

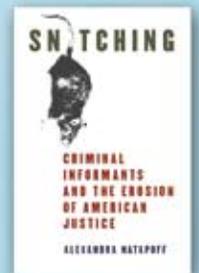
## HONORABLE MENTION | BOOKS

### *Snitching: Criminal Informants and the Erosion of American Justice*

New York University Press  
New York, New York  
Alexandra Natapoff, *Author*

## COMMITTEE COMMENTARY

*Snitching* opens with the dramatic tale of a 2006 drug tip gone tragically wrong. A drug dealer-turned-informant, busted by Atlanta police, tells them drugs are being sold out of the house of 92-year-old Kathryn Johnston. Police enter Mrs. Johnston's home, killing her in a hail of bullets. But the dealer's tip is bad. No drugs are to be found. Alexandra Natapoff, a law professor and former public defender, has written a compelling book about the all too pervasive practice of snitching, which she carefully defines as the "governmental practice of rewarding informants who have broken the law." She calls them "criminal informants," or "snitches." Excluded are other types of informants, such as whistleblowers. *Snitching* easily intertwines anecdotes, analysis, and thesis as the author explains abusive practices, such as how criminal informants are induced by either expectations of lighter sentences or money to create information that police want to hear. Tips can even be downright fabrications, as in the case of Mrs. Johnston. Natapoff's thorough research uncovers facts that will inform, if not shock, readers about the costs of snitches, and how their widespread use in poor urban communities has corrupted drug enforcement and the criminal justice system. In addition to educating readers about the legal and cultural impact of snitching, Natapoff presents comprehensive recommendations for reforms. She states each proposal clearly and explains its potential impact. Ultimately, this well-written book keeps readers turning pages and thus will enhance the public's understanding of our criminal justice system and the urgent need for reforms to better regulate the use of criminal informants.



### INTERVIEW with Alexandra Natapoff

*Alexandra Natapoff is the author of Snitching. She is a law professor at Loyola Law School, Los Angeles, and previously worked as a federal public defender and a community lawyer in inner city Baltimore.*

#### Where did the initial idea for *Snitching* come from?

Living and working in inner city Baltimore, I watched the criminal system warp people's daily lives and expectations. It was shocking to hear young children explain that drug dealers were snitching in order to stay out of jail. As a public defender, it became clear that everyone—from judges to defendants—simply took these strange and secretive deals for granted. And yet the whole phenomenon was invisible to the outside world. Becoming a law professor gave me the unique opportunity to research and write about this underground form of justice.

#### How do you think your book treats or offers insights or perspectives on legal issues and legal institutions?

The use of criminal informants, or "snitching," is an immense yet invisible part of the American criminal process. The practice is at once a powerful law enforcement tool and a dangerous gamble, generating wrongful convictions, violence, and crime.

The public is largely unaware of how widespread it is. Every year, tens of thousands of cases are built around snitch deals and these deals influence every aspect of the criminal process, from investigations to plea bargaining to sentencing. The book offers a comprehensive picture—legal, institutional, and cultural—of this influential phenomenon, with a special focus on the harm that criminal snitching can inflict on poor high-crime African American communities.

#### How does *Snitching* foster public understanding?

*Snitching* is written for the general reader as well as for attorneys, law enforcement, judges, and legislators. My hope is that the reader will gain a deeper understanding of how our justice system really works, and how criminal policies like snitching can affect individuals and communities.

*Snitching: Criminal Informants and the Erosion of American Justice* retails for \$29.95 hardcover. It is available from New York University Press and booksellers nationwide. For more information, go to [www.nyupress.org/books/Snitching-products\\_id-11114.html](http://www.nyupress.org/books/Snitching-products_id-11114.html)