

They Don't Believe in Snitching So Why Should Hip Hop

Written by Davey D ID3619
Monday, 23 April 2007 08:10 -

Cheney, Rowe, Cohen, The Police - They Don't Believe in Snitching so Why Should Hip Hop?

Be Warned Snitching Is Big Business by Davey D

This past Sunday night Harlem based rap star Cam"ron appeared on the news investigative show 60 Minutes to talk about the 'stop Snitching' ethos that exists throughout inner city communities. He definitely came off looking bad as he allowed reporter Anderson Cooper to ask him a number of set up questions including; whether or not Killa Cam was a millionaire and whether or not he drove a Lamborghini.

A smirking Cam admitted "yes" to both questions. He then went on to admitting how he would not turn in a serial killer even if he lived next door. Cam said he would move but not turn the killer in. Armed with this information and a few excerpts about Busta Rhymes' refusal to cooperate with police in the aftermath of allegedly witnessing his good friend and bodyguard Isreal Ramirez being killed earlier this year, Hip Hop came off looking pretty bad. Absent from this interview with Cam was a historical or political analysis behind the 'stop Snitching' ethos.

We didn't get a run down about how informants/ snitches in the form of "house niggas" were the ones who doomed numerous slave revolts including the one lead by Nat Turner. We didn't hear about government programs like Cointel-pro where Civil Rights and Black liberation fighters and organizations ranging from Martin Luther King to Malcolm X and from the Black Panthers on down to SNCC (Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee) were brought down and undermined thanks to snitches (government informants).

Cooper and the 60 Minutes crew interviewed NY Police Commissioner Ray Kelly and somehow forgot to ask him about the "No Snitching" ethos that exists within the police department. We didn't hear about the infamous Blue Wall of silence. Nor did we hear about the unsavory practices used by police to get confessions and flip informants. Torture, Blackmail and other manipulations are commonplace. We didn't hear how oftentimes its the police themselves who will snitch on snitches. As we learned in the Atlanta conference that far too often its the police

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who will dime you out when you try to do the right thing and be a witness to a dangerous criminal. The other irony is that often times its those dangerous criminals who will dime out their crew after the police apply illegal tactics.

Also we didn't hear about the No Snitching ethos that seems to be practiced by our very secretive Vice President Dick Cheney and Presidential aid Karl Rove. We can talk about the lack of snitching around important issues like the War in Iraq, the firing of Federal Judges. Hell let's look at 9-11. Also we shouldn't forget how Cheney went into Stop Snitching mode after he shot his homeboy in the face. The Cheney bunch are the epitome of 'stop Snitching' . They hold that position much harder then Cam"ron or any other rapper. And yeah try getting too deep into some of these guy's illegal business and you might wind up missing like anyone else.

During the 60 Minutes interview we heard conversation about how big corporations profit off of rappers like Cam rapping about people to 'stop Snitching'. They mention his Cam's record label Asylum but they never named the executives. They never mentioned the label being founded by David Geffen who is Presidential candidate Barack Obama's biggest supporter. Nor did they mention it currently being headed by former Def Jam CEO and now Warner Music Group head Lyor Cohen.

The relevance here is that anyone who works in the music industry knows there's a serious "No Snitching" policy especially when it comes to talking about how records get on the air. Yes we all know about payola but few of us know who the key players are and how they interact with the music industry. Just as some of those details were about to come out, we saw these big corporations settle. Hence when we have rappers talking about Stop Snitching it's important to know the entire backdrop. When Killa Cam gets on TV and talks about he's a millionaire who drives a couple of Lamborghinis, its important to know he's in the company and may have even gotten encouragement from some very powerful men who are 'stop Snitching" practitioners that write him million dollar checks and probably drive Lamorghinis themselves.

The difference between them and Cam is that they refused to show up on 60 Minutes and offer comment. They probably consider it snitching to go on national TV and even admit to the practice. Maybe they should've given Cam the memo.

The other glaring manipulation was when Cooper and 60 Minutes talked about Lil Kim having a reality Show after she was convicted of perjury. She got praised for "not snitching". The Lil Kim show nettted BET one of its highest ratings in history.

