own identity development. Kids that participate in his after school programming are more apt to be drawn into hip hop culture’s glitzy and more negative aspects that only scratch a superficial layer of hip hop culture’s lineage. Youth acceptance of popular media portrayals should not come as a surprise. Hip hop culture’s stronghold on commodifying “coolness” and “rebellion” allows it to maintain its appeal to youth. Offering an opportunity to youth with its accessibility not only in terms of music, hip hop culture has also allowed for participation through commodity fetishism. It allows youth to grow their identity in hip hop culture. If youth choose to identify with the popularized imagery in hip hop, they can find themselves dealing with contradictory messages that don’t reconcile with their socioeconomic class. Talking about frivolous spending on high priced items does not speak to the material conditions for youth in low- to middle-class income households. In a similar fashion to the educational and economic situation in the Philippines where *first world* industrialization tactics are being taught, highly corporatized hip hop culture images do not speak to the realistic needs of Fil Am youth.

A different change in hip hop culture since its Golden Era has been the oversaturation of hip hop artists. Technology and hip hop’s accessibility allow hip hop culture to be easier to

consume as well as produce. Kiwi expressed that he felt hip hop doesn't have the same "feeling of grassroots or independence" that he remembers. For Fil Am youth, Kiwi said that they are fortunate in having access to artists that look like them and that may even be coming from the same community as them. He was conscious as to how he and other Fil Am hip hop artists today were not seen in hip hop culture when he was growing up. As hip hop culture has grown and evolved, the context for seeing ethnic representation by Filipino Americans has changed. As mentioned, Kiwi was pointed out by interviewees for being the first Filipino emcee that they had ever really heard. His work and success appeared to initiate further recognition for other emcees that would come soon after him.

Hip Hop, Fil Am Youth, and Parents

While the generation gap between Fil Am youth with their parents and guardians justified some of the misunderstandings between both generations as seen in the The Debut, it also was a source of strength in some ways for a few interviewees. For Jojo Gaon, he vividly recalls some of the talks he had with his dad and uncle about the racism that they experienced. Dealing with classmates that would quickly dismiss him as Chinese, Jojo gained more confidence in reiterating his ethnic identity by recalling how his dad and uncle stood up for themselves while dealing with the same treatment as they served in the U.S. Navy. Those discussions would play a big part for Jojo and his development since he could identify with the same struggles that his dad and uncle were enduring to simply have their ethnic identity acknowledged. Jojo felt that music he was listening to at the time played into his identity; but, music represented the "soundtrack" and the "anthem" for his experiences rather than the motivator for his personal identity growth. In the interview with Kuttin Kandi, she recognized the generational gap for

Filipino Americans and the need for better communication similar to assessments that Renato Constantino mentions in *Parents and Activists*. Kuttin Kandi stated:

The conversations aren't happening between the generational gaps between elders and the young. And this comes from the adultism and ageism that takes place within those lines of communication. [...] The gap between Filipino and Filipino Americans, a huge gap around that. So when that happens, you then have a young person really confused about their identity and, of course, assimilation process.¹⁵⁵

In dealing with the generational gap for Filipino American youth, hip hop culture provides an alternative space for growing their understanding of ethnic identity. Kuttin Kandi recalled her parents' transition to life in the U.S. and how they were going through the assimilation process. Her parents, especially her mom, held the belief that lighter skin was heavily preferred in society and that learning Tagalog was not that important in the U.S. As the child with fairer skin compared to her sister, Kuttin Kandi faced different treatment since she was seen as possessing greater beauty. Whether she was able to connect her preferential treatment with larger social conditions or not, Kuttin Kandi's experiences are a direct result of colonial mentality along with elements of self-hate. As the Philippines has stores that regularly sell skin whitening creams and lotions, further generations of Fil Am youth in the U.S. must deal with its lasting effects as Kandi described. Dealing with the challenging expectations of her parents, Kuttin Kandi also had to work through U.S. exceptionalism.

