



Homeland Insecurity: A Hip-Hop Missiology for the Post-Civil Rights Context

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A Missiology in an Era of Civil Disruption

As I sit writing this book, the current time, context, climate, and culture in the United States is fraught with racial, gender, and cultural strain the likes of which have not been seen since the Jim Crow era. It is a time unlike any other. While the period prior to the 1970s experienced direct and intense racism, the present context uses social media, passive-aggressive behavior, and microaggression to sustain its hegemony and create a culture of hate. I am a Black male living in the United States and trying to live out a faith rooted in Christianity. But I struggle with the objectionable history of North American Christianity, which is antithetical to not only the color of my skin but my narrative, body, and life. For me personally, the events started to erupt during the Troy Davis campaign. Here, a young Black male, who was convicted of shooting and killing a White police officer, sat on death row. When I began to research the issue and Davis's case, I discovered that little physical evidence to incriminate him was actually found, and the "eyewitness" later recanted the story of seeing Davis murder the police officer. Despite a strong social media campaign in support of him, and even phone calls to elected officials, Troy Davis was executed on September 21, 2011. Then came Trayvon Martin and later Michael Brown, both the Ferguson and Baltimore uprisings, and the terrorist acts of Dylann Roof in Charleston, South Carolina. Roof mercilessly murdered nine Black church members of the historic Emmanuel A.M.E Church. Then came Tamir Rice, Dante Parker, John Crawford III, Sandra Bland, and Laquan McDonald. This list could go on; it seems the killing of Black persons has become a sport in the United States.

In all of these tragedies Christian discourse such as "forgive," "love your enemies," "bless those that curse you" is used to continue the subjugation of Black bodies. And while in theory, at least, those platitudes are hoped for and desired, the reality is that when White America feels threatened or is attacked (e.g., 9/11), the opposite of those platitudes is taken and a type of "holy violence" often commences. And while I see White evangelical youth dancing to Lecrae at one of his concerts, the irony is revealed when those same youth tell me things like "Michael Brown wasn't innocent and probably deserved to die." Or "These 'thugs' were asking for it." Or the classic "This was part of God's plan." They say such things as they enjoy and embrace Black culture.

Further, the election of Donald J. Trump as the forty-fifth president of the United States on November 8, 2016, shook many of us in the ethnic-minority community. This sent a direct message to ethnic-minority communities: your voice does not matter. Our hope for the Obama legacy was shown to be mythological in nature, and our optimism about the coming "demographical changes," in which minorities were to finally triumph and they would use their power for justice, was just another neo-liberal delusion. It also shook those of us who have dedicated our lives to intercultural and racial justice work that 81 percent of White evangelicals voted for a person like Trump and continue to support his policies. That was an

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BOOK EXCERPT

"We pastors sit around wringing our hands and lamenting the state of the church in America. As the institution of the church crumbles before our eyes, our culture gets increasingly wild. Facing an uncertain future, we're tempted to turn our backs and cover inside our sanctuaries, even as their foundations crack and crumble. With Homeland Insecurity, however, Daniel White Hodge calls us to join him in the margins that are swiftly becoming the only reality available to us. He shows us the rot that has killed our traditions. And he points to where the Spirit has been at work for a long time, wild and unpredictable. Hodge introduces us to the prophets and poets who have discovered God at the margins and invites us to take a seat and learn from them. This is not a manual for church renewal. This is an invitation to resurrection, to join the Spirit, to discover new life on the other side of death, and to find a firmer foundation, one that moths cannot eat and rust cannot destroy. The Hip Hop church is good news for us all."

—JR. Forasteros, author of *Empathy for the Devil*, teaching pastor of Catalyst Community Church

awakening for me, and it made me question the work I do. Had it mattered? Did any of it sink in? How could all the material published and all the speeches be ignored? All these questions developed while I was writing this book. My heart is heavy and my mind full.

