

Hip Hop MC Immortal Technique Speaks Out on Police Brutality

Written by Immortal Technique ID4336
Wednesday, 30 April 2008 10:25 -

Please forgive the mass mail. It is not often that I find it so unequivocally necessary to write everyone on my personal mailing lists and express the words that we often think and wish we could vocalize but that remain inaudible.

Recently, someone inquired about what they thought were a series of blogs that I released on myspace and on other websites. At first I was confused until it dawned on me that I have never explained to anyone how I keep a journal, almost a book's worth I would say, of personal stories that detail events in my life. These stories are written without the anger, pain, sadness or bitterness that often clouded my vision at the time that these things happen. I usually only release the politically charged ones to the public, because I am not in the habit of sharing personal stories about my life, unless it is with my inner circle that gets a chance to read some of the entries at times... However, the events of the past week have provided a reason for me to bring up a story about my youth. I pray that those who I am just as close to in mind, heart, spirit and Revolutionary cause may be able to understand and hopefully identify with.

I grew up in Harlem during a time when the Apollo had underground Rap acts performing there every weekend, when Morningside Park wasn't a place where you wanted to be without a weapon, and where they used to fight pitbulls on the steps after dark. I can remember when to the West, Grant's Tomb used to throw huge Jazz festivals, and they would incorporate upcoming Hip Hop acts as well. This was all during the era of struggling Black businesses, the sunset of redline district ratings, and what would become known as the golden age of Hip Hop. New York City was not the police state that it is now, and while some see the city's past as a lawless criminal haven, there was a balance in the fact that there was more culture rather than a contrived tourist attraction that nets corporations money, but that threatens to remove much of the current population. All that said, I think it would naïve to think that just because all this is true, that the old New York was better. Because I couldn't say that to someone who lost their child to gang violence, drug addiction, murder, or a bevy of other issues that used to claim so many more lives than they do now. However the problems haven't gone away. They've simply been masked in many areas and increasing the prison population hasn't resolved the fundamental problems of social imbalance that are the root cause of many of these issues.

I was very young and unable to articulate what I can now but I remember everything. As God has blessed me with one of the best memories out of the people I know. To remember things in detail is difficult for some people but when thoughts are ingrained into my mind, they can be recounted effortlessly. Even more so often I guess because I often wrote them down in detail as a child. As all children when I was young I got into my fair share of trouble, but much more so as a teen and a young adult than as an adolescent who was more concerned with just playing stickball, arcade games (remember those?), Street Football, and talking to girls in the

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neighborhood.

Behind the tomb of the 18th President of the United States, Ulysses S. Grant, on 122nd Street in what is now gentrified West Harlem, there is a small park. The park extends from what would be 123rd street all the way to 125th where it ends and a bridge carries the remaining road parallel alongside the Westside Highway and above what was once was the empty meat market district. The park is has a paved path with a row of benches on its side leading up to a playground where for as long as I can remember a large diverse community of people gathered over the summer. Blacks, and Latinos, including Mexican's, Puerto Rican's and Dominican's from the Harlem and the Washington Heights Community have traditionally set up BBQ's and family picnics there. The entire area was then, and still is, littered during warmer days with people who allow their children to play together in the jungle gym and swing area. I remember watching people of all ethnicities having a good time there when I was young.

Across the street from the park there is a strip of sidewalk that follows the scene I just described towards a Bridge. Like a lonely admirer, the street never joins with the park but rather continues on it's own as a path as it proceeds over the bridge up to 135th street.

On a summer day when I was about 13 years old, I was walking down this exact same path with three of the kids from around the way, Jay, Angel, and Mark. We were walking through the park, laughing, making jokes and just basically having fun. We we're drunk or high or scheming on anyone, we didn't harass any females, or spit on someone we thought looked at us wrong. We brought no cause to even notice us besides the faint laughter heard from a distance as we cracked jokes on one another. Usually we just walked through the picnic area to see if there were girls there or played stickball with one of our other homies Dominican Chris (RIP) who I shouted out on the "One Remix" at the end of Revolutionary Vol.2. On this one occasion we thought we'd walk back down the path opposite the park and go down a street called Tiemann to get to 125th. I saw the long open road that followed the park, turned to the fellas, and bet that I could beat any of them to the end of the road in a race. We went back and forth, talking shit for a minute, until finally, betting a quarter water and some 25 cent cookies on the winner of the race, we all took our mark and then we ripped down the street. Just some innocent kids enjoying a summer day running through a park. I remember seeing my lead come and go as the other competitors struggled to obtain lead and excel.

