

# Seattle Unplugged: What exactly is 'Seattle culture?'

By Gavin Muhlfelder, Alex Mengisteab and Phillip Zhou for RadioActive Youth Media | July 2023

**Content note:** *This story briefly references drug addiction.*

*[RadioActive Youth Media is KUOW's radio journalism and audio storytelling program for young people. This story was entirely youth-produced, from the writing to the audio editing.]*

## **PODCAST TRANSCRIPT:**

*[Music fades in]*

**Phillip:** Welcome to Seattle Unplugged, the newest episode of the RadioActive Youth Media podcast, where young people share their voices. My name is Phillip.

**Alex:** I'm Alex.

**Gavin:** And I'm Gavin.

**Phillip:** In this episode, we're delving into the streets of Central Seattle, and uncovering what Seattleites think "Seattle Culture is," and how it impacts them.

**Gavin:** We felt compelled to produce this podcast because growing up in such a unique city with many diverse perspectives, we really wanted to learn more about the local environment and what the everyday person has to say.

*[Sounds of people on an urban street]*

**Alex:** We chose to interview people on one of the busiest Sundays of the year. With a sold-out Taylor Swift concert, the Mariners vs the Blue Jays game, the Capitol Hill Block Party, and the Bite of Seattle all taking place around the same time.

**Phillip:** The light rail was super crowded. But we wanted a chance to talk to as many people as we could. So at around 1PM, we set out to do just that.

## **PIKE PLACE MARKET**

*[Light rail train and station sounds]*

**Phillip:** I've always loved the Puget Sound. Seattle's perfect blend of urban charm and ocean. And that is what makes Seattle, Seattle. To me, the place that captures this the best is Pike Place Market. So that's where we decided to go.

***[People talking and busker playing at Pike Place]***

**Phillip:** Founded in 1907 and located downtown right off the pier, Pike Place Market is a fundamental part of Seattle. It's home to the gum wall, fish markets and the first ever Starbucks.

Pike Place attracts millions of tourists every year. Hundreds of farmers, fishmongers, business owners and buskers bring this market to life. We interviewed tourists, business owners and locals who call this city their home.

**Phillip (on tape):** What's your name?

**Chris:** Chris Talon.

**Megan:** My name is Megan Crafton.

**Alex (on tape):** What's your name?

**Noah:** Noah.

**Alex (on tape):** What's your relationship with living in Seattle?

**Noah:** I've lived in Seattle three years, I'm in Chinatown. I worked as a barista. I work at a fish market now.

**Megan:** I moved here about nine years ago because my partner at the time got a job out here. So I quit school and I went with my partner.

**Phillip (on tape):** Oh, that's nice.

**Megan:** Well, we're no longer together. But I'm still here. And I still like it here.

**Phillip (on tape):** What do you consider Seattle culture?

**Megan:** Seattle culture... that's a tough one because I feel like there's a few different dominating forces here. There's a lot of, you know — the tech scene is like a major contributing factor to the culture here. And the things that come with that — things are a bit more sanitized in certain areas. But we also have, you know, people who just kind of work normal, regular jobs.

**Chris:** It's fairly progressive, you know, or it used to be. I think it's somewhat still there. But you know, there's a lot of money running through this place right now, so that's disrupting a lot of things.

**Noah:** I would say, you know, fish, trees, Seahawks, coffee, all the essentials, you know, Pike Place. I mean, Pike Place is like the biggest part of it, in my opinion. But yeah, I love it here.

**Phillip (on tape):** What's your favorite thing about the city?

**Chris:** I like the water. I like the temperature here. There's a lot of stuff to see too, because I'm, I have a son, he's in soccer. So we can go to see the soccer stadium, see the Sounders play.

**Megan:** My favorite thing about the city is that, a lot of people don't know this, but the largest remaining video store, the largest public video archive, is here in Seattle.

**Phillip (on tape):** On the flip side, what do you not like about Seattle?

**Megan:** I moved away for a year and I came back, and my biggest complaint with it was it was just so hard to make friends. Because I feel like a lot of people are insular, a lot of people are transplants, and they don't quite know how to like, mesh with each other. I feel like everybody here is nice, people here are friendly, but you have to, like, say hi, you know? Yes, hello. You know, just put yourself out there.