What does faith look like in this context? What does a missiological response look like when the bodies of Black youth are celebrated and adored on one platform, yet hated and seen as of little worth on the other? What does all of this mean for those doing short-term missions in domestic urban contexts — especially if those doing ministry favored Trump in the election? How is it possible for the multiethnic dissonance of our culture to manifest itself in the popularity of an artist like Lecrae? Do we as mission-minded people take race, gender, and class into account when we evangelize? How do we contend with someone like Darren Wilson, who spoke of Michael Brown as a “demon” coming after him? Does the Christian faith, as the mystic and Black Christian theologian Howard Thurman asks, “make room” for concerns such as racism and the disinherited? Some still argue that the only ministry or mission worth doing is preaching the “gospel” to the “lost,” and that is where mission ends. I take issue with *ministry* and *mission* defined so narrowly. Woven into that definition is a faulty understanding of mission and *who* mission extends to, *who does* mission, and *why* it is conducted. With Richard Kyle, I contend that “reflecting the old Puritan heritage and American individualism, evangelicals focus on abortion and sexual immorality while downplaying the issues of poverty, racism, and social injustice. When they address such problems, they believe that the problems can be solved primarily through individual, church, or local efforts.” Race, gender, and class are lost within that narrow definition. Given the current state of American Christianity, race, gender, and class can no longer be avoided. One of the reasons Christianity is viewed as irrelevant, useless, sexist, racist, and exclusive is because of the narrowly defined concepts of ministry and mission. The simplicity this depicts is much too utopian for a world that has rejected almost every form of utopianism and given creed to complexity, mystery, ambiguity, and a disruptivist worldview. The *gospel* means nothing to someone who lives in a constant state of terror from institutional racism personified in a police uniform. “Jesus’ good news” is empty discourse to those whose lives are disrupted by short-term missionaries who pose for selfies, write cute newsletters, and seek narcissistic emotions while taking advantage of others’ misery and despair. Therefore, at this point in Christian history, we find ourselves in a moral quandary. Whose narrative will win, we wonder, conservative or liberal?

I suggest that the issues we face as Christians and missiologists alike are much more multifaceted and broader than binary constructs such as left versus right; they are much broader than simply saying ministry and mission end when a person accepts Jesus into their life. I assert that the issues we face in terms of racism, sexism, fascism, and classism are worsened by a myriad of media outlets claiming to be “truth tellers” or “fact checkers,” which drive people deeper into their binary corners and thereby ignore the complexity of the middle.

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BOOK EXCERPT

We need a church in the wild. A church that embraces a mission of complexity, mystery, ambiguity, and high concentrations of doubt: the same mindset that makes up large portions of this generation's ethos. A church bold enough to disrupt the complacency of American evangelicalism and create a much more contextual approach to Jesus. A church creative enough to use Hip Hop and its theological core as a missiological premise. A church confrontational enough to interrupt White supremacy in American Christianity. We need a church in the wild that does not yet exist.

— Taken from the introduction



Daniel White Hodge, author of *Homeland Insecurity: A Hip-Hop Missiology for the Post-Civil Rights Context*

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"Daniel White Hodge is the preeminent hip-hop theologian of our generation. Homeland Insecurity only adds to his legacy as he speaks directly to contemporary missiology through the political lenses of rap, racism, and white privilege. He also critically addresses the complexities of reconciliation in a power structure, even in the church, where there has only ever been one racial winner and one racial loser. . . . Homeland Insecurity is a text I will be using in my courses for years to come."

– **Andrew Marin**, research associate at the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics, University of St. Andrews

The “Preeminent Hip-Hop Theologian of Our Generation”

Daniel White Hodge, PhD, is the Director of the Center for Youth Ministry Studies and associate professor of Youth Ministry at North Park University in Chicago. Dr. Hodge has worked in the urban youth and hip-hop context for over twenty years. He is also the founding editor in chief of *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies*. Hodge is the author of *Heaven Has a Ghetto*, *The Soul of Hip Hop*, and *Hip Hop’s Hostile Gospel: A Post-Soul Theological Exploration*.

Hodge, a hip-hop scholar and urban youth specialist, focuses on hip-hop studies, urban and city youth culture and development, race relations, film, pop-culture trends, and spirituality. Having received his PhD from Fuller Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, his dissertation focused on the life, theology, and spiritual message of Tupac Amaru Shakur.

Hodge has been a lecturer in the pan-African studies department at Cal State, Los Angeles and at Citrus College in the sociology department. He has taught in higher education for over a decade and has published through Brill Academic, VDM Academic, InterVarsity Press, John Knox Press, and *PRISM* magazine. In addition, he has published articles in journals such as *Memphis Theological Seminary Journal*, *NOMOS*, and *Missiology: An International Review*. Hodge is also a national speaker and has spoken at the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) and the Urban Youth Workers Institute (UYWI) national conferences.

Hodge has been involved with hip-hop culture all his life. As a former music producer, Hodge helped mix Bone Thugs-n- Harmony’s first album *E 1999 Eternal*, along with Beastie Boys’s albums with DJ Hurricane. Hodge also helped in the formation of different background tracks for the first two seasons of *New York Undercover*. He continues to remain closely tuned into the music of hip-hop.

As a social activist, Hodge cofounded the organization, Youth on the Move, which worked with pregnant teen moms, helped juvenile offenders find employment, and developed life skills for urban youth. This program went on to partner with Urban Young Life in the Bay Area of California. Hodge has worked on a number of different community-based campaigns and programs using hip-hop to address issues of race and ethnicity, gender-based violence, literacy, and immigration.

Along with his wife, Emily, and daughter, Mahalia Joy, they currently reside in Chicago, where they volunteer and network with various urban organizations and speak at local colleges. Approaching life as a team, they work together in the community of North Chicago (West Rodgers Park).

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