

Let's Talk: Asian Black Solidarity through Hip Hop

Audio Transcription by Akemi Chan-Imai

[intro music plays]

Akemi: Welcome to another episode of Let's Talk, a podcast where we feature individuals and organizations in and around Oakland Chinatown who are working hard to bring our AAPI and Black communities together. By highlighting their stories, we hope to encourage inclusive, intergenerational, and anti-racist perspectives in all spaces. I'm Akemi Chan-Imai, the Program Manager at the Oakland Asian Cultural Center and this is "Let's Talk." Today's episode features Marlon Richardson also known as Unlearn The World, and Stephanie Liem, an educator and former Communications Director at Hip Hop For Change. Using Hip Hop as a lens for solidarity, Marlon and Stephanie have presented workshops about the history of Afro-Asian solidarity, exploring historical examples of cross-cultural unity from the Cold War to the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement and Stop Asian Hate protests. They will be joined by Jason Chu, an Asian American rapper and poet based in Los Angeles.

Jason: What's up folks. My name is Jason Chu. It's such a pleasure and a privilege to be here today with the OACC and with these two very special guests. I'm a rapper and an activist and an educator based in Los Angeles, California. I'm Chinese American, and I'm so excited to be talking today about Asian Black solidarity through the medium and venue and culture of Hip Hop. Before we dive in further, before we get into our content, I'd love to have our guests introduce themselves today. Marlon and Stephanie, would you all like to let the people know who you all is?

Marlon: Of course, well I appreciate you having us Jason. I appreciate you letting us hold space with you and do all the things that we do. My name is Marlon Richardson. I go by the artist name Unlearn The World. I am an MC, producer, beatmaker, DJ, but also a Hip Hop educator. I am the proud Education Director of Hip Hop For Change, which is a nonprofit organization out of Oakland, California, having served 28,000 youth around the country teaching them the culture and the deep history of Hip Hop as well as all of the expressive elements. So we're getting kids to DJ, make beats, write songs, do graffiti, breakdance, and we're tying in themes of social justice, multiculturalism, tolerance, and really just giving them an access point to creativity that allows them to be their authentic selves. So thank you for having me today.

Stephanie: Nice to meet you all. My name is Stephanie Liem, I use she/her pronouns. I'm a first-generation Indonesian American immigrant. I am an educator as well as a grad student, and I used to work for Hip Hop For Change for around four years as the Communications Director. I am a student of Hip Hop, I love Hip Hop, and I think that it's the best medium for all of us to express our appreciation and solidarity for each other. Let's get into it.

Jason: I love it. So you know, we're just gonna come out the gate swinging and continuing to introduce ourselves. But Marlon, I love, you said a phrase, "the deep history of Hip Hop". And I think that you know, as a student of the culture myself, there is SO much in it. My favorite saying is **when Mos Def on "Black On Both Sides" he says, "Hip Hop is the people."** Whatever the people doing, wherever the people been, that's where Hip Hop is at.

Marlon: Absolutely, absolutely.

Jason: And I think what's super cool right, is how Hip Hop is so deep but we all come to it in certain ways. It first piques our imagination in certain ways. Marlon and Stephanie, could you all let me and let the audience know when- what was it that you first encountered Hip Hop culture?

Marlon: Hip Hop for me wasn't something that I found on Instagram or YouTube, right? I'm an 80's baby. So that said, Hip Hop was literally outside of my front door. My cousins would DJ. I would sit and watch them, you know, put together mixes and blend with their vinyl and all that. My brothers on occasion would breakdance in the house or at block parties. So it was something that was always exposed to me in all of its various forms. I think for me, I took a liking to MCing only because of my interesting upbringing. I'm AfroLatino, my parents are from the Dominican Republic, I identify as Black. But up until I was 13, I grew up with a woman who was White and Jewish. And being in that environment where I'm the only Black person in most of the spaces that I'm in, it created a catalyst for me to look inward and look at who I was. But then, looking at artists like Rakim for example, and listening to "Eric B. is President" on a rap tape that my mother bought me really showed me and gave me the kind of foray into what it is to express yourself as a person of color, what it is to express yourself as a young Black person living in New York, being exposed to the various elements of Hip Hop. So then by the time I was 10 years old, I'm literally freestyling just to make sense of my own life and my own unique circumstances. And then that paired with the Illmatic album that dropped when I was 13, that sent me into a mission of let me take these thoughts of mine, let me put them in books and let me start writing raps and creating songs and performing and battle rapping and all of that. And that essentially just sent me on my journey to be an artist. Fast forward decades later, I've expanded over 30 years of Hip Hop and have been involved in Hip Hop in various ways, not only as an educator like I am now with Hip Hop For Change, but also as a contributor. I put out several different albums, mixtapes, I'm a producer for myself and other artists. But aside from that, I understand the culture not only from the rap music industry phenomenon that it is for public consumption, but also from the cultural standpoint of it, and the relevance it has for people who come from communities like mine and similar communities around the world.

