

Epilogue

Aftershocks

In August 2008, just days before I left Los Angeles to move to the San Francisco Bay Area, I invited gospel rappers Khanchuz and B-Love (of the Hip Hopposite collective) to perform and speak to the students in my “Cultural History of Rap” class at the University of California, Los Angeles. Khanchuz removed his sunglasses and delivered his testimony, explaining how he used to gangbang with the 51st Street Cat-Walk Neighborhood Crips (CWC) in Inglewood, landed himself in a jail cell, and eventually gave his life to Christ. To fully demonstrate this spiritual transformation, he performed two songs. The first was a gangsta rap song he wrote while at Crenshaw High School, fully loaded with explicit language and gritty tales of his daily life in the streets of Los Angeles. By way of contrast, he then rapped the lyrics to a gospel hip hop song he wrote in the early 2000s after his conversion—“All Honor to God.” Zigzagging across the room with an artful swagger, he fired his lyrics out triumphantly over the maze of desks. Khanchuz closed with “ADK (Any Demon Killa),” a track that chronicles the various emergency “house calls” he makes in his Cadillac—now converted into a holy hip hop ambulance—to stomp out demonic spirits. During this spiritual triage across the city, he sends “demons to flight” every time he “picks up the mic.”

As the last line of his rhyme rang out, the classroom began to shake. The music stands huddled together along the back wall rattled against each other and I quickly realized we were experiencing an earthquake. Khanchuz, rocked by the reverberations of his seismic sounding, immediately sat down in a desk chair and prayed for the safety of his family and all the students in the room. As the tremors subsided, I heard him speak quietly under his breath: “See what happens when you speak the truth?” Quickly ushering my students outside into the bright sunlight, we stood in a circle—silent—stunned by what had just happened.

The 2008 earthquake occurred at 11:42 a.m. that morning, registering a 5.5 magnitude. The epicenter of the quake was located in Chino Hills, approximately twenty-eight miles east-southeast of downtown Los Angeles. No lives were lost but it caused considerable damage in numerous structures throughout the area and forced Disneyland and Magic Mountain to shut down their rides. I thought back to when Soup the Chemist told me about the final concert of the 1995 Holy Hip Hop tour at Magic Mountain, which included himself as well as other gospel hip hop groups such as P.I.D. (Preachers in Disguise), I.D.O.L. King, and Gospel Gangstaz. Apparently, the stage started buckling as multitudes of fans climbed atop it, eventually causing the whole structure to collapse. Soup recalled, “The Holy Ghost was in the house.”

I also thought back to my first interview with Pastor Graham and his now prophetic announcement of gospel hip hop as *earthquake music*: “I call it *earthquake music* because the music shakes our souls and moves the ground we walk on.” Whether the tremors that day were a product of nature, culture, or the divine, holy hip hop was again at the center of a groundswelling that had resonant effects.

I walked Khanchuz and B-Love to their cars in the UCLA parking structure. B-Love sped off quickly to pick her daughter up from daycare, but Khanchuz took his time, selecting the perfect holy hip hop track to accompany him on his drive from Westwood back to Inglewood. His metallic beige Cadillac then pulled away slowly as he headed back out into the shifting grounds of Los Angeles, leaving the hard-hitting beats of gospel rap in his wake.