The Filipino American Experience and Hip Hop Culture

Representations of hip hop culture conjure up many references that are embedded in Black culture. Popular media's interchangeable use of hip hop culture and Black culture has supported an unfair predisposition for Black people to meet negative representations in hip hop

¹⁵⁵ Kandi.

culture. The overgeneralization of hip hop culture and Black culture to work in a synonymous nature leave little, if any, space for other communities that have immersed themselves and have embraced hip hop culture throughout its history. Where does this leave other communities such as Filipino American participants that have also helped to grow hip hop culture through their own participation?

After asking interviewees what they felt the Filipino American experience brought to hip hop culture, they all recognized the contributions Filipino Americans have given specifically to deejaying and the dance elements of hip hop culture. A common person that was mentioned was DJ Qbert, world famous deejay and award winner, for the way his innovation changed deejaying culture along with deejay products. Kuttin Kandi delved into the various experiences for communities of color and how they also need to be told as well as how hip hop culture provides a medium for stories to be shared. For Filipino Americans, there are significant commonalities in their experiences in the U.S. But, interviewees were quick to point out when asked about the Filipino American experience that there are varied experiences for Filipino Americans. Collectivity may exist as Filipino Americans, but recognizing the diversity of experiences inside the grouping was deemed as important so as to not overgeneralize Filipino Americans as having a singular “experience.” Bearing that in mind, interviewees shared their understanding of the Filipino American impact on hip hop culture and the ways that Filipino American experiences are being told or omitted.

Aside from the iconic Fil Am deejays and the impact that Fil Ams have had on deejay culture, interviewees didn’t recognize anything specific that the Fil Am experience brought to hip hop culture. Bambu DePistola iterated that the Filipino American experience offers something that can be brought to hip hop culture although he didn’t see it happening. Hip hop

culture has exposed other experiences all over the world. The Filipino American experience can also be brought out, but it faces difficulty in that only a few artists are doing it effectively.

Bambu also felt that expanding the awareness of Filipino American experiences would add to the already rich histories of the immigrant experience in the U.S. Growing the awareness of the Filipino American experience may require “somebody special to really bring our experience to the table.”¹⁵⁶

Getting their Dues

The lack of recognition for Filipino Americans involved in hip hop culture was mentioned by multiple interviewees. Although there may be some more recent popularity for Fil Am dancers in hip hop and a longer recognized contribution to deejay culture, Filipino Americans still get overlooked. Respondents felt that Fil Ams were deserving of recognition for their contributions, but not in a self-indulgent way. For the Filipino American experience, it is one of many experiences in hip hop culture that needs to be told according to Kuttin Kandi. She goes on to connect the Filipino American experience in the U.S. to other “Black and Brown” communities and experiences. As a reflection of race and identity politics in the U.S., hip hop culture gets represented in a “Black and White” binary. Kandi affirms that communities of color need to have their experiences shared in hip hop and society because “[...] we’re all struggling here. We all got to find ways to make it work and try to bring all struggles out.”¹⁵⁷ For Filipino Americans, bringing their struggle out remains a large obstacle. It could be advanced with the simple recognition of the struggle and connecting with it. Further generations of Fil Am youth face the choice of an alluring assimilationist path, as described by Angela Dy, or one of active

¹⁵⁶ DePistola.

¹⁵⁷ Kandi.

resistance. Freedom Siyam and Rocky Rivera mentioned the history for Fil Ams sharing spaces with Black communities. Freedom goes on to say that Fil Ams have “adopted” and “adapted” hip hop culture in areas where Fil Ams participated and produced. He also acknowledges DJ QBERT’s influence on deejaying style, DJ Kuttin Kandi’s influence on deejaying and female representation, as well as the current impact that the Blue Scholars are having especially within the Seattle community. For Rocky, recognizing Filipino Americans in hip hop culture can be at the discretion of how much Fil Am artists connect with their ethnic identity and make it known. Despite the recent attention that Fil Ams in hip hop culture have gotten, Rivera said that “it really does depend on the identity of that particular Filipino which I wouldn’t at all at this early stage of our representation even generalize.”¹⁵⁸ Receiving attention for Fil Am contributions to hip hop culture is not something that is necessarily required according to Jojo Gaon despite recognizing that “...in terms of community, we’re not getting that respect.” Each of the comments by interviewees implied a desire for a reciprocated acknowledgement for Fil Ams for their place and contributions to hip hop culture.

