

Indigenous Hip Hop as a Tool of Decolonization:
Examining Nicholas Galanin's *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan Part One and Two* and
Kevin Lee Burton's *Nikamowin (Song)*

by

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Submitted to OCAD University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of
Master of Arts

in

CONTEMPORARY ART, DESIGN, AND NEW MEDIA ART HISTORIES
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April, 2014

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Abstract

This paper examines how Indigenous hip hop gains decolonization specifically in two artworks that were presented in the exhibition *Beat Nation*. Nicholas Galanin's *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan Part One and Two* and Kevin Lee Burton's *Nikamowin (Song)* create a space of decolonization not only for Indigenous peoples but for non-Indigenous peoples as well. Here, an exploration of how Indigenous artists such as Burton and Galanin engage with hip hop, how Indigenous hip hop creates receptive and listening ears in non-Indigenous peoples to the concerns of Indigenous peoples, and how Indigenous hip hop causes non-Indigenous peoples to question their own ideologies occurs.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to OCAD University's graduate department for supporting my academic endeavors, including this paper. Thank you to all those involved in the creation of *Beat Nation*, especially Tania Willard, Skeena Reece, Kevin Lee Burton, and Nicholas Galanin. Finally, I would like to thank my primary advisor Julie Nagam and committee member Jessica Wyman for their indispensable advice throughout this writing process.

To my parents, Ron and Dawn, for their astonishingly unwavering support.

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To me, hip-hop says, "Come as you are." It's about you and me, connecting one to one. That's why it has universal appeal.

-DJ Kool Herc

Hip hop, according to one of the originators of the form DJ Kool Herc, provides the opportunity to create multiple one-to-one connections across the globe. Canadian Indigenous hip hop is investigated in this paper to discover how it can contribute to decolonization for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. This Major Research Paper (MRP) examines the decolonizing possibilities hip hop can spark in *non-Indigenous* peoples in Canada, bringing up questions such as: How can Indigenous hip hop enable settlers in confronting their learned racism and in what ways does Indigenous hip hop create an open dialogue for discussing colonialism? Throughout this MRP my central argument is that Indigenous hip hop possesses the capacity to create a receptive ear in settlers, which then creates the necessary engagement of non-Indigenous peoples in the decolonizing process. The exhibition of contemporary Indigenous artwork titled *Beat Nation* displayed *Nikamowin (Song)* (Figure 1) by Kevin Lee Burton, and *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan Part One and Part Two* (Figure 2) by Nicholas Galanin, and it is that context that I first encountered these works. This paper will engage in an examination of Burton's work, followed by a discussion of Galanin's piece. These artworks are the focus of this paper, acting as case studies to understand

how hip hop functions as a tool of decolonization for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Indigenous activist and scholar Charity Marsh's reasoning for the connection between Indigenous and hip hop cultures is discussed using the artwork of Galanin and Burton. Marsh's work makes evident that hip hop culture provides a voice with agency, which is foundational to my overall arguments.

My strong interest in Indigenous hip hop arose after reading non-Indigenous Director of Research for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada¹ Paulette Regan's *Unsettling the Settler Within* in which she addresses how non-Indigenous peoples must confront their own settler mentality to aid in the process of decolonization.² Regan indicates that "unfamiliar territory" or an unsettling place can create "the deepest learning" and "this space of not knowing has power that may hold a key to decolonization for settlers."³ Indigenous hip hop engages me because of the outlet it provides for Indigenous peoples and the capacity it creates in me, a settler, to listen in a space of not knowing. Hip hop is a form that creates a receptive listener in me.

Before demonstrating the benefits of hip hop to unsettling the settler within, I want to set the context of colonialism and decolonialism because, as

¹ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: "The truth telling and reconciliation process as part of an overall holistic and comprehensive response to the Indian Residential School legacy is a sincere indication and acknowledgement of the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing." From "About Us – Our Mandate," The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=7>.

² Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

³ *Ibid*, 18.

Regan states, “once most non-Natives understand the ways in which colonial violence is embedded in the institutional structures of Canadian society that gave rise to the residential school system, they genuinely want to do something to remedy the situation.”⁴ Indigenous peoples in Canada have and continue to experience the effects of colonization. Here I provide just a few examples of Canada’s colonization of Indigenous peoples that are specific, far-reaching, widely known, and/or recently shared. When settlers came to Canada starting in the 1500’s and later starting in the 1700’s, they began to impose a variety of colonial tactics on Indigenous peoples, such as outlawing Indigenous peoples’ languages, placing Indigenous children in residential schools, and creating laws against the practice of Indigenous traditions. Canada and its government ignored these violent colonial tactics for a long time. Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s public apology for Canada’s Indian Residential School (IRS) system to Indigenous peoples of Canada, which only occurred a few short years ago in 2008, provided a platform for the Canadian government to acknowledge its implementation of the wrongs and atone.⁵ This apology addressed the IRS system that removed children from their parents and culture in order to assimilate them. However, shortly after this apology, at the 2009 G-20 summit, Harper expressly denied the existence of Canada’s colonial history by stating, “We have no history

⁴ Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 22.

⁵ *Ibid*, 2-4.

of colonialism”.⁶ Since that apology for and subsequent denial of colonial history, it has come to light that Indigenous peoples on reserves and Indigenous children in residential schools were used as subjects for medical and nutritional experiments in the 1940s and 50s.⁷ This is an ongoing investigation that became public knowledge in the summer of 2013. This investigation makes evident the necessity of discussing our colonial history instead of pretending that Canada does not have a colonial history, as Prime Minister Harper chose to do. What these circumstances indicate is a colonial state. The necessity of continued decolonization modes, tactics, and methodologies for Indigenous peoples is evident when looking at this information.

Indigenous artists and curators have been responding to this history of colonialism by challenging how they are represented in the institutional art world.⁸ Indigenous artists’ and curators’ autonomies were felt in 1967 at Montreal’s World Expo in the Indians of Canada Pavilion. Here Indigenous peoples participated in how they, their history, and their culture would be displayed in an institutional space. In 1992, 500 years after Christopher Columbus “discovered” the Americas, the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) hosted *Land*

⁶ Sonny Assu’s piece *Chief Speaker* (2011) seen in *Decolonize Me* addresses this quote. “The Happiest Future,” Sonny Assu, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://sonnyassu.com/images/chief-speaker>.

⁷ Ian Mosby, “Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942-1952,” in *Histoire sociale/Social history*, vol. 46, no. 91, May 2013, pp. 145-172.

⁸ Here I am looking at institutional interventions by Indigenous peoples in the art world only. Indigenous peoples have been responding to colonialism since it began over 400 years ago. For a broader discussion of the history of decolonization, see Leanne Simpson, *Dancing On Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*, (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011).

Spirit Power, an exhibition by non-Indigenous staff curator Diana Nemiroff, Indigenous visiting curator and artist Robert Houle, and non-Indigenous visiting curator Charlotte Townsend-Gault. They curated a selection of contemporary Indigenous art that explored decolonization through multiple artistic styles.⁹ Additionally in 1992, the Canadian Museum of Civilization exhibited *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives in Canadian Art*, curated by Indigenous curator and scholar Gerald McMaster and Indigenous curator Lee-Ann Martin. McMaster and Martin also contributed to and edited the accompanying text with essays from a variety of Indigenous scholars and critics displaying some of the many ways Indigenous peoples in 1992 were interacting with the “established” art world.¹⁰ The texts and artworks illustrate a refusal to play victim to years of colonization; instead the work illustrates how Indigenous peoples thrived despite centuries of colonial tactics. I introduce these exhibitions to indicate a larger set of impulses that preceded the exhibition *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture*.¹¹ Like other exhibitions of contemporary Indigenous art before it, *Beat Nation* explores decolonizing possibilities for Indigenous peoples but chooses to address these possibilities through the examination of an uptake of hip hop

⁹ Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle, and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, *Land Spirit Power*, (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992).

¹⁰ Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives in Canadian Art*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992).

¹¹ A variety of recent exhibitions created in the past five to ten years inspired and/or were inspired by *Beat Nation*. These exhibitions include but are not limited to *Decolonize Me* by Indigenous curator Heather Igloliorte at the Ottawa Art Gallery in 2011, *Sakahān* at the National Gallery of Canada in 2013, and *Ghost Dance: Activism. Resistance. Art.* by Indigenous curator Steve Loft at the Ryerson Image Center in 2013.

culture. It was at The Power Plant in Toronto that I saw *Beat Nation* and there I was introduced to the artworks of Burton and Galanin.¹²

Burton and Galanin are amongst many people across the globe who have employed hip hop as an effective decolonizing tool. Tony Mitchell, non-Indigenous music and pop culture theorist, writes extensively on a variety of cultures that have incorporated hip hop in his book *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA*. Mitchell outlines how hip hop exists in a variety of these cultures in his introduction to the text. When Mitchell addresses hip hop's presence in Indigenous cultures, specifically in North America, he demonstrates the lack of research in this particular area:

Scant attention has been given to Native American rap and hip-hop, with the exception of Neal Ullestad's 1999 survey of American Indian rap and reggae, which chronicles the "rant and roll" of the American Indian Movement activist and actor John Trudell, the "pow wow hip-hop" of Robbie Bee and the Boyz from the Rez, and the conscious rap of With Out Rezervation (W.O.R.), who combine traditional chanting and drumming with rap, as do the Pomo-Apache Indian rapper Btaka, the Tulsa-based rapper and actor Litefoot, and Casper the Hopi reggae rapper, many of whose releases are only available on hard-to-find-tapes.¹³

¹² Beat Nation had a long history before entering The Power Plant. It started as an online only exhibition at artist run centre grunt gallery in Vancouver, www.beatnation.org. It then became a tangible exhibition at SAW Gallery in Ottawa, followed by an exhibition at grunt gallery. Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) took notice of the exhibition. Indigenous curator of Beat Nation since its inception Tania Willard co-curated the VAG iteration with non-Indigenous staff curator Kathleen Ritter. The exhibition is currently travelling from the VAG across Canada and it was at the exhibition's Toronto stop that I saw *Beat Nation*.