**Chris:** I mean, I don't like the noise. It's just a lot of noise, man. Tons of noise, constantly. Even at night, like, trash, trash trucks, ambulances, cops, people screaming in the streets, the, you know, the cars banging, it's everything.

**Phillip:** We heard from many different people as we walked around Pike Place. The highs, the lows. How tech culture is changing Seattle. How people feel about the 'Seattle Freeze.' And how the pier, coffee and public video archives blend together to make Seattle culture.

As a place that locals and tourists love and the first farmers market in Seattle, Pike Place was the perfect location to start our day.

## **CHINATOWN-INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT**

***[Light rail train and station sounds]***

**Alex:** Next we went to the Chinatown-International District, a cultural hub for many Asian American and Pacific Islanders in the greater Seattle area. Noodle houses, restaurants, bakeries, and mom-and-pop grocery spots, all situated in the southern area of downtown.

The district is home to some of Seattle's oldest Japanese, Chinese and Vietnamese restaurants. Its vibrant cultural atmosphere, rich history, and diverse culinary experiences makes it really unique and welcoming.

We wanted to interview people that live around here as it's one of Seattle's most beautiful neighborhoods.

**Nathan:** My name is Nathan, I'm from Portland. I came to Seattle about one year ago.

**Gavin (on tape):** What's your name and pronouns?

**Malik:** Malik, and I don't do pronouns.

**Gavin (on tape):** Alright. What's your relationship with Seattle?

**Malik:** It's a nice city to look at. The population is very randomly sketchy. Honestly, I don't hate it. But I definitely have a lot of reasons to, I guess, expect more or want more from the city.

**Gavin (on tape):** Definitely. What do you consider Seattle culture?

**Malik:** Obviously, mixed. I feel like it's mixed but doesn't have an identity of its own. I feel like it's a culture that has a, a *want*. It wants to be something and because there's just so many influences on it, it can't really find one. You know? So I feel like it's lost, in an innocent way. But lost.

**Gavin (on tape):** What's your favorite thing about Seattle?

**Nathan:** Probably the sea. The reason I moved to Seattle was for my dog to see the sea.

**Malik:** Opportunities. There's a lot of opportunities and a lot of ways to network here. I like the fact that it's notorious for so many things, so it attracts a lot of people. So there's always the possibility for you to meet somebody new, important, somebody who can maybe just benefit you on your way, you know, whatever your journey may be.

**Gavin (on tape):** What's your least favorite thing about Seattle?

**Malik:** It's overpriced. It's overpriced for what it offers. Like, yeah, it's a cool place. It's big. It's opportunistic. But the way that money is cycled here, it's almost like a trap. I mean, money is always a trap. But it seems like you get lured in with the opportunities and the amount of money you can make. But then you're charged, you know, an exorbitant amount to be able to function. So it kind of seems like a trap. So, you know, the, I guess the economy. That's probably the one thing I hate is it's just very expensive.

**Nathan:** Drug addiction. I mean, there are a lot of addicts in Seattle. And Seattle is allowing people to become addicts. And it's very difficult to live in this type of society. And that mentality, in order for me to walk out and see that or deal with it is like I need to strengthen myself and become like... really... hm, gosh...

**Gavin (on-tape):** Callous?

**Nathan:** Yeah. It becomes a callous mentality.

**Alex:** As we explored the heart and soul of the Chinatown-International District, we saw an interesting blend of perspectives that gives this neighborhood its vibrant character. It's clear that CID is a place of diverse experiences, in addition to the rich cultures that flow through the area.

## **CAPITOL HILL**

***[Light rail train and station sounds]***

**Gavin:** Finally we ended up at Capitol Hill.

One of the city's most popular nightlife and entertainment districts, dive bars and nightclubs meet high-end dining and expensive condos. Many vibrant communities call it home, but lately it's become very interwoven with many tech companies that reside nearby downtown.