As with Filipino and Filipino American history, hip hop culture participants have generally overlooked the Filipino and Filipino American narrative. While ethnic identity may not determine one’s personal abilities to produce hip hop culture, it is a factor in determining one’s political economy. In hip hop culture, ascribing all attributes of hip hop culture to Black culture is problematic regardless of hip hop culture being a common outlet for Black cultural expression. As already asserted, hip hop culture is a global culture with many contributors outside of the predominant community. It is not to take away from the central role that hip hop culture has traditionally played in Black culture and vice versa. However, it is a disservice to the communities that have helped grow hip hop culture outside of Black Americans as well as Black

¹⁵⁸ Rivera.

Americans themselves by not including a social context for why and how hip hop's messages have emerged whether positive or negative. By working from a more fluid foundation for hip hop culture's growth and evolution, it supports the recognition of a collective struggle for marginalized communities with hip hop culture's roots in resistance.

Compiling responses from research participants affirmed the link between Fil Am and Black culture. A general recognition of respect and shared community—both real and imagined—has promoted similar experiences between both groups. Looking at the changing landscape of hip hop culture, the positionality for Filipino Americans has changed to not solely be on the audience side of hip hop culture. Illuminating the history for Filipino Americans and hip hop culture and relating it to today's lineup of artists changes how the text is presented to Fil Am youth. Interviewees saw limited Fil Am representation in hip hop culture production when they were younger. But, the predominantly Black hip hop culture producers that interviewees did see showed how resistance in hip hop culture could be interwoven with ethnic identity building; Afrocentric rhetoric and imagery have been consistent in hip hop's history with its proliferation being at its highest during the so-called Golden Age of hip hop. As mentioned by respondents, there are Fil Am hip hop artists getting visibility today that the current generation of Fil Am youth can look up to as leaders. With Black hip hop culture producers having such a large influence on interviewees, it suggests that Fil Am hip hop culture producers would bring an even larger influence along the lines of ethnic identity building depending on their connection to the Fil Am community and their message.

Resistance as Theme

When asked, the interviewees for this research project confidently confirmed that resistance was a theme in Filipino American identity development. Invoking the history for the Philippines and thus the Filipino diaspora including within the United States, respondents pointed out the ways that the occupation and colonization of the Philippines leads Filipino Americans to relate to *resistance*. By this association, the theory of historical materialism maintains suitability for Filipino Americans looking to redress the social injustices for the Philippines and the Filipino diaspora. E. San Juan Jr. describes the challenge for Filipino American identity by saying that “[b]ecoming Filipino then is a process of dialectical struggle.”¹⁵⁹ He goes on to say that the layered understandings for being Filipino American necessarily calls for incorporating the intersections for both Filipino and American society. As products of these intersections, participants in this study affirmed the impact it has had on their own development.