Jason: Love it, I love it man. And I resonate so much with that story. Rakim [was] my favorite MC growing up. It was always them storytellers that I really loved and I really- for me it gave me, it painted a picture of a world that wasn't mine, but it brought me in and that was so powerful to me.

Marlon: Exactly.

Stephanie: Well I got into Hip Hop in high school, and for context I'm 24 years old. [laughs] So that was maybe 10 years ago? I fell in love with Hip Hop after listening to Tupac, Lauryn Hill, and I was so over saturated with pop, American pop culture, and all of these images that didn't resonate with me, and I wanted something else. And so I started listening to Hip Hop and you know when I heard Tupac say that, when he mentioned the rose growing from the concrete, I was like, wow I could be the lotus growing from the water you know, like taking power from Black Power using that to just fuel my own aspirations in life. I saw so much diversity in Hip Hop. I think that's just such a fundamental reason why a lot of the youth now are really drawn to Hip Hop because it's so fundamentally different than any other genre out in the market right now. It's just so grounded in social justice and like authenticity that you can't help but want to be drawn to Hip Hop. And specifically as an Asian American who grew up in America, you know, my parents are refugees. Our story was one of hardship and that wasn't [a story] that was typically depicted in American pop culture so I gravitated towards Hip Hop because those were stories

that I could identify with. Those were stories that truthfully depicted the struggle beautifully and resiliently. That's why I fell in love with Hip Hop.

Jason: How did you go from that sense of oh, this is something that I'm watching and I'm learning and I'm seeing, to this is something I'm building in?

Stephanie: So in high school, that was when I first fell in love with Hip Hop and then in college, that's when I started interning for Hip Hop For Change and that's when I started learning. Marlon was one of my mentors in college. [laughs] He's still is one of my mentors; he's always teaching me stuff. And you really learn about the complexity of Hip Hop culture. As a grad student now, I really think about how critically Hip Hop has changed the world. It changes the lens of how we see everything. I used to be really into K-Pop in middle school and now I can't unsee the Hip Hop influences on K-Pop. I can't just unsee how social justice, especially social media, social justice, is influenced by Hip Hop. Everything! Literally everything is influenced by Hip Hop. I talk to this with Marlon all the time, but we talk about Hip Hop fashion and how all of the Hip Hop artists are influenced by Asian fashion designers. But Asian fashion designers are influenced by Hip Hop artists. [laughs]

Marlon: It's so meta, right?

Stephanie: It's meta! [laughs] Yeah, and just being a student of the culture you know, the fifth element [of Hip Hop], I can't critically disengage with how Hip Hop has influenced literally everything in my life. So at Hip Hop For Change, we get grills as a present to be on the leadership team. The people who make our grills are Asian. So if you critically think, all of the jewelers in the Hip Hop industry are Asian. All of the most famous jewelers, all of the people who make the 24-karat gold chains. They're all interconnected and it's just so meta. Everything is a circle and we're just influencing each other. It's a repetitive cycle of solidarity and creative expression. It's beautiful.

Jason: That's exactly why I wear a grill too. Because people, they come at me sometimes like, "Yo, is this appropriated?" And that's an opportunity, right? That's an opportunity to go into the conversation of Hip Hop is deeper than you know. And unless you know about Filipinos in the Bay, or unless you know about Johnny Dang, unless you know about Ben Baller and his role in the LA Hip Hop scene, and then [how] he became THE go-to grill maker you know, this Korean dude. Unless you've done that [research] man, don't come at me talking like "oh, where does this come from?" Because I know where it comes from, do YOU know where it comes from. You know what I'm saying?