Cap Hill has always been special to me. Bordering both Downtown and Sodo, I'll never forget driving through it countless times to get to Harborview (my dad's old workplace), going to the various parks in the area, or genuinely having the best tacos in Seattle (shout out Tacos Chukis).

Cap Hill historically has been a cultural hub for the LGBTQ+ community since the 50s. And more recently, it was the epicenter of the Grunge movement in Seattle during the 90s. Nirvana's Kurt Cobain hung out here a lot too.

We decided to interview those who live around Capitol Hill and those here for this weekend's Capitol Hill Block Party music festival to see how a younger crowd feels about our city.

***[Music playing, sounds of people on an urban street]***

**Gavin (on tape):** What's your name and pronouns?

**Wilson:** My name is Wilson Ron, I use they/them pronouns.

**Walter:** Walter Williams, I use he/him.

**Travis:** My name is Travis, I use he/him pronouns.

**Jesse:** I'm Jesse, I'm he/him.

**Gavin (on tape):** What's your relationship with Seattle?

**Jesse:** I grew up in Washington. I live in Renton. So I'm like 15 minutes south. And the city was always like a little bit of a mystery to me. I grew up, you know, I didn't really come to the city too much. But lately, with our business adventure, selling like clothes, we've realized that Seattle has a huge community. And we love coming out here. There's so much life out here.

**Wilson:** I lived here for a little while. And I'm back for Capitol Hill Block Party.

**Walter:** Born and raised, been here my whole life and I'll probably continue to be here for a little longer.

**Travis:** I've been living here for almost a decade now, moved from Southern California.

**Gavin (on tape):** What do you consider Seattle Culture?

**Travis:** I think Seattle culture right now is a very weird mix between old Seattle, very music focused, and now the tech industry, which is kind of shifting who's available to live here and who can manage to stay within the city. And so I think there's a weird clash right now between that.

**Wilson:** Oh, damn. The parks! Like Cal Anderson and Green Lake and Cowan and Ravenna. Those places were where I found a lot of peace when I lived here.

**Walter:** For me, I would say I consider Seattle culture just the community. I feel like the biggest thing for me is how welcoming it is.

I feel like it's like a major city like New York city, like Los Angeles, where it says you can wear whatever, do whatever, be whatever, and people won't really bat an eye. I feel like other places, it's not the same.

And also just feel like being out here, it's just a great feeling. A lot of people, a lot of creatives, a lot of just normal people where you can just kind of get together, hang out, have fun, and no one's really feeling like, Oh, damn, I'm not a creative, I'm not doing this, I'm not doing that. It's like everyone kind of blends together in a way.

**Jesse:** I would consider Seattle culture to be free. Like, it's kind of very accepting and you can really be whoever you want to be out here. There's not really too many people that judge. So just the culture is just 'be who you are.' That's how I see it.

**Gavin:** Nearly 725,000 people call Seattle home. And on the busiest Sunday of the year, we only could talk to a handful of them. From addiction, raising a family, returning home from a music festival, selling locally caught fish, and even just living here, Seattle is something to everyone — good, bad, the worst and the hopeful.

It was a great experience altogether and we hope to continue to tell the stories of others around Seattle. We all love our city and having these honest conversations with others can strengthen and grow the Seattle community, a community that's given the three of us so much.

**Phillip:** Thank you for listening to Seattle Unplugged! You can find more RadioActive podcasts like this on K-U-O-W.org slash RadioActive.

**Gavin:** You can also find us on Instagram and TikTok at @KUOWRadioActive, and Facebook at RadioActive Youth Media.

**Alex:** If you haven't, please subscribe to the RadioActive podcast on Spotify, Apple Podcasts or anywhere you listen to podcasts! Leave us a nice review as it helps other people find us too!

**Phillip:** This show was produced by me, Gavin Muhlfelder and Alex Mengisteab, with support from our mentors Eva Solorio and Antonio Nevarez, and our editor Kelsey Kupferer.

**Phillip:** A special thank you to all those we interviewed, people who helped us throughout the interviewing process and RadioActive staff.

**Phillip:** For RadioActive, this has been Gavin, Alex and Phillip, signing off.

***[Music fades out]***