As posited earlier on in this chapter, I questioned why a higher amount of Fil Am emcees and hip hop artists emerging over the past decade have bared conscious messages in many of their songs, art, and interviews. Interview responses that justify resistance as a theme in Fil Am identity formation would support why consciousness would be infused into the higher profile Fil Am artists. With the importance of resistance through Filipino American identity development, hip hop culture’s draw towards identity formation,

The rapper and community organizer, Kiwi, pointed out hip hop culture’s influence on his own identity. “When I was first really getting into hip hop, it was like “I’m hip hop” and I think it just kinda played a role in terms of [...] being a huge part of my identity until I

¹⁵⁹ San Juan Jr., *Toward Filipino Self-Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization*, 156.

discovered [...] being Filipino.”¹⁶⁰ For Kiwi, hip hop culture segued into understanding his ethnic identity as a Filipino. Kiwi explicitly pointed out hip hop’s transitional role in his life; his relationship with hip hop culture contributes to the organizing power that he sees in hip hop culture. As someone that also felt that “resistance [is] rooted in Filipino identity” when asked if resistance was a theme in Filipino American identity development, Kiwi’s interview shows how hip hop culture can provide an inroads to developing Filipino American identity and thus an awareness of resistance. Hip hop culture provided support to interviewees in resisting various oppressive forces by building self-confidence and rendering voice to the interviewees.

Rapper Geologic affirmed his answer that resistance was “absolutely” a theme for Fil Am identity development by going further to state that resistance was part of the “global identity” for Filipinos. With so many Filipinos leaving the Philippines for job roles in other countries that don’t match their Filipino education levels, Geologic acknowledged the “undoing” of colonial history today. Thinking about resistance, Geologic related the Fil Am and Filipino struggle to the class aspects of labor. He references the Filipino diaspora in saying that “we are basically a class of people who have been made to be a labor class for the world.”¹⁶¹ Bonded in struggle, the Filipino diaspora can relate to one another with histories traced to the Philippines. Rocky Rivera stated that “resistance is the thread that binds us all. All of us Filipinos is that. We’re tired. You know, we’ve been resisting for so long.”¹⁶² In struggling against oppression for so long, Rocky sees Filipino Americans that desire to embody stereotypes of the model minority really “want to be included.”¹⁶³ Although she claims that she doesn’t want to speak for them, Rocky Rivera also feels that Filipinos striving for these types of inclusions are misled in still

¹⁶⁰ Illafonte.

¹⁶¹ Quibuyen.

¹⁶² Rivera.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

believing that the “American Dream” exists for them and is attainable. Due to the backwards understandings of meritocracy in the U.S., the struggle for communities of color has become an individual one. Hardships that are part of the everyday experience for Fil Ams with low socioeconomic statuses have gotten normalized and believed to be challenges that one must go through in order to reach any aspects of the “American Dream.” Rocky Rivera recalled her own realization when she “finally understood that it wasn’t my fault and it wasn’t my parents’ fault and it was something that happened way before me [...] that’s when I was able to resist in the right way.”¹⁶⁴ It is telling that Rocky alludes to distinct types of resistance since those Fil Ams pursuing the so-called American Dream could be envisioning themselves resisting. Rocky’s own consciousness of Filipino history and its relationship to her material conditions allowed her to realize how she could be more effective in resisting. If hip hop culture stimulates and promotes a deeper connection to Filipino history, a historical materialist framework within Fil Am youth would be promoted. Nurturing ideologies of resistance plays an important part in the lives of Fil Am youth with responses of resistance varying in methodology.

Angela Dy referenced a similar challenge that she saw within Fil Ams that choose an assimilationist path. To those taking that path, Angela saw them as possibly feeling that they are resisting in their own individual way. She continues on to say that the assimilationist path “perpetuates oppression” by reproducing internalized oppression. Adding to Geologic’s references to socioeconomic class and the global Filipino work force, Angela also suggested that class connections to Filipino Americans affect their acclimation to resistance when she stated: “...i feel that working class youth’s material conditions inform them of the need for resistance early on, though it may not be named as such [...] and the internalized oppression manifests

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

itself in different ways in different socioeconomic settings.”¹⁶⁵ Her clarification suggests that Fil Ams that go through their ethnic identity process can be acclimated to resistance. However, Fil Ams in lower socioeconomic circumstances may be more motivated to resist oppression given their financial circumstances. With the majority of Filipino Americans coming from poorer communities, it would then suggest that the majority of Filipino Americans would be inclined to learn about and resist oppression during their identity development.