Marlon: That's right. [laughs]

Jason: [laughs] That's actually a perfect segue, Steph, into this conversation that I wanna have. We're talking today specifically about Asian and Black solidarity through the culture of Hip Hop. Shout outs to the OACC who is giving us a venue to speak on this and shout outs to Hip Hop For Change who's doing this work day by day in the trenches. I think that it's important to acknowledge two things whenever we have this conversation. The first is that Hip Hop is rooted in Black and Brown experiences and histories. Without very specific Black and Brown communities, Hip Hop would not exist. Certainly not in the form that it does today. But it's also important to acknowledge that there are ways for cultures to grow and expand. Not *beyond* the base, in the sense of moving away from the base, but I think, you know the way I see it, any tree that grows, the roots are planted in a certain place, but it gives shade to a lot of space beyond just the roots. Steph, you just shared a little bit from your perspective, but Marlon I'd love to

hear from you brother. Let's talk specifically about Asian American and Asian communities embracing, benefitting from Hip Hop, bringing themselves and their cultures to Hip Hop. What do you see happening? How does Hip Hop benefit? How do these communities benefit?

Marlon: Yeah, I mean it's an important question for us to unpack but I think ultimately what we're dealing with within Hip Hop culture are intersectional identities. And it's one thing that I always say; I say we may not agree on politics or even religion, but I think a lot of us can agree on a dope Hip Hop beat, right. I think that becomes the impetus for us getting along and finding a commonality in terms of the artists and the music that we appreciate and the culture that comes from that, right. So we're dealing with identities that are rooted not only in race and ethnicity, but we're also dealing with communities that are founded based on circumstances, based on economic status. The fact that a lot of Asian communities live literally next door to Black communities, and that overlap, right? I literally went across the street almost every day of my life to buy Chinese food. And you can hear that in my lyrics, you can hear that in the lyrics of a lot of New York MCs in terms of their relationship to the Chinese restaurant in their neighborhood. That's the first part. Aside from that, it's Asian culture and I was a student of martial arts as a kid, so I studied Taekwondo, I studied Aikido, I competed nationally. So I was always exposed to Asian culture in one way or another whether it was my Puerto Rican teacher who learned from Ernie Reyes and Ernie Reyes Jr. Aside from that, you know meeting people like Jhoon Rhee, who was a Taekwondo instructor who was a master who taught Bruce Lee how to do kicks that were higher than the Wing Chun style of kicking. Little things like that. So, I always kind of just coming up before I was even involved in Hip Hop, was very appreciative and welcoming of Asian culture in my life and the influence that it had. I studied Bruce Lee as an icon and as an actor and as a martial artist for years. [I] read the *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*. One of my more iconic photos of me as an artist is me with Bruce Lee on my jacket. So, I say all that to say that I understood the values of Eastern philosophy and Eastern culture being adapted into my context as a kid growing up on Washington Heights in New York City. The reason why I was meditating on the roof as opposed to selling drugs in the street, a lot of that came from East Asian and Eastern influence in my life. Fast forward years later, you just, you see it with groups like Wu Tang [Clan]. You see it with fashion designers like Nigo and their relationship with people like Pharrell [Williams] and all of these different things. So I just see that there's a lot of give and take, and there's always been a lot of give and take. And I think we often get bogged down in who's taking more and who's benefitting more. But I think that we need to kind of rise above that conversation and contextualize the relationship. Contextualize it from the aspect of economics and class, but also contextualize it in terms of solidarity and historic solidarity. I think a lot of people who are making these complaints are coming from a space of being uninformed. Just like you said, if you do the history, and you do the knowledge, right. Hip Hop is founded on knowledge – knowledge of self, knowledge of the environment. You're gonna find that what we're just bringing to the forefront in the 21st century is something that's coming from a legacy of marginalization that both Asian and Black communities can identify with and have historically found solidarity with one another to try to combat that problem.

