



Snitching: Criminal Informants and the Erosion of American Justice

Alexandra Natapoff

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2010 Honorable Mention, Silver Gavel Award, American Bar Association Albert Burrell spent thirteen years on death row for a murder he did not commit. Atlanta police killed 92-year-old Kathryn Johnston during a misguided raid on her home. After being released by Chicago prosecutors, Darryl Moore drug dealer, hit man, and rapist returned home to rape an eleven-year-old girl. Such tragedies are consequences of snitching police and prosecutors offering deals to criminal offenders in exchange for information. Although it is nearly invisible to the public, criminal snitching has invaded the American legal system in risky and sometimes shocking ways. Snitching is the first comprehensive analysis of this powerful and problematic practice, in which informant deals generate unreliable evidence, allow criminals to escape punishment, endanger the innocent, compromise the integrity of police work, and exacerbate tension between police and poor urban residents. Driven by dozens of real-life stories and debacles, the book exposes the social destruction that snitching can cause in high-crime African American neighborhoods, and how using criminal informants renders our entire penal process more secretive and less fair. Natapoff also uncovers the farreaching legal, political, and cultural significance of snitching: from the war on drugs to hip hop music, from the FBI's mishandling of its murderous mafia informants to the new surge in white collar and terrorism informing. She explains how existing law functions and proposes new reforms. By delving into the secretive world of criminal informants, Snitching reveals deep and often disturbing truths about the way American justice really works.

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