Overwhelmingly, participants saw resistance as a necessary part of Filipino American identity development. Years of colonization and oppression in the Philippines were consistently referenced as reasons for why interviewees felt that way. The Filipino diaspora carries that history with them. If Filipino Americans are to develop their ethnic identity, it would require that they uncover their connection to a violent past and the associated resistance by the Filipinos. Although many first generation Filipino American immigrants want their offspring to assimilate to avoid the “othering” that the U.S. has promoted so well, the yearning to learn and understand Filipino cultural symbols, language, and lineage remains in the current generation. The use of hip hop culture as a tool to inspire Fil Am ethnic identity development, a deeper sense of critical consciousness, and ultimately resistance makes it an important factor in Filipino American decolonization.

¹⁶⁵ Angela Dy, Interview, August 5 2011.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Hip hop culture is a powerful thing. While the music, the style, and the intricacies may not appeal to everyone, it continues to be a culture that has grown in scope and profitability. For those that do gravitate towards hip hop culture's influence, there is an association with "cool" that has been evident since it first dominated the music scene. With hip hop culture being driven by youth, it continuously aligns with the three themes of "cool" which Juliet B. Schor has noted in her work. The three themes of cool that she has found are: something that is "socially exclusive" or "expensive," "being older than one's age," and being "edgy."¹⁶⁶ Popular media have uplifted lyrics, imagery, and other parts of the culture that glamorize all of these aspects of cool. While hip hop culture provides a spectrum of styles and topics, capitalist cooptation has led to more narrow public perceptions of hip hop culture. Black culture continues to be commonly substituted for hip hop culture and vice versa. However, the influences of other communities have developed hip hop culture since its beginnings. Despite the contributions of other communities, the conflation of hip hop culture and Black culture should not be ignored. At the same time, other communities and contributors in hip hop can signal different relationships to hip hop culture and how it is interpreted and utilized. The emergence of Fil Ams as hip hop culture producers over the last decade is noteworthy with each one's connections to ideologies of resistance. Filipino Americans and hip hop go back much further historically, but the past decade has seen a stronger presence in public prominence. Qualitatively researching perceptions

¹⁶⁶ Juliet B. Schor, "From Tony the Tiger to Slime Time Live: The Content of Commercial Messages in Children's Advertising," in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 367-68.

and motivational factors for hip hop culture producing can provide insight as to how (neo)colonial history gets incorporated, if at all.

Focusing on the intersections of hip hop artists that have projected their Filipino American ethnicity into their hip hop work as well as in real and imagined communities, I discovered that themes of resistance were overwhelmingly present. The term “resistance” can be understood in many different ways depending on one’s positionality along with their experiences with oppression and perceptions of empowerment. My usage and investigation of the term “resistance” directly relates to the historic and contemporary effects of (neo)colonialism upon Filipinos and the Filipino diaspora, particularly Filipino Americans. Factoring in the history for Filipino Americans and Filipinos that places them in unique subjectivity to the U.S. presented an opportunity to further examine if Fil Am hip hop artists were attempting to resist American narratives of Filipino history and work against them. Selected interviewees strongly felt that resistance was a part of Filipino American ethnic identity development. Supporting this belief, participants cited the longstanding history of resistance by Filipinos to colonial rule and further subjectivity to imperialist projects. Each individual’s interactions with racism and misunderstanding contributed to their ability to relate with the experiences for other Fil Am youth.

Through this study, it was clear that interviewees went through similar challenges growing up in terms of their ethnic identity. Being mistaken for other ethnicities such as Chinese, Mexican, and Samoan was a common encounter that participants recalled. When participants were identified as Filipinos and Filipino Americans, prominent stereotypes were invoked. Striving for understanding while breaking through their “forgotten Asian American”¹⁶⁷ status, participants yearned for a space that would allow them to connect and express with other

¹⁶⁷ Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans, a Pictorial Essay, 1763-Circa 1963*.

