To Snitch Or Not To Snitch: The View From The Other Side [1]

I decided to write this article in response to the endless criticism that is being directed against the "Stop Snitching" movement by critics claiming Hip Hop is responsible for the "Stop Snitching" movement and the "Us vs. Them" mentality youth of color have towards law enforcement agencies. As a former gang member and street combatant of the drug wars that dominated the streets of Philly in the late 80's and a member of the generation that came of age listening to Hip Hop I believe I am qualified to offer a frontline perspective from the other side of the issue, especially as one who was sentenced to life without parole as a juvenile because of the testimony of a snitch co-defendant that was close to 10 years older than I.

The "Stop Snitching" slogan that has spread through urban America like a wildfire, which many refer to as a "movement", has emerged more so as a "urban phenomenon" that is not organized or directed but rather is spontaneous and fluid. This phenomenon emerged out of the county and state prisons of America and was a legitimate backlash against unscrupulous law enforcement agencies striking deals with unscrupulous criminals to testify, truthfully or falsely, against their co-defendants or any other individual charged with a crime with whom the D.A. lacks the evidence to prosecute. It was born of prosecutors granting immunity and informant fees to criminals in exchange for their testimony only to see these same criminals leave prison and resume a life of crime in the hood. It was born of prosecutors striking deals with allowing drug kingpins to keep the profits of their drug empires in exchange for their testimony against street level dealers that worked for them only to see these "kingpins" released to become bigger kingpins while on the payroll of the state and federal authorities. It was born of prosecutors striking deals with 30 year old triggermen who've murdered in exchange for their testimony against their 16 year old co-defendants. It was born of grown men breaking under pressure providing statements to the police implicating a juvenile co-defendant as the ringleader of a murder. It was born of prosecutors striking deals with jailhouse informants who come forward time and time again claiming a prisoner "confessed" their guilt in a casual conversation on the yard.

Is it necessary to continue? there are countless other examples. It is these circumstances combined with the countless families within the black and latino communities fractured due to the testimony or statement of a snitch who abused the system and the prosecutors who were/are their partners in crime. This gave birth to the "Stop Snitching" phenomenon.

I do not want it to be interpreted that I am ignoring the endless suffering of families within the black and latino communities that have lost a loved one to gang or drug related violence. I do want it to be emphasized that "Stop Snitching" is not directed to the majority of people within these communities that are working class people. It does not apply to the grandmother living in terror from idiot thugs terrorizing the neighborhood and robbing working class people of their hard earned dollars and possession. It does not apply to child molesters who prey on children, child murders, rapists or any category of sexual predator. "Stop Snitching" is directed at
those who are in the "game" and street life informing and telling on people in exchange for the freedom to continue their criminal activity. It is a call to responsibility, that is if you are captured be prepared to do the time and accept the consequences. Ride it out. Don't cut statements or strike deals to save your own ass.

Just as Hip Hop did not create the "Stop Snitching" phenomenon it did not create the "Us vs. Them" mentality between law enforcement and youth of color. The "Us vs. Them" mentality between youth of color and law enforcement has long been raging within American society. Youth of color did not create this conflict, it was created by law enforcement agencies that are saddled with historical institutional racism and prejudice and view youth of color as "the enemy" and our neighborhoods as "enemy territory" and "free fire zones". Every major urban rebellion in this country was a direct response to police brutality against persons of color! The history of this relationship is so extensive it would be a waste of time to further elaborate.

Also why is no one challenging the "blue wall of silence" amongst law enforcement agencies that encourages police officers not to snitch on each other or even stop fellow officers from committing acts of brutality on individuals. How many officers were not even charged with murder or acquitted of murder, assault or civil rights violations because fellow officers refused to testify against a fellow officer. Is it any wonder why gangs refer to police as just another gang? Only in the case of the police the policeman code of silence is legitimized by the state.

The larger question that should be addressed is what does it say about the leadership of the black and latino community when the most widespread protest phenomenon since the civil rights/black liberation movements emerging amongst the youth today is a campaign to stop snitching? How is it rappers and so-called thugs have the vision to capture and direct the anger, frustration and lack of direction of the youth while all the activists and educators have intellectualized the debate and have nothing to say? The reason this is happening is because the activists and educators have for the most part abandoned the hood. They have abandoned the prisons. In their retreat they have allowed the debate to be defined by the streets and those in prison. Instead of attacking the Hip Hop community and the youth embracing the "Stop Snitching" call they ought to be out there tapping into this discontent and frustration and directing it into more positive community action.

Whether one likes it or not the "stop snitching" call at its roots is about LOYALTY to one's friends. If activists can re-direct just a portion of this loyalty to one's family, friends, neighborhood and people we could seriously begin re-building our neighborhoods and ending senseless murders. That ain't going to happen when activists or community leaders align themselves with law enforcement agencies responsible for the injustices and hardships committed by snitching. The youth ain't going to pay attention to anything anyone has to say when they align themselves with the biggest and baddest gang on the set = law enforcement. Here is the cold reality, at the end of the day, regardless if one likes it or not, that damn young thug on the corner with his hoodie pulled up and his baseball cap on and those hardened men emerging from prison with empty eyes are the people you have to talk to in order to put a stop to the senseless violence in our neighborhoods. Let's start rapping...

Source URL: http://freesalim.net/to_snitch_or_not_to_snitch

Links