Stephanie: Like what Marlon was saying, there's so much history at the intersection of all of solidarity. If you really look at the history of Asian people and their relationship with Black people, you look at how American society has emasculated Asian men. So in the 90's, you see a lot of Asian men dressing in Hip Hop fashion and like using Hip Hop language to present themselves as more masculine. I think that it's really important instead of just pointing the finger directly at cultural appropriation, to make space for these people who were in survival mode, who did want to present themselves as more acceptable to

American society. And the thing is that you actually see the same phenomenon happening again like currently. You see it happening in Asia too, especially in the underground of say Korean, Japanese, other Asian countries and their underground Hip Hop scenes. There's a lot of cultural appropriation going on, but there is also a lot of cultural appreciation going on. I watch a lot of video essays of Black people who go to, say Japan and Korea, not just limited to those two East Asian countries, but they feel the most welcomed in Hip Hop circles. And yes, there's a lot of appropriation going on but the most space for solidarity is made of these places where people are students of the culture because they embrace the diversity. There are problems there because I've noticed that the way that Asian people really show their love and appreciation for artists is by replicating them. They want to look exactly like them, they want to talk like them because they idolize them so much. But in a lot of Asian countries, we don't have the social justice, social media culture you know. People don't have as much access to social justice education as we do. So, I'm not excusing it but I'm just saying I actively try to make space for people who are still learning. And so, how can we turn cultural appropriation into appreciation and give people a proper pathway to see how education can help them become activists or learn more about the culture, and participate in the culture in a more creative way?

Jason: [When] I first encountered Hip Hop culture, it was my boy Yusef. We were talking about music in class on day. We were in class together. I was being like a little punk and I was saying, "Oh man, this music that I hear on the radio, it's all garbage, man. Puff Daddy's just rapping about money, what is that?" And he was like, "Man, shut up. Here." And he burned me *Deltron 3030* by Del the Funky Homosapien, he burned me *The Blueprint 2* by Jay-Z, and he burned me *Labor Days* by Aesop Rock. And he was like, "Just listen to these three, and then come back and we'll talk." And I remember riding the bus listening to them and just being like, wow there's something here. I didn't even understand everything that was being said but I understood that there was a whole world that was unfolding through this music. I think of where I was there; I went from complete ignorance to a little curiosity, and then fast forward...and its been a whole stage of growth. And Steph, exactly what you just said I think it so crucial to those of us who are at a certain place in our journeys. That can be with Hip Hop, that can be with social justice, that can be with anything. It's so important to remember that we weren't always where we are at today, and that there's people who aren't at where they're gonna be at. I think the temptation so often in these [social] justice conversations is to say, "If you ain't caught up to me, you trash." And then that makes *me* the measuring stick, and we forget that it's a journey. People just gotta be where they're at, and the measure of whether they're gonna go somewhere, is where they're headed. Not where they've been. Or not even where they are at today. Could y'all break down to you, what does cultural appropriation mean and why is it harmful?

Marlon: I would say for me, cultural appropriation is trying to benefit from a form of expression that for the community that actually created it and founded it, it's looked down upon. One of the more prominent examples of cultural appropriation is Bo Derek. For those who don't know, a very popular actress back in the 70's who gained a higher profile for being in a movie or being in a film show where she had cornrows. So this White woman, blonde, blue eyes, with cornrows, it was kind of heralded as so fashion forward and amazing when people, especially women in the Black community had been wearing cornrows for generations, and have been periodically and perpetually told that it's unprofessional, it's not attractive, it's all these different things. So that's kind of one microcosmic example of the dangers of cultural appropriation where for one culture where it's actually who they are, it's embedded in their DNA, it's viewed as low class, bad, ugly, unprofessional. Even now, I have cornrows in my hair now, but

there are actually laws being passed in terms of not discriminating against people with certain ethnic hairstyles. But other classes of people can appropriate those hairstyles or appropriate those sense of fashion, the sense of talking, and it's considered innovative, it's considered edgy, it's considered amazing. But I also think it has to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. You can on one sense, look at somebody from the Asian community or any other community adapting to Black culture, Black identity and not know their proximity to the Black experience, right? Their proximity or their relation as it relates to class, as it relates to marginalization, as it relates to oppression, we can't speak on that without knowing the nuances of their lived experience and how that may be in closer proximity to the African Americans that they are identifying with than who we're trying to place them. We're compartmentalizing them with this idea that oh, you belong in this category, so what you're doing now is appropriation. Not knowing that they may have a very deep history with that look, those grills, that hair, the raps, all of those things. Maybe their best friend, maybe they were raised by a Black family. Maybe they were raised around Black people their entire lives and that's why they talk the way they do. So I think it has to be looked at on a case-by-case basis, not only the appreciation aspect but the appropriation aspect.