¹³ Tony Mitchell, "Introduction: Another Root – Hip hop outside the USA," in *Global Noise: rap and hip hop outside the USA*, edited by Tony Mitchell, (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 5.

Global Noise was written and edited by Mitchell in 2001, the beginning of Indigenous hip hop being put on record¹⁴ in Canada.¹⁵ This lack of information regarding Indigenous hip hop in North America in Mitchell's text could be explained by the lack of documentation of Indigenous hip hop in 2001. However, many Indigenous people since then have engaged with hip hop in a very public way. It is no longer possible to pay "scant attention" to this movement. Indigenous peoples across Canada are looking to hip hop to create a potent mode of decolonization and their relationship to hip hop deserves recognition.

Marsh has noted the lack of scholarship regarding Indigenous hip hop. What Marsh has found is that the draw Indigenous peoples, particularly youth, feel towards hip hop culture can be explained in four points: hip hop culture gives Indigenous youth agency, is accessible (no great talent or financial means is necessary to engage in hip hop), is a culture with a comparable history to Indigenous histories, and provides a voice that demands to be heard.¹⁶ Marsh's work has been important to directing my understanding of Indigenous hip hop. Marsh's four points serve as a means to take ideas of Indigenous hip hop from the specific instances of Burton's and Galanin's works to the broader decolonizing possibilities of Indigenous hip hop.

¹⁴ Archived in a manner that the public can access at any time.

¹⁵ The first instance of recorded acknowledgement of Indigenous hip hop was in 2002 when the first Hip Hop award was given out at the Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards.

¹⁶ Charity Marsh, "Bits and Pieces of Truth: Storytelling, Identity, and Hip Hop in Saskatchewan," in *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada: Echoes and exchanges*, edited by Anna Hoefnagels and Beverley Diamond, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012).

Even in this short introduction, a number of terms have come up that need clarification. A variety of designations have been given to Indigenous peoples during Canada's colonial history. Many of these words are conflated or used incorrectly which I aim to avoid. According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), "First Nations refers to Status and Non-Status "Indian" peoples in Canada."¹⁷ This means that First Nations can refer to someone who is on the "Indian Register" (Status "Indian"). However, Non-Status Indigenous peoples can be considered First Nations if they are a part of a band (sometimes also known as a First Nation). The Métis Council accepted this official definition in 2002: "Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation."¹⁸ Métis are distinguished from First Nations due to their mixed heritage including First Nations and European ancestry. They became a recognized group of Indigenous people by AANDC in 1982. Inuit people have settled land claims with the Canadian government in the Northern third of Canada (although not all Inuit people reside in the Northern most points of Canada).¹⁹ These terms are broad and do not do justice to the complexities of any single person or culture found within them. An even broader term, Indigenous peoples, encompasses all three of these categories. This

¹⁷ "First Nations," *Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada*, accessed March 4, 2014, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100013791/1100100013795>.

¹⁸ "The Metis Nation – Citizenship," *Metis National Council*, accessed March 4, 2014, <http://www.metisnation.ca/index.php/who-are-the-metis/citizenship>.

¹⁹ "Inuit," *Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada*, accessed March 4, 2014, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014187/1100100014191>.

indicates all the peoples who claim ancestors who lived in North America before European settlers called it their own (this can include people who have part European or non-Indigenous ancestry like the Métis peoples). In this paper I have chosen to use the all-encompassing term Indigenous peoples as hip hop has been employed by people who identify as First Nations, Métis and Inuit to achieve decolonization. Only when it is pertinent to this discussion will Indigenous individuals' specific cultures will be made evident.

This paper employs the phrases “hip hop” and “hip hop culture” as separate entities. Hip hop culture is an umbrella term that references everything that hip hop has to offer. This includes music, methodologies and the four “pillars” of hip hop: graffiti, MCing, DJing, and break dancing.²⁰ Hip hop is a term often used interchangeably with rap to describe a certain genre of music although there are differences between the two: hip hop includes MCing and DJing, whereas rapping specifically refers to the actions of an MC.

Hip hop has many complexities. It is a mode of expression born out of anger. The progenitors of hip hop in the Bronx were ruthless gangs who provided safety and protection to their own kind.²¹ A crucial component to hip hop is acceptance of all aspects of a culture to foster open conversation. Non-Indigenous

²⁰ DJ Afrika Bambaataa was the first to use the term “four pillars” and outline what those four pillars are. It is now a commonly used phrase in hip hop discourse.

²¹ For a more general history of hip hop culture, see Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005). For specific debates on the negative aspects of hip hop culture, see Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What we talk about when we talk about hip hop – and why it matters*, (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2008). For how the complexities of hip hop impact Indigenous culture, see “You Can't Stop the Hip Hop: Charity Marsh at TEDxRegina,” TEDxTalks on YouTube, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpYnwdJYAm4>.

cultural theorist and hip hop specialist Imani Perry succinctly states, “to listen to hip-hop is to enter a world of complexity and contradiction.”²² Perry indicates hip hop cannot be either positive or negative because that unjustly represents the culture, as “hip hop critiques the division of that characterized as clean and that characterized as dirty or evil as both social and artistic praxis. Hip hop calls for a radical honesty concerning the complexity of black communities and art, even in the public eye.”²³ Ignoring certain aspects of a culture does not do that culture justice. What this MRP is concerned with is how hip hop culture, including the aspects that have been criticized,²⁴ is helping Indigenous peoples across Canada create autonomy for themselves and find a space of cultural decolonization.

Here, I would like to clarify my own position as a Euro Canadian. I engage with Indigenous hip hop in this paper to avoid a mistake many non-Indigenous people make when writing about Indigenous culture. Indigenous political science scholar and activist Taiaiake Alfred identifies this problem when writing about Regan in the forward to *Unsettling The Settler Within*, in which he states,

Writing from a settler perspective primarily for other settlers, the author avoids the trap that so many non-Native scholars fall into – telling Native people how we must live. Instead, she hones in on what settlers must do to fix “the settler problem.” By this, she

²² Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 1.

²³ *Ibid*, 6.

²⁴ Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*.

means that non-Natives must struggle to confront their own colonial mentality, moral indifference, and historical ignorance.²⁵

I do not wish to tell all Indigenous peoples that they must employ hip hop to achieve decolonization. I wish to support those who do use it. But, like Regan, I intend for this work to speak to a settler audience because I can draw from my own experience of unsettling the settler within.

²⁵ Taiaiake Alfred, "Foreword," in *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* by Paulette Regan, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), X, pp IX-XI.

Methodologies

My upbringing within settler culture taught me that colonial ideologies are to be understood as truths. The naturalized systems of dominant discourse have become unnaturalized to me through an immersion in feminist studies and Indigenous studies. Here I will focus on some of the Indigenous pedagogies and methodologies I have been exposed to. In 2012, at the 11th annual New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts: Reconfigured Realities, held at Carleton University, non-Indigenous social worker Stephen Leafloor, aka Buddha, discussed a topic he called “Social Work through Hip Hop,” based on his social work group BluePrintForLife.²⁶ Leafloor discussed how his team travels to various high schools primarily in the North of Canada. (They have since expanded their locations to include high schools in more southerly cities.) For one week, BluePrintForLife takes over the curriculum of a particular high school to teach the four pillars of hip hop.²⁷ At the end of the week the students showcase their work to the town, their parents, their family and their friends. Students are encouraged to incorporate aspects of their own culture. Through hip hop, Leafloor argues that a sense of community is fostered resulting in fewer suicides, less drug use and fewer young pregnancies. I knew of Leafloor’s work before going to *Beat Nation*, and this knowledge piqued my interest of Burton’s and Galanin’s artworks.

²⁶ “The 11th Annual New Sun Conference on Aboriginal Arts: Reconfigured Realities Carleton University, Saturday, March 3, 2012,” Trickster Shift, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://http-server.carleton.ca/~aryan/conference/2012/2012%20theme.html>.

²⁷ “About,” BluePrintForLife, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www.blueprintforlife.ca/about/>.