As we finished the race, (Angel beat us all), we slowed our run to a jog and then stopped to rest in front of a row of steps. But no sooner had we stopped running when another competitor who had obviously been watching our race very carefully joined our group. The police cruiser pulled up right next to us in what can only be described as an unhealthy speed to try and stop a car in

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front of anyone let alone children. It slightly came onto the curb but didn't jump it completely. The cops barked for us to all "FREEZE!" I can remember feeling nervous at first and then all that fear subsiding because I knew I hadn't done anything wrong at all. The cops then ordered us all to come to the car, and we all did so quietly and reluctantly, all of us except Angel. He backed away from them towards a set of stairs that led down to another street. The cops immediately asked us who we had robbed, they asked us what we took and where we had hidden it. "I didn't steal anything," I answered back and was told to shut up. "The only reason niggers and spics run is when they've stole something" was the response the cop in the patrol car.

I had seen the cops rough people up before. There is a deli near my old apartment that for many years during the 90's was a famous coke spot that everyone from college students, junkies and business people frequented. But those were drug dealers from the hood. In Hip Hop we glamorize the drug trade sometimes, but I always understood the harsh reality of that world. I saw cops rob drug dealers before and they beat down a few drunk people on the street who were talking reckless, but I hadn't seen them talk to children like that. They came to my elementary school once, only a few years earlier, to talk to us about safety and drugs. So while it wasn't the first time I had seen or heard the police get physical or confrontational with people, it was the first time it was directed at me personally. There they were calling me a nigger and a spic and accusing me of stealing something when all we had done was what their kids did in their all white community 15 miles out of New York or in a Queens suburb, race each other in a fuckin' park.

But that was just the half of it. When Angel came back, away from the steps they all of a sudden seemed interested more in him than of the rest of us. "What the fuck did you step back from us for?" they asked.

"Why'd you run away?"

They ordered him to come towards the car. When he obeyed, the cop who was riding shotgun grabbed him by the neck and yanked him halfway inside the vehicle, leaving his little feet dangling in the air.

The cop driving slapped him in the face and growled "what the fuck are you running for? What the fuck did you steal?"

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We all watched in disgust and horror at the sight of our friend being mangled by these grown men with the power of life and death over us. They asked us how old we were and I clearly remember that we each went down the line saying, "13, 12, 14, 13" and I think back on it now, noting how small we must have really been in comparison to these police officers. He then asked Angel to give him his mother's phone number to find out where he lived, he asked him over and over, and then one of them yelled at him "don't lie to us!" He didn't pose any threat to them in any way shape or form, and yet they felt the need to keep hitting him. They even pulled out the top of their nightstick and banged it against his head. We all started yelling about how we didn't do anything and again they told us all to shut up. Finally, they then let him go and told us that if we didn't steal anything and we weren't guilty than we didn't have anything to fear from the police.

We walked back to our block silently, but there was a quiet attitude in Angel that I hadn't seen before, he was not just left without words, he seemed to be silent inside. He wasn't as badly bruised as I thought he'd be.

He had a few marks and his face was red but there was something behind his face looked like it was broken...

I am going to leave that story at this point for now, and not go far into detail about explaining to my father how useless it was to look for their badge numbers or about how this was just beginning of my abusive relationship with NYPD, who only 3 years later pulled guns on me outside of an 86th street train station because they claimed my green jacket matched the description of a robbery suspect. I could really tell a whole chapter of these stories. Almost getting killed by cops, but by then I was already a criminal, which coincidentally doesn't mean that a summary execution of me was in order.

Scooter Libby is a criminal, he broke the law, and so did Oliver North. But I'm sure if someone shot them both tomorrow that person wouldn't be exempt of the charges because of the victim's status. I watch people often implant these ideas in our mind to justify what happens to drug dealers, to thieves, to people that come from a community that is persecuted or to people whose politics are adverse to our own. We are media-trained to see ourselves as a threat, rather than the system as one. Perhaps that's why even when the cops are of color they feel more threatened by a Black or Latino person. They feel like they're less concerned with the consequences of doing this in our communities vs. other places where they'd be more accountable for their actions by the governing council.