Fil Ams. Supportive circles such as the isangmahal arts kollektive out of Seattle, WA were organized to provide avenues for expression and camaraderie amongst Fil Ams while being inclusive of other communities. Other spaces were referenced as markedly Fil Am spaces that provided support to interviewees such as DJ Kuttin Kandi's introduction to a predominantly Fil Am attended dance club. Before these spaces, interviewees found hip hop culture appealing and relatable to some of their own experiences. Hip hop's popularity encouraged participation and grew interviewees' identity as they were struggling with their ethnic identity development. Regardless of the selected interviewees' strong connections to hip hop culture, they recognize that the culture has changed from the so-called Golden Era circa late 1980s and early 1990s. Many of them don't see youth today being exposed to the same messages nor the breadth of artistry to which interviewees felt they witnessed. However, participants recognize hip hop's influence, scale, and popularity today that maintain the culture's relevance for youth and youth culture. Each participant expressed a vested interest in helping Fil Am communities and oppressed communities as a whole. To connect with youth, a theme that emerged from these interviews was the recognition that hip hop and hip hop culture was a tool that is useful for reaching Fil Am youth. Bambu DePistola referenced the larger goal of organizing Fil Ams as paramount versus the usage of hip hop culture. "[Hip hop is] important. It can be utilized and its utilization becomes important. If country music were the way to go, I would say country music is the best way to get our folks. I mean, it's just a vehicle at this point."¹⁶⁸ Although hip hop culture has significant personal meaning to this study's interviewees, their investment in the Fil Am community motivates their usage of hip hop culture with its relevance.

For Fil Am youth, navigating bicultural citizenship between Filipino cultural norms with Fil Am elders and American norms dominated by Eurocentric influence is challenging. Having

¹⁶⁸ DePistola.

visibility and representation in media continues to be a very limited space for Filipino Americans and Asian Pacific Americans as a whole. However, there were few, if any, Fil Am hip hop artists who were recognizable by interviewees when they were younger. Today, that dynamic has changed quite a bit in their perspective. Some included themselves when describing the various hip hop artists that can be seen today in comparison to what they saw as youth. Participants iterated that they were not seeking recognition for Fil Am contributions to hip hop culture, but feel that Fil Am roles in hip hop culture's history and growth do not get their due. While recognition might be nice, it is not the motivating factor for their work. This was exemplified when DJ Kuttin Kandi adamantly mentioned the need for inclusivity by bringing everyone's voice and experiences to the table in hip hop culture and in our interactions as people to work for social justice. Coalition building and growing a sense of community within the Fil Am population and across other groups was important to how each interviewee saw their work whether involving hip hop culture or not. Being cognitive of *colonial mentality* and the co-opted colonial narratives of Filipino history can aid the process for Fil Am youth to critically question and understand their self identity and how it relates to the larger diaspora.

Ideologies of resistance correlate to Filipino American ethnic identity development. According to this study's participants, Fil Am youth developing their ethnic identity will learn about the history for Filipinos and the many years of confronting colonial occupation. Participants overwhelmingly felt that it was ingrained in Filipino Americans because of the conditions causing Filipinos to leave their home country and families for better opportunities. To understand the reasons for sacrifice and hardship of their elders, Filipino Americans implore the context for oppression that continues to beleaguer Filipinos. Resisting may come in various forms. Resistance for Filipino Americans growing in their ethnic identity means a rejection of

the exceptionalism of American intervention in the Philippines. It signals an explicit and tacit awareness of the historic and contemporary oppression for Filipino Americans.