Marsh and her work with the Interactive Media and Performance (IMP) Labs are important aspects to understanding Indigenous hip hop.²⁸ The IMP Labs serve as an afterschool program for students to learn how to create beats using high quality equipment that would not normally be available to them. Marsh heads the IMP Labs and employs these programs as a way to further her research on Indigenous hip hop and its effects on Indigenous youth.²⁹ Indigenous youth living in Saskatchewan, where Marsh is based, are encouraged to take part in these labs. Marsh's and Leafloor's work with Indigenous hip hop inspired me to look at Indigenous methodologies to further understand the connection between hip hop and Indigenous cultures.

This MRP is rooted in Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous perspectives. There are a number of texts that elucidate the importance of Indigenous methodologies, one being social work scholars Leslie Brown and Susan Strega's book *Research as Resistance: critical, indigenous, & anti-oppressive approaches*. In this text, Indigenous scholar of Indigenous education Margaret Kovach argues for an "emancipatory methodology" when researching Indigenous cultures.³⁰ This methodology's aim is to create a body of research that aids the culture that is being researched rather than seeing it simply as a subject.

²⁸ "Welcome to the Interactive Media and Performance (IMP) Labs!" Interactive Media and Performance, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www.interactivemediaandperformance.com/>.

²⁹ Charity Marsh, "Research overview, Hip Hop as Methodology: Ways of Knowing," in *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol 37, no 1, 2012. 193-203.

³⁰ Margaret Kovach, "Emerging from the Margins: Indigenous Methodologies," in *Research as Resistance: critical, indigenous, & anti-oppressive approaches*, edited by Leslie Brown and Susan Strega, (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press/Women's Press, 2005), 19-36.

To aid the culture through emancipatory methodologies, a researcher must not further colonization. I aim to support Indigenous cultures by arguing for the necessity and acceptance of continued decolonization practices. Further, it is the aim of this paper to make evident the importance of hip hop culture to decolonization processes. The process of collecting information for this paper is heavily rooted in archival research. Emancipatory methodology calls for critical research, which requires that one approach ideas in a critical manner and enter into a constructive conversation with discourses. Critical research is based in the notion of fluidity, that is, the opportunity to think critically to avoid being static.³¹ Writing a paper such as this one is a commitment to engaging in a discussion in which things are not conclusive, but fluid. Indigenous writer, scholar, storyteller and activist Leanne Simpson's book *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nichnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* explores the role of decolonization in Simpon's culture Michi Saagiig Nichnaabeg (or more generally, Nichnaabeg). She explores the relationship between decolonization, resurgence, history and different types of resistance. Decolonization is inextricably tied to resurgence for Simpson because "in essence, we [Indigenous peoples] need to not just figure out who we are; we need to re-establish the processes by which we live who we are within the current context we find ourselves."³² The notion of being conscious of the current context is important to Indigenous hip hop. This paper

³¹ Kovach, 23.

³² Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, (Manitoba: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011), 17.

posits that hip hop is part of the current context in which Indigenous people find themselves. Indigenous peoples have engaged with hip hop because it is a part of what Simpson calls “the current context we find ourselves.”³³

I have entered into this discourse because I am aware of the necessity for all Canadians to participate in decolonization for it to become successful. Non-Indigenous Canadians should not be active players in determining how decolonization occurs, but should be receptive listeners to Indigenous cultures. At a doctoral symposium in 2005, Regan tackled the role non-Indigenous peoples must play to aid in the process of decolonization. She addressed both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples by clarifying that “our respective paths in this struggle are different, but the goal is the same – transforming the social and political landscape to enable us to co-exist peacefully.”³⁴ Regan elaborates on this notion in her text *Unsettling the Settler Within*. She makes evident the necessity to look inward to achieve personal decolonization instead of creating a “singular focus on the Other [as it] blinds us from seeing how settler history, myth, and identity have shaped and continue to shape our attitudes in highly problematic ways. It prevents us from acknowledging our own need to decolonize.”³⁵ By unsettling the settler within, non-Indigenous peoples can contribute to decolonization. Through this paper, I aim to effectively add to this transformation.

³³ Simpson, 17.

³⁴ Paulette Regan, “A Transformative Framework for Decolonizing Canada: A Non-Indigenous Approach,” at IGOV Doctoral Student Symposium, University of Victoria, 2005, 5, accessed January 5, 2014, <http://web.uvic.ca/igov/research/pdfs/A%20Transformative%20Framework%20for%20Decolonizing%20Canada.pdf>.

³⁵ Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 11.

Decolonization cannot occur exclusively through the actions of Indigenous peoples. Non-Indigenous peoples must engage in these discourses with open ears. Hip hop culture encourages receptive listeners.

Kevin Lee Burton's *Nikamowin (Song)*



Figure 1. Kevin Lee Burton, *Nikamowin (Song)*, 2008. Digital video, 11:21. Courtesy the artist. **Installation view of *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture* at The Power Plant, Toronto. On view 15 December 2012 - 5 May 2013. Photo by Toni Hafkenscheid.**

Kevin Lee Burton, Swampy Cree Nation member and video artist, questions the term “traditional” in his art. His work in *Beat Nation*, a piece that has been in the exhibition since its inception, employs hip hop in a variety of ways. Burton’s *Nikamowin (Song)* creates a relationship between Indigenous and hip hop cultures through modes of expression developed by hip hop culture, MCing, DJing and hip hop music videos. Instead of creating a direct comparison

between hip hop and Indigenous cultures, Burton gently weaves aspects of hip hop culture into his examination of Cree culture and language. Here I will examine Burton's exploration of Indigenous hip hop and how it engages decolonization and unsettling the settler within.

The audio track of *Nikamowin* opens with a conversation occurring partly in Cree and partly in English. One of the participants knows how to speak Cree and English; the other only knows how to speak English. The Cree/English speaking voice asks why the other does not know Cree and begins to teach the English speaker Cree. Full Cree sentences are then spoken but it is unclear if it is the teacher or the student speaking these full sentences. Parts of the Cree words and sentences are sampled, remixed and repeated to make a beat. Burton remixes the Cree language into a beat through sampling these words, phrases, and sentences. The visuals of *Nikamowin (Song)* trace the journey from God's Lake, Manitoba to Vancouver, British Columbia. During the opening conversation one sees a camera slowly panning around a lake from the middle of it. When the conversation morphs into music the viewer sees images shot from a moving car, invoking ideas of travel or movement from God's Lake to Vancouver. These images are edited and overlapped suggesting multiple trips from God's Lake to Vancouver back to God's Lake.

Burton grew up in God's Lake and is currently living in Vancouver, a similar trajectory to that in *Nikamowin (Song)*.³⁶ Where one is from and where

³⁶ Ritter, "Kevin Lee Burton," 90.

one lives is important to Mitchell's notion of Global hip hop. In *Global Noise: rap and hip hop outside the USA*, Mitchell summarizes hip hop's ability to connect people to their own roots and cultures. According to Mitchell, the use of hip hop in communities outside the USA "all involve an initial negotiation with U.S. rap, followed by a return to the local, and in some cases the country of origin, emphasizing that hip hop is about both where people come from and where they live."³⁷ Burton speaks not only to where he has come from, God's Lake, but also to where he currently lives, Vancouver, indicating the importance of historical and current surroundings to one's identity. In the video, the Cree narrator asks, "Where are you from? Do you live there now?" Through this work, Burton engages with hip hop in an archetypal fashion. He employs the hip hop medium to examine where he is from and where he lives. As Simpson makes evident, decolonization involves negotiating what it means to be Indigenous within one's present context; that involves incorporating one's heritage, one's past and one's present.³⁸ Hip hop allows Burton to access this negotiation. Through hip hop modes of expression Burton is able to show the layers of his identity. He shows his connection to his heritage through language, the connection to his childhood home through images and his present home, again, through images. Through this work, Burton is able to indicate to the viewer that he speaks Cree, grew up on the reserve God's Lake, and currently resides in Vancouver. Burton does not fit into any stereotype of Indigenous peoples as he engages with his culture through

³⁷ Mitchell, 32.

³⁸ Simpson, 17.

language and his home of God's Lake while negotiating how his past remains in his present life in Vancouver. Burton indicates a necessity for unsettling preconceived notions of Indigenous peoples by examining the his identity in *Nikamowin (Song)*.

Shooting specific locations like God's Lake and Vancouver for this piece references the production of hip hop videos. As scholar of African studies and cultural critic Tricia Rose makes clear, music videos "often capture the regional specificity of spatial, ethnic, temperate, and psychological facets of black marginality."³⁹ Music videos these intricacies through their visuals. Burton is able to identify his own past and present regional specificity and Indigenous marginality. Burton gives specificity to his personal history, interrupting notions that a homogenous (and thus racist) identity can be placed on Indigenous peoples. The artist creatively incorporates ideas of movement, change through different camera angles, and the display of multiple places he has called home. The result of this creative visual subject matter is a story or record of Burton's life history. The medium of the music video's ability to include such specificity allows for marginalized creators (such as Burton or a rapper from the Bronx) to speak to people who identify with their culture. By creating this complex representation of his identity, Burton is able to connect with Indigenous peoples who see this complex identity in themselves.