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Like Cam talk of Lil Kim's show was done in such a way as to make Hip Hop look not only bad but also as the sole culprit of this practice. Cooper and 60 Minutes castigated BET (Black Entertainment Television) for putting on the show but somehow stop short of mentioning Viacom as being the parent company or Sumner Redstone being its head. They made it sound like BET was all by itself, when in fact it was part of bigger machine that not only profited handsomely from the Lil Kim Reality show, but from what I was told had people outside of BET helping make this show popular.

Lastly Cooper and 60 Minutes didn't talk about how snitching via government informants is a multi-billion dollar a year UNREGULATED industry for law enforcement. Lots of money and resources are spent keeping 'snitches' on payroll. We also didn't hear about the fact that within the African American community an estimated 1 out of 12 people are used as police informants (snitches). Hence this argument about the police not having people willing to come forward is a bit misleading.

In this interview, we sat down with KC Carter who heads up Hip Hop Against Police Violence out in East Texas. We met up at a 'stop Snitching' Conference in Atlanta last month that was put on by the ACLU. We had in attendance more than 100 people which included Hip Hop artists, professors, lawyers and police officers. We had victims of aggressive police and FBI stings which were set up by questionable informants. In this interview we spoke about was the high percentage of people who are routinely railroaded through the courts via snitches and the types of illegal tactics used to get confessions.

We also talked about how informants are used to indict large numbers of people in small out of the way towns with law enforcement using these arrests as a way to obtain funding by showing high conviction and arrest rates.

We also talked about how certain groups and individuals who are willing to speak out against the police or powerful people may find themselves victim to snitching tactics. KC Carter gives a run down of how the Geto Boys and Rap-A-Lot Records found themselves under the gun, especially after it was discovered that the Geto Boys were spending hundreds of thousand of dollars to pay for legal resources to try and free people who they feel were railroaded into Texas jails. KC talked about how informants were flooded into the 5th Ward in an attempt to bring down J Prince of Rap-A-Lot records and that law enforcement went so far as to try and get Scarface to become a snitch.

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Yes indeed Snitching is big business in more ways than you can possible know. Its just a shame that 60 Minutes got Cam"ron to talk about such a serious issue, cause from what they showed, he definitely didn"t break it down the way he should"ve. Well don"t fret "cause we break the whole thing down in this eye opening interview on Hard Knock Radio

Click the link below to hear the interview -

<http://www.kpfa.org/archives/index.php?arch=19554>

A Brief Overview of the Anti-Snitch Conference in Atlanta by Alan Bean

As promised, here's a guest post from Rev. Alan Bean of Tulia Friends of Justice describing an invitation only gathering of activists in Atlanta, GA sponsored by the ACLU discussing snitching abuses by law enforcement. Pictured at right is forum participant Alexandra Natapoff, a law professor at Loyola (CA) who is perhaps my favorite legal thinker on the subject.

The ACLU's Drug Law Reform Project called their Atlanta roundtable event, "Undercover, Unreliable and Unaddressed: Reconsidering the Use of Informants in Drug Law Enforcement." The invitation-only gathering was a kind of testing-the-waters experiment bringing together a representative sample of academics, media people, grassroots organizers, Hip Hop artists, and people who have been personally violated by dishonest informants.

"Law is just one piece of the puzzle," Loyola law professor Alexandra Natapoff told us, "what needs to be changed is social tolerance for unfair practices."

This statement was reinforced by Anjuli Verma's insightful report on a series of focus groups conducted in Texas earlier this year by a high-profile research organization. If the broad cross section of people questioned in this small study is anything to go by (and I suspect it is) Mainstream America isn"t too worried about the criminal justice system in general or the abuse of informant "snitch" testimony in particular. It is generally assumed that appropriate checks and

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balances are in play and that most "snitches" are small fish used to catch big fish.