Stephanie: I think Marlon really just took it away. To me, cultural appropriation is exploiting the culture without giving anything back. I'll give an example. So, for the longest time, Asian people were very criticized or very much ridiculed for their eyes. But now, suddenly cat eyes are very much trending and people are getting surgery and wearing makeup to have the very cat-ish eye look. When Asian women had that, they were exotified and killed. But now, it's a makeup trend and it's suddenly stylish, and it's building on the same principles that Marlon was speaking of. But, I do very much see his point about taking into consideration people's histories and lived experiences when really deciding, is this cultural appropriation or is this just something else. Marlon and I, we had a conversation about the whole Awkwafina and her scandal about cultural appropriation, and her usage of African American Vernacular English (AAVE)-

Marlon: Her blaccent, so to speak.

Stephanie: Yes, her Blackness. Well, we talked about it and you know, she's from Queens, she grew up around a lot of Black people, and while Hollywood does love to exaggerate blaccent and hyperbolize that, I think there is that intersection of Black people especially in New York living very close to Asian people and all of the Asian people going to school with their Black friends and just trying to fit in and you know, Awkwafina is also a Hip Hop artist. So then there's also that intersection there. So how do we make space for people who are just an accumulation of history and their experiences?

Marlon: They are a product of their environment.

Stephanie: There you go, that was what I was looking for. [laughs]

Marlon: I mean, ultimately that's what we're talking about. I think the overarching societal narrative is that you *have* to be a product of where you come from, *unless*...right? You have to be-, you have to talk with an accent and wear baggy pants or listen to rap music, *unless* you're Asian. [laughs] Because society will tell you Asian people have to act this way. Black people need to act this way. White people need to act this way. So there's a lot of societal compartmentalization that goes on, and we're born into it. We're literally born into it and we have to kind of groom ourselves and acquiesce to the world that is expecting certain behavior patterns from us, certain frames of thinking from us, and all too often, those

narratives that we've been given to accept may not be intrinsically who we are at our core. You know what I'm saying? I think that Hip Hop allows you to come into a space as you are, as your most authentic self for you to remix your life for the better. For you to take from every aspect of your life, the movies you watch, the environment you came from, the languages you've learned, and now you find a way to remix it to express yourself in an authentic form. So I think Hip Hop provides a pathway to kind of transcend all of this compartmentalization that society's all too often imposing on us.

Jason: Yeah, and as you all have been sharing this, a couple of my favorite lyrics have been coming to mind. I remember Donald Glover, who started rapping as Childish Gambino, he had a line [where] he said, "the only Black kid at a Sufjan concert." And you know of course, Kanye famously he's talked about, "back when they thought pink polos would hurt the Roc, before Cam got the s*** to pop". Some of our favorite figures in Hip Hop have been the ones who say hey, you think a rapper's supposed to be like this, but I'm gonna show you that I more, I don't just fit into this mold that was never what Hip Hop was telling us to be. That was always what society was saying, oh ok if you Black, you gotta be like this. If you a Asian woman, you gotta be like this. If you Indigenous, you know- and I think that that is something that I'm very passionate about when it comes to this conversation of appropriation and appreciation and poly-culturalism. We gotta be careful that it doesn't become a regressive force. So often when we talk about cultural appropriation, there's real hurt behind it. But what it becomes, is it becomes this sort of conservative push to say stay in your lane. And by 'your lane' I mean what we think you're allowed to do. That's something that I think is so counter-productive when it comes to conversations about solidarity. Isn't there a way for us, like exactly like you said Marlon, we live next to each other. We learn from each other, we grew up with each other. Isn't there a way to make like a, maybe make like a Mexican egg roll? Isn't there a way for us to make some soul food with kimchi?

Marlon: You need to come to the Bay, bro. We got you covered. [laughs]

Jason: [laughs] I know!

Marlon: A Black man just made me some garlic noodles the other day that was smackin'.