³⁹ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 11.

Early hip hop videos often show the rappers and their crews in an urban location. These locations, to the untrained colonial eye, appeared to be archetypal American ghettos that could be interchangeable. However these scenes are more specific to the rapper. Rose argues “if white teen and adult viewers were the preferred audience, then it wouldn’t matter which ghetto corner framed images of Trech from rap group Naughty by Nature, especially as most white popular cultural depictions of ghetto life are drained of relevant detail, texture, and complexity.”⁴⁰ Burton has created an artwork with a similar framework to rap videos in that he films geographical locations in which he has spent an abundance of time: God’s Lake, Vancouver, and the road in between those two places. If you are from God’s Lake, you can recognize the lake, the large farm in amongst trees, the row of white houses with red roofs, the collection of houses near the lake, the open spaces dotted by patches of forest, and how the landscape differs greatly between the seasons in *Nikamowin (Song)*. Burton, with producer Alicia Smith and composer Christine Fellows, created *God’s Lake Narrows* in 2012. *God’s Lake Narrows* is an interactive slideshow with text written by Burton about God’s Lake Narrows produced by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB). Burton writes, “I grew up here [God’s Lake Narrows]. If you’re from a reserve the houses tell you certain things. You know this person sacrificed his income for his four wheeler and you know why his porch door is so worn and torn. If you’re not from

⁴⁰ Rose, *Black Noise*, 12.

a reserve, all the houses might seem the same to you.”⁴¹ The houses by the lake are not all the same. They have different families, different personalities, and different worn out points. To the untrained eye the images in *Nikamowin (Song)* look like any reserve. To those who are from there, it is a specific representation of home.

The format of the music video presents an opportunity to speak to people within one’s culture through visuals. However, it also offers access to people outside that heritage. Hip hop offers modes of accessing the settler consciousness without losing one’s cultural specificity. Rose argues that hip hop does not exclude other races.⁴² She makes it evident that hip hop can be “a black idiom that prioritizes black culture and that articulates the problems of black urban life,” while “not denying the pleasure and participation of others.”⁴³ This is where the notion of unsettling the settler becomes important. Indigenous hip hop can be created by Indigenous people specifically for Indigenous people but the message of Indigenous hip hop can still be understood on some level by non-Indigenous peoples.

Burton uses hip hop to explore his heritage and language but *Nikamowin (Song)* can also connect to other people by bringing a general awareness to

⁴¹ “God’s Lake,” National Film Board of Canada, accessed March 21, 2014, <http://godslake-wired.nfb.ca/>.

⁴² Hip hop is based in youth culture, which could support the notion that the medium excludes people of different ages. However, hip hop’s inception with youth culture in the Bronx does not exclude adults (who feel a similar disenfranchisement) from engaging with the medium. Cheryl L’Hirondelle is one of the more senior artists in Beat Nation and has been a part of the organization and exhibition since its beginnings.

⁴³ Rose, *Black Noise*, 4.

Indigenous reserves and Cree language sounds. Rose makes evident that putting one's old neighborhood into music videos brings "the ghetto back into the public consciousness."⁴⁴ I have made it evident that the details of a rapper's old neighbourhood and their favourite place to hang with their friends would be lost on people outside of that community, such as colonial society. Burton employs this method by showing specific aspects of God's Lake so it is identifiable to those who know the area. However, specific images of old neighbourhoods or reservations bring these places "into the public consciousness."⁴⁵ Hip hop allows for the exploration of the details of Indigenous culture while accessing the consciousness of settlers.

One of the connections between Indigenous cultures and hip hop culture was/is the struggle to attain livable housing. In *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, non-Indigenous cultural theorist Jeff Chang elaborates on a variety of reasons that caused many people to leave the Bronx: money no longer came to the area, politicians avoided it, and it began to fall into a state of disrepair.⁴⁶ The necessity of ghettos such as those within the Bronx being brought to American public attention in the late 20th century is made evident by the increasingly dangerous, unlivable state of these places: apartment buildings were often left by landlords until they were in disrepair and vacant. Empty buildings were destroyed by fire because they were more lucrative to landlords

⁴⁴ Rose, *Black Noise*, 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Chang, 17.

through insurance claims than through habitation.⁴⁷ *God's Lake Narrows*, Burton's NFB produced interactive work, presents a collection of images and text which address the housing in his reserve:

On some level the houses *are* all the same: built from the cheapest materials, shipped in from the big city. I guess that creates a reserve aesthetic. And yeah, it's pretty ghetto if you're judging it from a certain set of values. But when you have 100 families that desperately need housing, what are your choices?⁴⁸

Burton's display of God's Lake Narrows connects to people from there through the details of the imagery. The display of God's Lake Narrows in *Nikamowin (Song)* also forces non-Indigenous people to question their notions of reserves and the necessity of improving housing in these areas. The specifics of reserve or ghetto imagery in videos may be lost on the colonizer but what these images do for the colonizer is bring areas like the Bronx back into the public consciousness. These images have the potential to unsettle non-Indigenous peoples. The neglect of these areas does not lead to their disappearance as politicians and/or colonizers and/or the master may hope. Instead, cultural production flourishes, creating imagery of these places and a refusal to disappear from public consciousness. This commonality between the residential origins of hip hop culture and many Indigenous cultures' experience in the 20th century strengthens the connection Burton makes between his own reserve and the hip hop tradition of shooting a street corner in one's old Bronx neighbourhood.

⁴⁷ Chang, 12.

⁴⁸ "God's Lake," National Film Board of Canada, accessed March 21, 2014, <http://godslake-wired.nfb.ca/>.

One of Marsh's connections between Indigenous and hip hop cultures is the voice hip hop, particularly MCing, is able to give people.⁴⁹ Hip hop theorists such as Perry agree with Marsh's notion that hip hop creates a place for those without a voice in the centre to speak and be heard. This space allows many different voices to speak and respond to one another with little censoring. All these voices transform this space into a place of open dialogue where no topic is off limits. Without rap, there would not be an easily accessible place for many marginalized peoples to speak and to hear concerns pertinent to them. Rap also allows non-marginalized peoples to participate in the medium. Therefore rap presents the opportunity to speak to one's own community while also engaging people outside of one's community. This place of conversation allows for the discussion of hegemonic racism people may feel. Perry, author of *Prophets of the Hood*, addresses the dialogue hip hop is able to create around racism: "hip hop nourishes by offering community membership that entails a body of cultural knowledge, yet it also nourishes by offering a counter-hegemonic authority and subjectivity to the force of white supremacy in the form of the MC."⁵⁰ Perry argues that hip hop simultaneously creates and catalogues a culture's history while at the same time questions and provides an alternative to the dominant culture. MCing thus generates possibilities for Indigenous cultures to both reject the center or decolonize and add to the history of Indigenous cultures.

⁴⁹ Marsh, "Bits and Pieces of Truth," 353.

⁵⁰ Perry, 44.

I posit Burton's work employs hip hop methodology to create a similar discourse. Perry and Rose make it evident that rapping or MCing provides a means to speak, creates a catalogue of the speaker's culture, and creates a place to challenge the cultural center. To use Burton's work as a case study, the artist is given a place to speak through MCing and DJing, which allows Burton to speak in his own language in a way that does not exclude people who do not speak Cree. Finally, the artist challenges Indigenous peoples to reject non-Indigenous cultures and engage with their cultures through said culture's language. In other words, Burton inspires Indigenous viewers to continue to engage in decolonization and non-Indigenous viewers to address the "settler problem." Here I will elaborate further on what Burton achieves through MCing and DJing in *Nikamowin (Song)*.

Rap is effective in creating discussion, "because it is a spoken art form that cherishes open discourse. [Thus] we find in hip hop a dialogic space in which artists' voices articulate ideas about existence on a number of registers."⁵¹ Here, Perry makes evident that rapping creates a space for one to explore complicated notions of identity. Rappers or MCs are not limited to exploring one level of themselves and can explore complex identities in a rap. Burton employed rapping not only to explore and discuss language but other facets of himself and his culture as well. For example, Burton is able to explore the complexity of being an Indigenous person who knows English and his ancestral language, Cree. He also grapples with the identity of being an Indigenous person living in a cosmopolitan

⁵¹ Perry, 43.

city like Vancouver. Burton speaks Cree, was born and raised on a reserve and now lives in a city, contesting the notion that Indigenous peoples do not live in cities. Through rap, Burton can share the complexities of his identity to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples because the medium has the capacity to engage all people.

MCing provides a place for people to speak, especially people who have few opportunities to be heard. Burton titled his work “Nikamowin” which means song, as the full title indicates. Non-Indigenous hip hop scholars Tim Strode and Tim Wood argue “songs” provide “personal and social power.”⁵² By naming his work song and recognizing the power rap songs can give to an MC, Burton makes evident the power he has accessed through *Nikamowin (Song)*. I assert that Burton gives himself personal power by finding a way to explore his relationship with language, both English and Cree. His exploration of language holds the possibility of engaging other Cree peoples, as the process of colonialism has stripped many Indigenous peoples of the ability to speak their ancestors’ language. MCing this song provides Burton with the opportunity to discuss the power of language to decolonize, in a way that connects with Indigenous peoples and engages non-Indigenous peoples to understand that these languages have thrived.