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Who all need to be voted out by the way, immediately!

When I went to school the next day I talked to my classmates about my crazy weekend and I found shock and disbelief from some of the white students, those who came from a more affluent background but the few Black and Latino kids were more understanding and we even shared stories of their own with each other, but not with the rest of the class, we felt like they thought the police were their friends. Imagine that... Sharing stories about police brutality in 7th grade.

I know that it's been a horrible week for anyone out there that was looking for some sort of justice in New York. Some of us hate marching. We're tired of it. And many others wanted us to riot, as if destroying our own neighborhoods would do anything for us. Others talked about destroying other neighborhoods, rich white neighborhoods, as if that wouldn't bring about the wholesale slaughter of our people. Some say that this would at least highlight the difference in the way police deal with people of color from the inner city vs. other communities. Some said blood needed to be shed, and that we must expect to incur losses, and we shouldn't be squeamish and look ahead. But these are the same "hardcore activists" that have never seen bloodshed or violence the way I have. And if we are all for sacrificing lives on the altar of Revolution then the question to be asked is, if there was only one life to sacrifice to bring attention to this police state, and it was your son, or daughter or husband who was father to them both, would you give them up? I can guarantee that while the Bell family is happy to receive the love and support from the community and the help of so many organizations to expose police corruption and seek justice, that they would trade it all to have Sean Bell back... If I was them... I would too.

Sean Bell's murder isn't just about race. Although it is important to point out that that the idea that one cannot be prejudice against their own race is just ridiculous because there are glaring examples of it present in our everyday lives all the time. But I firmly believe this is much more about power. The power of a growing authoritarian state who will protect it's praetorian guard at all costs, a city who values some lives over others, that doesn't mind paying out as long as the PBA can spin the issues and use whatever legal maneuvering with a retiring judge to make the decisions it finds favorable. It is about the power of a government to torture or kill a human being and not have to answer to the people that its supposed to represent. If our only claim to democracy is the vote we somewhat take part in as a nation 25 times every century, and not the foundation of it's institutions, then are we not truly a democracy in name only? But I am not here to preach to the choir, I actually presented this old journal entry of mine because I want to hear YOU SPEAK... We NEED to hear you speak.

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I wanted to take this opportunity to make this an open forum for people from all walks of life, all races, sexes, religions, persuasions and ethnicities to speak on their experiences with police abuse. In response to the Sean Bell killing and various other issues facing this nation Other Revolutionaries and I are working on coming up with more proactive solutions to the problems our communities are facing. Telling these stories is a way to communicate more with one another. Marches are good to show solidarity and display the numbers of a community but they are just one tool in the arsenal that we have available to us as a people. Communication is another, and as we search for non-traditional ways to battle the system, to take it beyond complaining and press conferences, as we take it beyond the predictable means of typical protest, a greater network is necessary to establish. We are not defenseless, we are not sheep, and we will not be placated "civilians" whose diversified skills and ability to structure ourselves with military organization will be allowed to go to waste. Networking is key. (Post it either here or join the network on www.myspace.com/immortaltechnique) where this has already started.

Please feel free to post a personal account from you or your family's experience with Police brutality, whether you are in NY, LA, Seattle, Toronto, Russia, China, Japan, The Middle East, Chicago, Jersey, Atlanta, Miami, The West Bank, Europe, Australia, Asia, Africa, or somewhere off in Latin America, in the 3rd World, where the police are the military and they are 10 times worse towards the people. Write us here from everywhere...

While we keep fighting, I and other Rebels of all walks of life make moves. So I want to hear from you, to hear your experiences so that we can learn from them, speak to one another, and form a stronger alliance. People know me as a Rapper but I see that as I always have only piece of what I am, music is really just a small part of my life, it is only the beginning of what I have begun working on.

Communication is an essential component in all types of warfare, releasing this piece of my journal and asking for you to speak on stories of your own is part of a much larger action planned to increase Communications all while moving our other projects ahead...

R.I.P. Sean Bell.

But remember, that he will only Rest In Peace when we bring those that murdered him and the state which basically sanctioned his execution, to justice. We must be well- trained, disciplined, sober, vigilant and ready for action when it comes. We remember the many that fell before Sean, and those that are still to come because this will never stop unless we take action to stop

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it. We are taking action this is just the first step.

We are the people. We are the Revolution.

Respectfully Submitted,

Immortal

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