Jason: [laughs]

Marlon: Not to cut you off, but I think what we're also talking about is, who's creating those criteria? Right? Let's really have an exploration as to who is setting these boundaries of compartmentalization for us. It's not us. It's not the Black community saying this is what "Black" is and if you can't be part of this or you're not part of- it's not the Asian community saying hey, if you wear dragons on your shirt, you're stealing from our culture. And I went through two years of high school wearing dragons on my shirt. [laughs] Right? But, you gotta start having those kind of conversations like, who is creating those criteria or is setting that framework for how we identify? And if it's not coming from our community, then we have to start digging. Why are we even adapting to these constructs? Why not adapt to the constructs that are more conducive to an equitable living space for everybody? It really comes down to: where are these constructs coming from? Should we be abiding to them? Are they serving us? If they're not, then we can dismiss them, especially if they have no stake in the day-to-day lives of, particularly the African American and Asian communities, but communities as a whole.

Jason: For y'all, Steph Marlon, what are some tangible steps toward solidarity that can be taken? Because I think sometimes, I know personally there's a ton of people I know who care but they just

don't know how to make that step. They just don't know what to do other than just post on social media. Other than just the obvious steps. But from the work, the incredible work that y'all through Hip Hop For Change and in your own lives and practices in communities have been doing, what are some of the tangible steps towards solidarity that some folks could take?

Stephanie: An easy step would be picking an organization that you're really down with, that you're willing to support. If you can't support them financially, support their social media posts, like their posts, share their posts, and get involved in the community. I think that you know, that's how I started. I started with Hip Hop For Change. That was an organization that I really liked and from there I was able to support it and use whatever skills that I had that were individual to my own skillsets, to really help them and like help the culture. So therefore, instead of always taking from the culture, learning from the culture and like whatnot, I was able to also participate in it. So then finding the avenues for you to participate and actively help the people that you so desperately want to help.

Jason: They're gonna be around. Organizations like OACC, like Hip Hop For Change. Y'all can really- trust me. Grassroots nonprofits are *always* looking for volunteers, for that human resource.

Marlon: Yeah, we need 'em. [laughs] We need those human resources. It's desperately needed especially considering that POC (People of Color) nonprofits are almost 50% underfunded than their White nonprofit counterparts. So we definitely need people to be invested on a community level, right. To lend their expertise, their unique abilities to the cause whatever that cause is. I think Hip Hop is an amazing cause because it transcends race, ethnicity and all of that, but it also grounds you in the history that is rooted in the Black and Brown experience in America. Or I would say, the marginalized experience in America. And when you broaden that scope, then you're including Asians. Then you're including immigrants, you're including a whole class of people that you typically don't associate with Hip Hop culture. So I think Stephanie's point [of] getting involved in different organizations, just your desire to get involved in general and get involved in different organizations to create social change is the first step. But then if you wanna kind of finetune it to 'I wanna volunteer as a Black man to this Asian organization', or 'As an Asian woman, I wanna volunteer with this Black-led organization', I think that that also helps, but I also think that that allows for, and it should be encouraged, for you to be grounded in the history. So you can understand how historically there has been a link, there has been solidarity, there has been a union. So the perception or the notion that these are just mutually exclusive communities that don't talk to one another needs to just be broken down. That entire construct needs to be broken down because it's not accurate. It's not rooted in history.

Jason: I love that. Yeah, that's exactly what I was thinking too is, if y'all are looking for ways to go out and serve and support, you don't gotta be locked into 'oh I'm Black so these Asian orgs, that's not my place' or 'I'm Asian so this Hip Hop org, that's not my place'. Go! Go and do it like, y'all, be the change you want to see. But also go humbly. You know what I'm saying? Go knowing there's gonna be a lot of learning you're gonna have to do. When we go in to support communities, we go in to support. We don't go in to lead. We don't go in to project. We don't go in to tell them what to do. We go in to say 'Hey, here's who I am and what I bring to the table, how can that be of value to you?' And then we build trust. That's how we build trust. Alright, so I got two final questions before we wrap up this incredible, incredible conversation. I just learn so much every time I'm in y'all presence. Marlon and Steph, we opened by asking where did you first encounter Hip Hop culture? And I'd like to sort of close by saying,

what do you see in Hip Hop culture today? What does it mean to you? And what could it be in your wildest imaginations?