The audio for *Nikamowin (Song)* is made up entirely of Cree except for the brief conversation in English at the beginning of the video. The Cree words when

⁵² Tim Strode and Tim Wood, ed., “Growing Up Gangsta: Gangsta Rap and the Politics of Identity,” in *A Longman Topics Reader: The Hip Hop Reader*, (New York: Pearson-Longman, 2008), 159.

left unedited are discernible to those who speak Cree. However, once these phrases, words, or sentences are edited to create beats, they are rendered incomprehensible. Perry indicates the power that exists in creating confusion in one's listener, as "one of the communication elements that resists white supremacy and co-optation has been the self-conscious incomprehensibility of hip hop lyricism."⁵³ By refusing to present easily digested phrases and sentences, hip hop rejects the colonizing and confining nature of language. The confusion this creates for those who only accept one set of linguistic rules causes them to have to listen closely to truly understand. Perry refers to the common complaint about hip hop that listeners do not understand what the artists are saying as a positive aspect of the medium.⁵⁴ It forces people to listen harder, it leaves room for interpretation, it creates an opportunity for dialogue. Burton is able to create a dialogue through his work by referencing this hip hop technique of creating (mis)interpretations. Burton wants Cree people to feel the embrace of their language, as made evident when he states in Cree "I give you ... love." Burton makes clear speaking one's ancestral language can bring them love. Burton puts a strong emphasis on engaging with one's own culture by employing the Cree language in a mode of communication that is not heralded by the colonizer: rap. Burton explores his culture through language as made evident by the artwork.

In her chapter "My Mic Sound Nice: Art, Community, and Consciousness" from *Prophets of the Hood*, Perry explores the relationship

⁵³ Perry, 50.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

between socially good and artistically good rap music. Rap does not have to be morally upstanding to be enjoyable to listen to. The inverse is true as well: a good message does not equal an artistically strong musical composition.⁵⁵ However, Perry makes evident through examples like the work of Lauryn Hill and Public Enemy that artistically strong songs with positive messages also exist. Artists can create songs that incorporate both moral and artistic integrity. By achieving an audibly enjoyable and socially conscious song, rappers or MCs can produce powerful work. Burton's *Nikamowin (Song)* creates a catchy tune by cleverly using fragments of words to create beats. By creating an enjoyable beat, Burton increases the chance for creating engagement with his listeners/viewers, whether or not they speak Cree. Further, Burton's message of the importance of learning one's ancestral language is a positive message. Through the combination of a positive message and an enjoyable sound, Burton's work becomes powerful for both decolonization and unsettling settlers.

Burton employs a variety of tactics gleaned from hip hop culture to engage in the language and identity of being Cree. He uses hip hop music video methodologies such as looking back to one's 'hood as a way to create socially and visually engaging work. Burton's complex MCing uses a combination of decolonization and hip hop methodologies that allow him to reject the center, explore his culture and remedy ignorance. Burton's use of hip hop engages him but is not so foreign to people outside of his culture that they cannot also enjoy it.

⁵⁵ Perry, 38-57.

The meeting of hip hop and Indigenous cultures in Burton's work strengthens the possibility for decolonization. Through Indigenous hip hop, Burton is able to present multiple aspects of his identity and connect with Indigenous peoples that identify with his experiences. He is able to bring awareness to reserves and to the importance of Cree language to its culture. Burton's *Nikamowin (Song)* has the capacity to engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the process of decolonization.

Nicholas Galanin's *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan Part 1 and Part 2*



Figure 2. Nicholas Galanin, *Tsu Heidei Shuaztutaan Part 1 and 2*, 2008. Video. Part 1 4:37, Part 2 4:08. Courtesy the artist. **Installation view of *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture* at The Power Plant, Toronto. On view 15 December 2012 - 5 May 2013. Photo by Toni Hafkenschied.**

In part one of Galanin's *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan* a man steps into a cement-floored, brick-walled room dressed in pants, a long-sleeved t-shirt and sneakers as Tlingit drumming and vocals play. This man is David "Elsewhere" Bernal who is heralded as an illusionary dancer, a style of dance derived from break dancing.⁵⁶ Elsewhere begins to dance to the Tlingit music as he moves his body in a way that makes it seem like he is made out of rubber. This black and

⁵⁶ A clear indication of why Bernal is called an illusionary dancer can be seen at his performance in 2001 at Kollaboration "David Elsewhere – Kollaboration 2011," YouTube, accessed March 14, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAYTK6jF5o8>.

white video continues, the camera staying stationary, the traditional Tlingit sounds continue, and Elsewhere keeps seamlessly dancing to Indigenous music in a hip hop style. In *Part 2* of Galanin's work, the roles are reversed. This portion of the video is still in black and white and the camera still remains stationary, but this time Dan Littlefield dances in an Indigenous style in Tlingit regalia to a bass heavy beat. Littlefield dances on a stage with a massive Haida print as a backdrop. These two works are projected on a loop, each sample of dancing and music continuously juxtaposed to the other. Like Burton's *Nikamowin (Song)*, Galanin's piece has been part of *Beat Nation* since its beginnings. Here I will elucidate the juxtaposition between hip hop and Indigenous (specifically Tlingit) culture Galanin presents and the new meaning that is created through this juxtaposition.

Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan illustrates what often occurs when hip hop culture is introduced to another culture. Mitchell argues that hip hop culture has "been combined in countries with local musical idioms and vernaculars to produce excitingly distinctive syncretic manifestations of African American influences and local Indigenous elements."⁵⁷ Galanin participates in creating a distinctive syncretic manifestation of hip hop through the comparison of his cultural elements with hip hop components. Galanin gently introduces hip hop to his culture, showing how hip hop dance works with Tlingit music and how Tlingit dance meshes with hip hop music. The hip hop style music Dan Littlefield dances to possesses a DJ aesthetic, which can be defined as a selection of different

⁵⁷ Mitchell, 3.

aspects compared to one another. The entirety of Galanin's work has a DJ aesthetic. This juxtaposition calls to mind non-Indigenous writing, rhetoric, and critical theorist Jeff Rice's theory of hip hop composition. Rice's theory, the "whatever pedagogy", is evident in Galanin's work as he "save[s] isolated moments and then juxtapose[s] them as a final product."⁵⁸ What this means is Galanin has employed small samples (isolated moments) of different cultural happenings and juxtaposed them. This juxtaposition of hip hop and Indigenous culture does not simply create a comparison; much like a DJ using samples to create an entirely new song, Galanin's work creates a cultural moment that can be identified as Indigenous hip hop.

DJing is primarily seen as an audio form of sampling. Pioneering DJs in the Bronx (and DJs to this day) would sample from music that they were exposed to: Black American (including but not limited to Jazz, Rock, Blues and Gospel), Jamaican, Latino, and music contemporary to those DJs. Regardless of the fact that Bronx DJs created songs using samples from older songs, the final product felt of the moment. It had to, according to non-Indigenous scholar specializing in African American literature Houston Baker, Jr. as, "for a song "to be "def-ly" yours and properly original, it has got to be ours – to sound like us."⁵⁹ Galanin makes a piece of artwork that sounds like or reflects his current experience through the act of sampling. *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan Part 1* and *Part 2*

⁵⁸ Jeff Rice, "The 1963 Hip-Hop Machine: Hip-Hop Pedagogy as Composition," *College Composition and Communication*, 54, 3 (2002): 465.

⁵⁹ Houston A. Baker, Jr., "Hybridity, The Rap Race, and Pedagogy for the 1990s," *Black Music Research Journal*, 11, 2 (1991), 221.

exemplifies the basics of DJ sampling. Galanin takes two separate things, puts them side-by-side, and creates a new whole. These parts are Tlinglit traditions that Galanin has a connection to through ancestry, and current practices in hip hop culture that Galanin is connected to through exposure. Galanin is also connected to hip hop culture due to the strong relationship Marsh outlines between the histories of hip hop and Indigenous cultures.⁶⁰ By taking these two parts and putting them side by side, Galanin creates something that is “def-ly” his: a reflection of his ancestry and how this permeates his own interaction with the world around him.

Rose writes in her text *Black Noise* that she was having a conversation about the merits of hip hop as a field of academic study. She was asked, “What’s the point in blasting hip hop music?” Her thoughts “immediately flashed on a history lesson in which [she] learned that slaves were prohibited from playing African drums, because as a vehicle for coded communication, they inspired fear in slave holders.”⁶¹ Rose equates the negative response people have when they hear blasting hip hop music to the fear slave owners experienced when they heard African drums. Here, Marsh’s notion that Indigenous and hip hop cultures have similar and relatable histories becomes important as Tlingit peoples practiced potlatch before an amendment that occurred in 1884 to the Canadian government’s Indian Act outlawed it.⁶² Potlatch can be understood as an exchange

⁶⁰ Marsh, “Bits and Pieces of Truth.”

⁶¹ Rose, *Black Noise*, 62.

