

Passing the Torch of Police Brutality Sean Bell The Solution

Written by Adisa Banjoko ID4331

Monday, 28 April 2008 08:58 -

Passing the Torch of Police Brutality: Sean Bell & The Solution By: Adisa Banjoko, The Bishop of Hip Hop

Though we live dangerous, cops could just/ Arrest me, blaming us, we're held like hostages-
Nas, NY State of Mind

I got my first car when I was 18. "Now when you get pulled over, it's a serious thing," my dad said to me before he handed me the keys to a brown Toyota Celica. "You keep your hands on the wheel if you get stopped. Move slowly. If you are going to reach for anything like a wallet you tell him what you are going to do and do it slow. If you move too fast they will kill you." There was a seriousness in his eyes and his tone that I knew better than to ignore. But in my head, a part of me, said, "All right Pop slow down. This ain't the deep South where you're from. We live in the Bay and it's the 1980s."

The first time a gun was put in my face, it was by the SFPD. A cop drew a 9mm pistol on me for wearing a red and black jacket with the words PARIS (a pro-black rapper not the chick) across the back. They said I looked like a gang member from Pinole (a surrounding city), and said I made an illegal u-turn to get a parking space. They were physically smaller than me (the one with his gun on me was trembling and was afraid) and I knew they would not hesitate to put a bullet through my eye socket if I did anything but breathe. All of my father's advice crystallized in that moment. I spoke slowly and clearly as they made eye contact, and explained I had no weapons, was unarmed and that I had broken no laws.

It took the cop a few seconds to hear me through his fear, and eventually he put the gun down. He smiled and said, "Gangs in the area are wearing your colors." Funny how, being a 6 foot tall black man, I always seem to be in "gang colors." I wake up in gang colors. I got to bed in gang colors. I walk to the corner store in gang colors. I was born in gang colors. I'm black.

Today I'm 38, and have a son. In 10 years, I will have to have the same conversation with him.

How can I not?

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This past Friday, the cops that murdered Sean Bell were acquitted. So many were surprised. I wasn't.

Surprised at what?

The same courts that let the cops in Rodney King's videotaped beating walk, the same courts who set up the three strikes and Rockefeller Drug Laws, and the same courts that let Amadou Diallo die in cold blood gave no justice to Sean Bell. Again. And people are surprised? Our system is failing us on so many levels.

No rational human being with knowledge of the American justice system could really be shocked. This is America and American courts have never made justice for black men a priority. The fact that they allowed his parents to file anything in court at all is simply the illusion of democracy.

When N.W.A. dropped "Fuck The Police" in the late 1980s many in the American media attacked them. Even the F.B.I. saw fit to write their label a threatening letter about how inappropriate the nature of the song was. And shortly thereafter, the release of Paris' "Coffee Donuts and Death" and Ice T's "Cop Killer" created a firestorm of controversy in the media. Hip hop music has documented racial and systematic injustice more effectively than any other art form to date, and this has been in large part because of the fact that much of what America has tried to sweep under the rug hasn't gone unnoticed by hip hop artists who care.

So many questions were asked.

"Why would black men write songs against the police?" "Who would write, let alone SELL music advocating police murder?" "Why do black men hate cops so much?"

But nobody asked if some of the accusations of police brutality being made had any merit. How could so many rappers, from so many different parts of America, be so unified in their feelings

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about the same subject? I was told by a white college student in the 1990s that the original police forces were bands of slave overseers "policing" the plantations of rich whites after Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. He said that their job was to keep free Africans afraid to rebel against their former masters.

Now, based on what I have seen in the courts and on TV, and in my own personal experiences of being terrorized and falsely accused by police officers since my early teen years - it all makes even more sense. Rap music is a billion dollar industry for some, and is a way out the ghetto for others. But for me, undiluted hip hop is one of the real scoreboards of what is going on in the minds, hearts and souls of black men. If you are attuned to what is going on outside the mainstream, you can see that young black males have been trying to bring attention to their struggle against police brutality for decades.

Their pleas for help went ignored by not only the courts and black and white media outlets, but by the old civil rights leadership too. Bill Cosby said nothing. Theo Huxtable never had to deal with what my friends and I had to deal with.

A few years before Sean Bell was murdered, rapper Talib Kweli wrote about the pain of having to pass on the torch of teaching his son about the reality of police brutality.

Niggaz with knowledge is more dangerous than than niggaz with guns

They make the guns easy to get and try to keep niggaz dumb

Target the gangs and graffiti with the Prop 21

I already know the deal but what the fuck do I tell my son?

I want him livin" right, livin good, respect the rules

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He's five years old and he still thinkin' cops is cool

How do I break the news that when he gets some size

He'll be perceived as a threat or see the fear in they eyes

It's in they job description to terminate the threat

So 41 shots to the body is what he can expect

The precedent is set, don't matter if he follow the law

I know I'll give my son pride and make him swallow it all

I sadly must have the same conversation with my son. I hate this fact...but it is something I must do. No one should ever ask again why any rapper speaks against the racism of American police departments or the American justice system. They have been trying for decades to tell the world how corrupt and broken this nation's courts are. Many times their language is harsh, the visuals are ugly and the subject itself painful to digest - but ignoring the voice of the youth has not helped the situation - and the fire of legal injustice covered by the ashes of hollow democracy don't make the nation any safer. Only honoring truth does. The truth is we can do so much better than we are.

I have family members who are cops. Some of the friends I grew up with listening to N.W.A. with are now police themselves. I know that there are good hearted, well-intentioned police men and women of all races out there. Victims of police brutality also come in all races and creeds as well, and many of them have been denied justice too. Unfortunately, the most horrific cases of police brutality continue to occur within the African American community.

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I find killer cops just as disgusting and appalling as cop killers, and I am a committed advocate for non-violence. Yet I do not want to be here ten years from now writing about my son, my neighbor's son or the son of one of you reading this now. I don't want any more American parents feeling the pain that the Bell family is currently experiencing.

Malcolm X said before he was murdered that he planned to file a suit against the United States for denial of human rights in the courts of the United Nations. I believe that it is time to pick that torch up now. Starting with the senseless murder of Sean Bell, African Americans can document our case all the way back to Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation. The injustice is systematic, and there is no other solution than making a case in the U.N. on the basis of human rights violations. We do this not because we hate America. We must do it to help create that "more perfect union" the founders of this nation aspired to manifest.

The time is now. If we neglect to solve the problem in the world courts, blood will continue to run in the streets. People are tired, and people are beyond angry. What if police start randomly getting killed too? Then what? America cannot benefit on any level from an escalation of violence. It never has, and black people in America have never had greater opportunity, educational or technological ability to confront the issue of police brutality and injustice. And American citizens of other races and cultures have never had a finer moment to help refine the American judicial system for all of its citizens too. Sean Bell cannot be just another victim of senseless police brutality. He must be the last.

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