None of this is true, of course. In the drug war, most informants are relatively big fish ratting on their small fish associates, girl friends and family members. Ed Burns, an ex-cop and school teacher who now produces HBO's inner city drama *The Wire*, remarked that "there are very strict rules about using informants and they are broken 99% of the time." Dr. Natapoff cited a report by the California ACLU suggesting that most police departments in the Golden State have no policies to violate.

My impressions of the Atlanta gathering were primarily shaped by a one-hour break out session in which ten Type-A Alpha males told each other what it was all about. While our soft spoken moderator, Graham Boyd, tried to steer us back to the informant issue, we insisted on talking about what I call "the prison problem".

Jack Cole, Executive Director of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, laid out the familiar but shocking facts. Most Western democracies have incarceration rates in the 100-200 per 100,000 people range. In America, by contrast, 717 of every 100,000 white males are currently behind bars-and that's just the white guys. At the depths of Apartheid hell in South Africa, 851 black males were incarcerated. In America, 4,919 black males per 100,000 are currently behind bars.

The question was why?

Black participants wanted to talk about "white supremacy" and "white hegemony". Marc Lamont Hill, professor of Urban Education and American Studies at Temple University with a machine-gun, rat-a-tat speaking style, put it bluntly: "I don't want to assume that the law could be anything but malevolent [toward black defendants] given the influence of white supremacy. All the spaces that were open at one time are being controlled. In the hood, there are police officers on every single corner."

Jack Cole, a retired police officer, blamed it on drug prohibition: "We spend so much money on the war on drugs, we don't have any money to help people."

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The Wire producer Ed Burns acknowledged the relevance of racism and the drug war but was inclined to blame mass incarceration on the loss of manufacturing jobs. "When the jobs disappear, the drugs come," he said. "We are doing all of this because there are no jobs."

In other words, the Atlanta gathering brought together bold, well-informed people with strong opinions. That's what it was designed to do, and the differences in perspective were as invigorating as they were enlightening. However, as the DLRP's focus groups and Bill Cosby's well-publicized rants suggest, there is a wide slice of black America (the people who have benefited the most from the Civil Rights Movement) who currently have no particular problem with the drug war, mandatory minimum sentences or the abuse of informant testimony. These people are concerned about the mass incarceration of black males, but there is a tendency to shrug and say, "You do the crime, you do the time."

If reformers want to change the minds and hearts of Middle America we need black reformers to frame and deliver the message to a black, middle class audience. If we can't convince Bill Cosby and Oprah Winfrey we don't have a prayer with the white mainstream.

As I suggested in my PowerPoint presentation, we need to discover and publicize an avalanche of Tulia-style criminal justice horror stories. The recent exoneration of Ann Colomb and her three sons after they had been convicted on the basis of perjured inmate informant testimony is a story still waiting to be told. Financing a massive and coordinated story-telling coalition (supposing we can find the resolve to work together) will require millions of dollars in funding-and that will mean converting a long list of high profile people to our reform gospel.

There was a widespread consensus at the Atlanta gathering that we need to change the national narrative-a daunting task, to be sure. As Ed Burns put it, "When you're going up against mythology you're swatting smoke. Where does the responsibility for changing all of this begin?"

And we are going up against mythology; in particular, the well-entrenched myth that efforts to help poor people create nothing but dependency and a false sense of entitlement. It is widely believed that locking up the poor, the drug addicted, the mentally ill and the ignorant will somehow teach them a lesson. And even if there is no deterrent effect, mainstream America believes that mass incarceration makes the streets safer.

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As professor Natapoff suggests, the America mainstream tolerates unfair practices so long as they are believed to enhance public safety. Until we can change that impression we will get nowhere.

The Atlanta gathering probably raised more questions than it answered-but that was what it was designed to do. A follow-up gathering is needed-and soon. This time I would like to hear Alexandra Natapoff, Ed Burns and at least one black representative from the Civil Rights and Hip Hop generations lay out their visions for the way ahead in hour-long presentations followed by vigorous small group discussions. As Dr. Natapoff told us in Atlanta , "This is just the beginning of the debate."

- Alan Bean

Source - <http://gritsforbreakfast.blogspot.com/2007/03/talking-snitches-in-atlanta.html>