⁶² Marsh, “Bits and Pieces of Truth,” 353.

of goods and the basis of the economy and culture commonly practiced by Indigenous peoples in the west of North America. By outlawing potlatch, the Canadian government acknowledged the power it possessed. The government's view of the potlatch "as a barrier to the assimilation of the native peoples into European and Christian society" became evident through its outlaw as described by non-Indigenous historians Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin.⁶³ African drums were prohibited also because of the power they possessed. This power inspired fear in the government and the slave holders.⁶⁴ Playing drums or participating in the potlatch was banned because of the strong presence African-American drumming or the potlatch created. The slaveholders and government did not want slaves or Indigenous peoples to have access to strong presence. Although potlatch was not outlawed specifically because of the noise it produced, the connection between African drums and potlatch being outlawed is based in power and presence. The sound of culturally specific music has the ability to inspire awe and joy in those who appreciate and understand it and fear in those who are ignorant to or scared of its meaning. *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan* can be heard before it is seen in *Beat Nation*, which is important in this context.⁶⁵ Being audibly present holds power (but does not override the presence of the visual). Rose makes evident "emotional

⁶³ Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand Upon the People: The Law Against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 2.

⁶⁴ Regarding the fear in slave holders see Rose, *Black Noise*, 62. Regarding the fear in the Canadian government see Cole and Chaikin, *An Iron Hand*.

⁶⁵ This is true for The Power Plant installation of the exhibition but may not hold true for other installations.

power and presence in rap are profoundly linked to sonic force.”⁶⁶ *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan* taps into the emotional power and presence that rap creates through its sonic force.

In *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan*, there is a visual comparison between Littlefield’s Tlinglit style of dance and Elsewhere’s hip hop dancing. Tlinglit and hip hop dance are juxtaposed through Littlefield’s and Elsewhere’s dances. Galanin’s presentation of *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan*, reflects the call and response trope of hip hop heard in rap songs and seen by break dancers.⁶⁷ American director and artist Charlie Ahearn’s 1983 documentary *Wild Style* has a scene that shows B-Boys (break dancers) competing against one another at a club. A member from one crew (team) shows off their moves in the middle of a mass of spectators. The other crew responds. The original crew responds with a new member breaking. This call-response trope promotes competition. Because *Part 1* and *Part 2* of *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan* are played on a loop it appears as though Elsewhere and Littlefield are engaging in a b-boy battle representing hip hop and Tlinglit crews, respectively. This juxtaposition allows for one to draw comparisons to the similarities between these styles of dance. Presenting this work on a loop deflects creating a hierarchy between the two styles of dance. Hip hop and Tlinglit cultures are visually compared in Galanin’s work to create something new: Indigenous hip hop.

⁶⁶ Rose, *Black Noise*, 63.

⁶⁷ Perry, 33-37.

Each dancer nods in respect to the other's culture by positively responding to the music of their "competitors". Perry explains, "funky sounds inspire both body and mind. The core of funkiness in hip hop is found in the bass: repetitive beats filled with bass that can be felt underneath the feet and inside the chest, bass that makes cars rumble and the floor shake. The percussion engages the listener in a historically learned pattern of response."⁶⁸ Each dancer recognizes the funkiness in one another's music. However, here the dancers do not engage in the "historically learned pattern of response" appropriate to the music. This indicates to viewers that different cultures' patterns of response can be applied to a beat if it is funky enough.

Galanin, through exploring the relationship between hip hop and Indigenous cultures and the past and present, is able to hit on something that Indigenous curator Steve Loft puts into words so succinctly: "there is no 'contemporary,' no 'traditional,' there is only 'we are.'"⁶⁹ Loft presents the notion that culture and people engage in both the past and present to create an understanding of themselves and of the world around them to understand who they are. He effectively indicates that Indigenous peoples are not what non-Indigenous historian Daniel Francis and Indigenous art historian Marcia Crosby call "the Imaginary Indian."⁷⁰ According to Francis, "the Indian is the invention

⁶⁸ Perry, 51.

⁶⁹ Steve Loft, "Who, me? Decolonization as Control," in *Decolonize Me*, edited by Heather Igloliorte (Ottawa: Ottawa Art Gallery, 2012), 76.

⁷⁰ Marcia Crosby, "The Construction of the Imaginary Indian," in *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, edited by Stan Douglas, Vancouver: Talon Books, 1991:

of the European,” born from Canadian culture seen in paintings, photographs, and writing.⁷¹ It is a colonial tactic. The Imaginary Indian is characterized as being entrenched in “traditional” and homogenous Indigenous practices.⁷² Loft and Crosby both argue that Indigenous peoples should not be viewed as unchanging. If a culture does not change, it can become obsolete. Thus, presenting Indigenous peoples and their cultures as homogenous and unchanging serves as beneficial to colonization as it indicates a move toward becoming extinct. Even though Crosby, Loft and Galanin engage in decolonization in different ways, the content of their respective works rejects the notion that there is a difference between “traditional” and “contemporary” Indigenous peoples.

What Galanin does both visually and audibly is create a remix of “old” and “new,” “traditional” and “contemporary.” Further, Galanin does not privilege old over new or traditional over contemporary by including “traditional” and “contemporary” components in part one and part two of his artwork. This indicates that the past and present intersect in a way where neither one is more important than the other. Galanin is able to remix the understanding of how the contemporary and the traditional influence one another because of this lack of privileging. Simpson makes evident that the contemporary or the traditional should not be presented as one being more valued. Instead, she argues that the

267-291. And Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992).

⁷¹ Francis, 20

⁷² Ibid.

traditional should inform one's contemporary context.⁷³ Galanin uses sampling to bring together the contemporary and the traditional.

The effective exploring of the relationship between past and present is a key element to DJing. According to non-Indigenous cultural critic Nelson George, "sampling's flexibility gave hip hop-bred music makers the tools to create tracks that not only were in the hip hop tradition but allowed them to extend that tradition."⁷⁴ I am arguing that Galanin is creating a direction for Indigenous tradition to extend through the method of sampling. Perry also points to the usefulness of hip hop in connecting past with present through its "attention to the ancestors, to the history behind the music, despite rap's postmodern luster."⁷⁵ It is this postmodern luster that allows for history to be explored in a present way, as the borrowing and layering of old samples creates a new opportunity to understand ancestry. DJing allows Galanin to explore the complex layers that exist within Indigenous cultures as made evident by Crosby and Loft. The remixing in *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan* delivers a message that words fail to communicate effectively: the present and the past exist simultaneously and work together positively.

I argue that Galanin rejects the "imaginary Indian" as an act of decolonization because it is a settler-created construct. Indigenous writer, scholar, and activist Gerald Vizenor identifies the power that social constructs (such as the

⁷³ Simpson, 17.

⁷⁴ Nelson George, *Hip Hop America*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Viking Penguin, 1998), 93.

⁷⁵ Perry, 54.

European construction of the “Indian”) give to colonization, calling them “manifest manners.” According to Vizenor, “manifest manners are the simulations of dominance; the notions and misnomers that are read as the authentic and sustained as representations of Native American Indians.”⁷⁶ Vizenor brings forth important notions of colonialism in this statement. Manifest manners or social constructs provide a means for dominance. An example of manifest manners would be the Imaginary Indian. These manifest manners gain so much control because they are presented as natural and not socially constructed. In the same text Vizenor provides the term postindian warriors and defines them as “new indications of a narrative recreation, the simulations that overcome the manifest manners of dominance.” In other words, postindian warriors reject constructed labels. This is important to my argument as postindian warriors refuse to be colonized, they participate in decolonization, and they provide non-Indigenous peoples with the opportunity to hear why their notions about the imaginary Indian need to be unsettled. Postindian warriors take on the challenge of refuting manifest manners to create new understandings of Indigenous peoples.⁷⁷ Vizenor indicates what is most important to the postindian warrior is that they dictate the terms of their representations. Galanin becomes a postindian warrior by overcoming manifest manners and sharing the notion of complex identities held

⁷⁶ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*, (New England, Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 5-6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 5-6.

by Indigenous peoples. Galanin's use of sampling in *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan* allows for narrative recreation.

The title of Galanin's artwork infers the self-determination that the postindian warrior seeks. *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan* translates to "We will again open this container of wisdom that has been left in our care."⁷⁸ No one else will open the container of wisdom. No one else has been left in charge of this wisdom. Only those who protect that wisdom can share it. Galanin chooses to share the wisdom he possesses, asserting his self-determination. His identity is not created by manifest manners or social constructs. Instead Galanin refuses to accept stereotypes through *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan Part 1* and *Part 2*. I argue Galanin brings together the refusal to be silent from multiple cultures not in a way that essentializes each culture but supports Indigenous decolonization. I assert Galanin illustrates the fluid relationship that can occur between hip hop and Indigenous cultures when both cultures are approached thoughtfully and respectfully. Hip hop allows Galanin to open the container of wisdom left to him in a manner that causes others to comprehend the wisdom he is sharing.