Marlon: I think that Hip Hop will serve as a holistic pathway to remixing ourselves and remixing the country that we come from. In 30 years, what Hip Hop is going to look like in the musical and the creative space, but as well as the education space, the nonprofit space, the financial business space, I think it's going to allow for a lot of paradigm shifts if we recognize its value and its importance aside from just the music. We're talking about, when we say Hip Hop culture, we're talking about a vehicle of creativity that allows young marginalized people to access higher levels of thinking away from their trauma of poverty, away from their trauma of marginalization, away from the trauma of racism in this country. And by actively practicing within this space, and participating within this community, you're gonna be exposed to values and lifestyles that are going to make you a better person. Make the world that you come from, make the communities you come from better. And they're gonna improve by virtue of being inclusive, which is what Hip Hop is wanting you to do to begin with. We are remixing beats. We're inclusive of different sonics and different music. Our graphic designers, our graffiti artists are inclusive of different art styles. Our breakdancers are inclusive of different dance moves. So the entire culture is predicated on inclusivity. So imagine that in different spaces aside from just the corporately co-opted aspect of Hip Hop music. Let's look at it in different fields and apply that creativity, apply that inclusivity to all these other areas. I think that in 25-30 years, we'll see a drastic shift in our paradigms for sure.

Stephanie: For me, Hip Hop allows me to present myself as my most authentic self. I never have to code switch whenever I'm with Hip Hop For Change. I think for a lot of people, Hip Hop also provides a platform to change and to learn to be their best selves. Recently, I watched, it's this this Korean show rap show called "Show Me The Money." It's on its 10th season, it's a Hip Hop show. 10 years ago Season 1 came out, and it was so hyper-masculine. But I watched the most current season, and as you see Hip Hop evolving and taking on different forms, it becomes more inclusive and it takes so many different influences now. So now you see rappers with skirts and their nails painted all on this Hip Hop platform that would not have been possible 10 years ago when the show aired. And so, I think you can really see the evolution of Hip Hop and how the evolution of it allows for more inclusivity and like how it allows for more people to come to Hip Hop, look for a platform to be their most authentic selves and express themselves through this culture. And that's why it's so important to fund Hip Hop education in schools! So we give all of these youths a platform to be their most authentic selves.

Jason: Marlon and Stephanie, before we get out of here, could you let us know how to keep in touch with you and what projects people should be keeping an eye out for from Hip Hop For Change, from you Marlon, Unlearn The World, and from Steph?

Marlon: Well first and foremost, our AfroAsian solidarity presentation that we do around the country, we do it virtually as well. Just continue to tap in with Hip Hop For Change either on our website or on our social media for different events that are gonna be open to the public. Both Stephanie and myself will be facilitating. So check us out, @hiphop4change on Instagram, you can also check out our website www.hiphopforchange.org. As for myself, you could find me on social media: "unlearnttheworld" as it sounds, all of my handles are the same. And yeah, I'm continuing to put out projects and music and highlight a lot of just my own experiences and the things that I feel about this particular issue but a lot of other issues that are pressing in today's society. So just more of that and we're gonna continue our

expansion. Right now we're an Oakland-based nonprofit but we're making great strides into Los Angeles Unified School District and eventually getting a space down there for us to really bring our entire movement down to the LA area, but you know around the country. So look out for that and all your support is needed. Thank you.

Stephanie: Follow us on Instagram, but also subscribe to our newsletter on, again our website, www.hiphopforchange.org. There's also the event that Hip Hop For Change is hosting with Hate Is A Virus and I'd love for Jason to speak on that.

Jason: On June 11th, at the Japanese American National Museum, Hip Hop For Change as well as Hate Is A Virus, a 501c3 nonprofit organization founded to fight anti-Asian racism in the wake of the COVID-19 virus, we are going to be throwing a joint Asian Black solidarity block party. It's gonna be amazing, we're gonna have food, vendors, visual arts, panels, and just a whole block party down here. It's been such a pleasure and a privilege to be with you all. Literally, I wanted to do this just cuz I like sitting in y'all's presence and learning from you all. Marlon, Unlearn The World, Stephanie Liem, and my name is Jason Chu @jasonchumusic everywhere. Thank you again to the OACC for hosting this episode of their Let's Talk series. We hope that you all tune back in to continue learning and growing more. Have a great day y'all.

[outro music plays]

Akemi: This podcast was produced with support from the Gingko Fund, the Asian Pacific Fund, and the Awesome Foundation. Special thanks to Jaide Lin for recording and editing this episode. Wanna suggest future guests? Email us at programs@oacc.cc.

[outro music concludes]