Given interviewees' perspective on the impact that ethnic identity development plays in Fil Am decolonization efforts, it draws attention to the successful ways that Fil Ams grow in that process. Fil Am youth experience the challenges of negotiating their bicultural citizenship between Filipino traditions and American assimilation. Popular culture's reciprocal influence with youth culture makes it a site for connecting with youth. Hip hop culture continues to be a large impact on dictating American popular culture; it is arguably the biggest influence for Fil Am youth culture. Given this current context for hip hop culture and Fil Am youth, its utilization by this study's participants to promote expression is fitting. Although hip hop culture has been shaped in different ways from when participants first began getting into it, they do see hip hop as a medium that can support efforts to grow critical consciousness, educate Fil Am youth, and to push for community organizing against social injustice. Resistance is a theme that is getting integrated in explicit and tacit ways for Fil Am youth through interviewees' use of hip hop culture.

Other research has incorporated a closer look at Filipino Americans and hip hop culture, but none have directly examined the theme of resistance for Filipino American identity and hip hop culture. The work that is being done by multiple Fil Am hip hop artists carries the spirit of previous Filipino Americans that have questioned social justice issues for themselves and for others. From the narrative of Filipino immigrant Carlos Bulosan to the labor organizers Gene Viernes and Silme Domingo to the current work of internationally renowned scholar E. San Juan Jr., the newer leaders bringing voice to Filipino American social justice issues can be found in hip hop culture. In summoning the colonized experiences for Filipinos and Filipino Americans

rather than suppressing it, Fil Am interviewees in this research project expressed how Fil Am history and hip hop culture complement one another to subvert cultural hegemony.

Areas for Further Research

There are more artists and more hip hop participants that can be interviewed. All of the participants within this study currently live on the west coast of the U.S. DJ Kuttin Kandi is the lone person that was born and spent the overwhelming majority of her life outside of the west coast since she grew up in New York. Additionally, Jojo Gaon and Bobby Gaon had a brief point in their lives in which their family were in South Carolina. With the overwhelming amount of Filipino Americans living along the west coast, environment is a variable that can affect the exposure, support, and narrative for Fil Am ethnic identity. There is a lot of potential for researching other Fil Am hip hop artists and groups like Deep Foundation from New York City, Nomi of the duo Power Struggle who lives in San Francisco, and BWAN who also hails from San Francisco. They all have connections to the participants in this qualitative study.

A different area to be considered for examination is looking at hip hop artists that are not emcees. My research primarily gets insight from hip hop artists that produce hip hop culture in spoken format. Other forms of expression can be analyzed within hip hop culture to find if resistance gets incorporated and if in similar ways to what my research has found. As mentioned already, Fil Ams have arguably influenced hip hop culture the most through deejaying. Connecting Fil Ams and hip hop dancing goes beyond the more recent dance crew publicity of television shows such as *America's Best Dance Crew*. These different aspects of hip hop culture could be explored for its relation to Fil Am identity and narratives of resistance.

Another potential research area involves looking at the Cultural Studies component of audience reception.¹⁶⁹ Although each of the participants in this study could be viewed as part of the audience for hip hop culture, their primary relationship to hip hop culture revolves around their cultural production. This study has included some details about audience reception and how hip hop culture gets consumed in the Fil Am community. But, the personal experiences of the audience and what they are extracting from hip hop culture could offer other insights about Filipino American identity and hip hop culture's relationship.

There are further opportunities to build off of my research by looking at future trends in the commodification of hip hop culture and its effect on the relationship I will be documenting. How hip hop culture's portrayal of authenticity determines Fil-Am identity formation can also be investigated in more detail using some of my work. These research examples would build off of my research by highlighting the relevance of hip hop culture to decolonization efforts. Understanding how hip hop culture has been utilized to synthesize themes of resistance with Filipino American identity is necessary to understanding their interdependency. There are no other popular culture forms that have influenced Fil-Am youth to the same degree as hip hop culture. Investigating this topic is necessary in order to maintain and develop decolonization efforts for Filipino Americans and other communities dealing with imperialist assimilation and avoiding the fate of cultural genocide.

¹⁶⁹ Kellner, "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture."

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