Nicholas Galanin's *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan Part 1* and *Part 2* provides a case study that effectively highlights the relationship between Indigenous and hip hop cultures. Kevin Lee Burton's work incorporates Indigenous and hip hop cultural aspects in a way that makes it unclear where Burton's Cree culture begins

⁷⁸ Kathleen Ritter and Tania Willard, co-curators, "Nicholas Galanin" in *Beat Nation: art, hip hop and Aboriginal culture*, (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2012), 16.

and hip hop culture ends. Galanin's work demonstrates the distinction between the two cultures but he brings them into dialogue with one another to create *Tsu Heidei Shugaxtutaan*. The work of these artists indicates two of the many ways in which Indigenous and hip hop cultures can work together. They can be blended together or they can be used side by side. In both instances, the artists position hip hop and Indigenous cultures to work together to create a voice and a space for unsettling. Hip hop allows for other cultures to be combined with it in a way that highlights both cultures instead of essentializing both. Highlighting Indigenous and hip hop cultures simultaneously allows for a clear indication of the complexity of Indigenous culture that can unsettle stagnant or homogenous ideas of Indigenous peoples that non-Indigenous peoples may hold.

Hip Hop's Draw, According to Charity Marsh

Charity Marsh's Indigenous hip hop research and theory will conclude this discussion of the artworks of Nicholas Galanin and Kevin Lee Burton. This section will address Indigenous peoples' interest in hip hop culture as a means of accessing and communicating their own cultures. Marsh's points will be supported by my own research into hip hop culture and Indigenous methodology. Galanin's and Burton's artworks will serve to further elucidate Marsh' points.

Why have Indigenous peoples chosen hip hop as a platform for personal and cultural exploration? Marsh was once asked a similar question when being interviewed on a morning talk show in Saskatchewan, where Marsh conducts her research at the IMP Labs. Marsh was asked, "Why do you think Aboriginal youth in Saskatchewan are drawn to hip hop culture?"⁷⁹ Marsh gave a detailed response in her text "Bits and Pieces of Truth: Storytelling, Identity, and Hip Hop in Saskatchewan," outlining four reasons Aboriginal youth in Saskatchewan are drawn to hip hop culture. Marsh's four reasons are: agency, accessibility, similarities in history between the two cultures, and gaining a voice.⁸⁰ Although Marsh's four notions specifically address Saskatchewan, they translate to the rest of Canada. Here I will examine each one of Marsh's reasons and elaborate on the connections she has made using the work of other Indigenous theorists and hip hop theorists.

⁷⁹ Marsh, "Bits and Pieces of Truth," 353.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 346-371.

Marsh's first point is also the most pertinent: "there is a productive (and perhaps innovative) aspect in allowing young people *agency* around how they connect to school, politics, culture, social relations, and the various artistic practices they enjoy." (My italics)⁸¹ Hip hop allows for the expression of Indigenous people's agency, which is effectively achieved through sampling in hip hop cultures. Sampling allows for the selection of what is displayed, heard, presented or seen. The process of sampling involves taking a portion of a variety of things made of similar mediums and combining them in a way that creates new meaning. I am not claiming that sampling is the only aspect of hip hop that garners agency; however, it is the most pertinent to this paper as Burton and Galanin both provide examples of how hip hop sampling can create agency. Here I will focus on hip hop sampling as a means of achieving agency.

Sampling is a fundamental aspect of hip hop culture in a few ways. It brought aspects from many different cultures to make a new culture. Non-Indigenous art historian Robert Farris Thompson makes evident "the original hip hoppers [were not] confined, as some outsiders imagined, to a single, monolithic black culture."⁸² Thompson goes on to elucidate the many different groups that lived in the Bronx during hip hop's conception including "English-speaking blacks from Barbados," "black Jamaicans," black Cubans, Puerto Ricans and

⁸¹ Marsh, "Bits and Pieces of Truth," 353.

⁸² Robert Farris Thompson, "Hip-Hop 101," in *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, edited by William Eric Perkins, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996), 213.

black youth born and raised in North America.⁸³ These varying cultures all contributed to the creation of hip hop. Sampling can also be seen in one of the pillars of hip hop: DJing. DJing began by taking clips of songs and bringing them together to create something that spoke directly to the youth of the Bronx. DJing sampled portions of songs from “disco mixing, dub sounds, and toasting,” as made evident by George in *Hip Hop America*.⁸⁴ Disco, dub and the Jamaican tradition of toasting (which involves speaking into a microphone over a beat) were brought together by DJ youth of the Bronx.⁸⁵ By bringing these sounds together, DJs were able to create new songs. The agency that sampling provides is evident in Burton’s *Nikamowin (Song)* as he samples sounds from his Cree language to make something of the moment that reflects his relationship with his ancestry. DJing uses sampling to modify the song’s target audience, thus shifting who has agency in the creation of the song.

Rice’s “The 1963 Hip-Hop Machine: Hip-Hop Pedagogy as Composition” illustrates how sampling has become recognized as a method. Rice creates an entire pedagogy around the idea of sampling, coining the phrase “whatever pedagogy” in his article. “Whatever pedagogy” is “a model based on digital sampling’s rhetorical strategy of juxtaposition.”⁸⁶ Rice argues that by sampling different moments and juxtaposing them, one can learn new ideas from these two seemingly disparate moments. This gives a person agency over what meanings

⁸³ Thompson, 213-14.

⁸⁴ George, *Hip Hop America*, 7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 24-25.

⁸⁶ Rice, “The 1963 Hip-Hop Machine,” 453-471.

and understandings can be derived from what has been sampled. The method of sampling⁸⁷ can be easily translated to different media other than music to gain the same result: agency. This brings us back to Marsh's notion that hip hop delivers agency to those who employ it. Rice argues that sampling allows people to create something new. This creation of something new out of old parts is also the construction of agency that Marsh indicates. Thus, hip hop's sampling provides a place for people to make meaning.

A great benefit of the sampling method to agency for Indigenous peoples is its origins. Sampling is a method that was not created by the center but by those on the margins. Non-Indigenous cultural theorist Audre Lorde addresses the importance of using tools not from the center to successfully decolonize in her key speech which was subsequently printed, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House."⁸⁸ In this text she argues that modes of rupturing systemic prejudice cannot be the same modes that create systemic prejudice. As the title of her work aptly suggests, methods used by the master cannot be used for decoupling from that same master. This notion is supported by Indigenous scholar and curator Heather Igloliorte as she foregrounds Lorde's notion that new tools are needed to rupture old systems in her curatorial essay for the exhibition

⁸⁷ I have intentionally conflated the term sampling method or method of sampling with Rice's phrase whatever pedagogy in this paper.

⁸⁸ Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House," 1984, in *Sister Outsider*, (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 110-113.

*Decolonize Me.*⁸⁹ Sampling is born out of hip hop culture, not the dominant culture, thus it is a tool with agency capable of dismantling the master's house.

Marsh's second response to the question of why Indigenous youth in Saskatchewan are drawn to Indigenous hip hop reads as follows:

Hip hop culture offers a wide variety of entry points that are fairly accessible (physically and economically) – a person can participate by rapping (or writing rhymes), dancing (break or hip hop), painting (graffiti arts), DJing, or creating music or beats in other ways – for example, by beat boxing or by using free downloadable software programs – or one can engage in the role of audience (giving “props” and appreciating other's attempts or skills).⁹⁰

If one has a mouth they can make a full rap song. Hands can create the beat. This is not to insinuate that rap music and hip hop culture are simplistic: however, they can be made simply if necessary. George verifies the range of hip hop music that can be created as “No musical expertise was needed to use [turntables], though there is an inherent musicality required to understand how elements from various recordings can be arranged to create something new.”⁹¹ George makes evident that anyone can participate in hip hop, although participation does not always result in something unique. Marsh is less concerned about the quality of work being produced and more concerned with the inclusion of those who normally experience exclusion due to physical or economical hindrances. Burton and Galanin, however, produce works that employ hip hop in a way that indicates a

⁸⁹ Heather Igloliorte “‘No History of Colonialism’ Decolonizing Practices in Indigenous Arts,” in *Decolonize Me*, edited by Heather Igloliorte (Ottawa: Ottawa Art Gallery, 2012), 19-37.

⁹⁰ Marsh, “Bits and Pieces of Truth,” 353.

⁹¹ George, 92.

more complex engagement with the four pillars of the form. Both artists demonstrate strong musicality, Burton through the creation of a song and Galanin through the comparison of two very different songs that flow when played one after another. People of different races, nations, ages and genders are drawn to hip hop because of the agency it provides. One does not have to pay for a class to learn how to break dance: all that is needed is a cardboard box to spin on. Hip hop provides a creative outlet that does not involve years of training or expensive supplies.

Marsh's third point regarding the connection between Indigenous cultures and hip hop cultures addresses the similarities between the histories of these cultures.⁹² Marsh explains, "hip hop is a culture that has a context – it comes from a specific time and place and has evolved out of many cultural practices that came before it, practices that also have histories. Early hip hop represented a new form of cultural and political expression for disenfranchised African American and Latino youth living in the south Bronx (and then elsewhere in the United States) during the late 1970s and early 1980s."⁹³ Indigenous peoples are able to see "identifications with these roots/routes of hip hop culture, including similar stories of marginalization, segregation, poverty, and racism, as well as strong identifications with stories concerning the importance of community ties, acts of

⁹² The histories of Indigenous peoples and the many cultures that make up the hip hop community (black Americans, Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, the list goes on) are not to be understood as the exact same. Specific details of their histories distinguish these cultures. However, experiences that can generally be described as struggles with and against white patriarchy have been felt by both cultures throughout history.

⁹³ Marsh, "Bits and Pieces of Truth," 353.

resistance, and empowerment through creativity and music.”⁹⁴ The methodology of sampling becomes more accessible and appealing to Indigenous peoples because hip hop is created by a group of people who have endured and thrived through similar hardships. Galanin emphasizes these historical similarities through his direct comparison between hip hop and Indigenous cultures today. Aspects of these cultures can intermingle well because of their similar histories and gain “empowerment through creativity and music.” Historical similarities, one of Marsh’s four notions, can be expanded from Saskatchewan to Indigenous peoples across Canada as all Indigenous peoples, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, have had, to put it lightly, negative experiences with the Canadian government

While hip hop was emerging out of a history of slavery, gangs, and government oppression. Indigenous peoples were experiencing serious effects of colonization such as residential schools, the 60s scoop⁹⁵, and the recently uncovered Canadian government’s use of residential schools students for the purposes of medical testing.⁹⁶ George shines a light on similar medical testing such as “the Tuskegee syphilis experiment that poisoned the bodies of poor Alabama men with a venereal disease for over forty years at U.S. expense.”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Marsh, “Bits and Pieces of Truth,” 353.

⁹⁵ For information on the 60s scoop see Patricia Cotter-Busbee and Trace A Demeyer, *Two Worlds; Lost Children of the Indian Adoption Projects*, (Greenfield, MA: Blue Hand Books, 2013).

⁹⁶ “Aboriginal children used in medical tests, commissioner says” CBC News, August 1, 2013, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/aboriginal-children-used-in-medical-tests-commissioner-says-1.1318150>.

⁹⁷ George, 38.

These groups of peoples' respective governments have employed them without their consent to conduct medical testing. Both Indigenous peoples of Canada and black Americans have experienced (and continue to experience) "law enforcement branches performing nefarious deeds for decades."⁹⁸ This complicated relationship between law enforcement, government and black Americans involves simultaneous control and neglect. Indigenous peoples in Canada also experienced and continue to experience this simultaneous control and neglect.⁹⁹ Indigenous cultures recognize a kinship with African American cultures who cultivated hip-hop culture.¹⁰⁰

Marsh's final suggestion for the Indigenous hip hop link ties back to her first. "Finally, I made the suggestion that Indigenous youth living in Saskatchewan need a voice – not necessarily a voice tied to words but a voice rooted in more of a presence – and that these young people need to be heard by an audience who will listen to their stories and engage with them in dynamic and respectful conversation."¹⁰¹ Hip hop provides a platform to create one's own voice. Further, hip hop creates access to a voice with agency. This means that not only does hip hop provide a voice but it also provides a means to be heard and a voice that can create change. This change is created because, as Marsh notes, hip hop provides a voice that people will listen to, aiding in unsettling settlers. This

⁹⁸ George, 38.

⁹⁹ For a contemporary example of this control, see Pamela D. Palmater, *Beyond Blood: Rethinking Indigenous Identity*, (Saskatoon: Purich Publish Ltd., 2011).

¹⁰⁰ African Americans were one of many cultures who played a role in the development of hip hop in the Bronx.

¹⁰¹ Marsh, "Bits and Pieces of Truth," 353.

voice is imbued with the thoughts and ideals of the person speaking and through their voice they get to create their own identity. George states “Hip hop has brought America a new language of rhythm, speech, and movement that has inspired a generation to take to verse to say what was too long unspoken about this nation.”¹⁰² Rose makes evident that rap has provided “open social reflection on poverty, fear of adulthood, the desire for absent fathers, frustrations about black male sexism, female sexual desires, daily rituals of life as an unemployed teen hustler, safe sex, raw anger, violence, and childhood memories.”¹⁰³ Hip hop has expanded from the Bronx-specific topics Rose outlined into residential schools, living on the reserve, being an urban Native, and colonialism. Burton addresses many of these topics in *Nikamowin*, including living on the reserve, and being an urban Native. He furthers what can be discussed using Indigenous hip hop by exploring the relationship he has with the Cree language. Hip hop offers Indigenous peoples a chance to discuss culturally specific topics and have these discussions heard by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Marsh’s points effectively indicate the positive relationship Indigenous peoples can experience with hip hop culture. I find two of Marsh’s points to be pertinent to the notion of unsettling the settler within. Marsh argues that hip hop is an outlet for Indigenous peoples to gain agency and to gain a voice with a strong presence. I argue that both of these qualities have the potential to make non-Indigenous peoples engage with unsettling subjects. Hip hop has commanded

¹⁰² George, xiii.

¹⁰³ Rose, *Black Noise*, 18.

receptive ears of people outside of the hip hop community for many years while presenting issues of sexual frustration, violence, and hate. Indigenous hip hop has similar potential to create listeners in non-Indigenous peoples regarding issues Indigenous peoples wish to present. Hip hop can bring listeners to unsettling subjects and “disturbing emotions,” Regan argues; it is “a critical pedagogical tool that can provoke decolonizing, transformative learning.”¹⁰⁴ Hip hop provides a vehicle that creates a receptive listener for potentially unsettling messages. As Regan makes clear, disturbing one’s preconceived notions has the potential to create supporters of decolonization in non-Indigenous peoples; thus, a non-Indigenous person listening to or seeing Indigenous hip hop can have their notions about Indigenous and Canadian cultural relations unsettled by works that take up this form of cultural expression.

¹⁰⁴ Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 13.

Conclusion

Kevin Lee Burton and Nicholas Galanin engage in the process of cultural borrowing, in this case, of hip hop as a means to continue building towards decolonization. What is notable about this cultural relationship are the boundless pre-existing points of connection hip hop and Indigenous cultures share and can strengthen. Throughout this paper, these connections have been explored. Marsh provided a list of reasons why Indigenous youth in Saskatchewan were turning to hip hop as a means of expression: agency, accessibility, relatability to hip hop history, and a voice. It was my intention, through the examinations of Burton's and Galanin's artworks, to make evident that these reasons extend beyond Saskatchewan youth to Indigenous peoples of all ages across Canada. Burton and Galanin indicate the impulse to engage in hip hop culture that Indigenous peoples are experiencing. They serve as excellent case studies to demonstrate the agency, accessibility, historical connection, and voice Indigenous peoples can experience when engaging with hip hop.

This paper showed how hip hop can address the "settler problem" while also exploring how hip hop provides an outlet to Indigenous peoples to explore their own cultural specificity. Simpson discusses the complicated nature of Indigenous peoples engaging in particular theories by noting:

Western theory, whether based in post-colonial, critical or even liberatory strains of thought, has been exceptional at diagnosing, revealing and even interrogating colonialism; and many would argue that this body of theory holds the greatest promise for shifting the Canadian politic because it speaks to that audience in a language they can understand, if not hear. Yet western theories

of liberation have for the most part failed to resonate with the vast majority of Indigenous peoples, scholars or artists.¹⁰⁵

At the same time, the Canadian politic may not understand Indigenous theories. I have proposed here that Indigenous hip hop may be an aid in rectifying this issue. It is evident that Indigenous peoples are engaged by hip hop as a tool for cultural exploration. It is also evident that non-Indigenous peoples are able to understand and connect with Indigenous hip hop (albeit in different ways than Indigenous peoples do). Generally, peoples' willing engagement with hip hop born out of the Bronx is evident in its current wide-reaching, Billboard Chart-topping, Grammy category-having popularity. With specific regard to Indigenous hip hop I am an example of a non-Indigenous person experiencing unsettling through Indigenous hip hop. However, I as one person do not provide a strong enough claim for the unsettling possibilities of Indigenous hip hop. Writing this paper has left me with questions regarding the implication of western art institutions displaying Indigenous hip hop. Can Indigenous hip hop permeate institutions with histories of aesthetic and value judgment systems created by settlers? Does Indigenous hip hop have the capacity to unsettle not just individual settlers but whole systems of colonialism?

Marsh identifies voice as a key reason that Indigenous youth in Saskatchewan are drawn to hip hop. This paper has found that voice draws Indigenous peoples across Canada to engage with hip hop. The voice of Indigenous hip hop, I have argued, is difficult to ignore. It has caused me to

¹⁰⁵ Simpson, 31.

question my own mentality and I urge other non-Indigenous people to unsettle the settlers within themselves. Regan argues that decolonization cannot occur without the participation of the settlers in the settler-colonized dichotomy.¹⁰⁶ The question in the decolonization process becomes “How do we solve the settler problem?”¹⁰⁷ Hip hop has the potential to achieve a myriad of positive outcomes for decolonization efforts, as I have made evident. The answer to “How do we solve the settler problem?” can be found in the open, listening and receptive non-Indigenous ears that Indigenous hip hop is able to foster.

¹⁰⁶ Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

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