

Are You About That Life?
“Chief Keef & Lil Jojo”
By Dexter Patterson

Are you about that life? When you were a teenager, did you know what life was about? How about life in the streets of Chicago? I know I don't, but their dramatic increase in gun violence should concern us all. So far this year, there have been over 340 murders in the city of Chicago. According to the Christian Science Monitor, "January-to-June murders here were 58 percent higher than the number of US troops killed in Afghanistan during the same period". Believe it or not, Chicago is officially a war zone. Gun violence is up 60 percent since 2011, and the murder rate is up 38% so far in 2012. I don't believe in radical gun reform, but I do believe we need to reform the structure of these communities. We need to provide all Americans with the basic resources such as safe neighborhoods, well-funded schools, and equal opportunity. Without opportunity, these kids will continue to gun each other down in the streets. According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, "Firearm homicide is now the leading cause of injury-related death for African Americans ages 15-34". Trust me, this isn't an issue that only impacts Chicago.

Recently that violence has begun to spill over into the world of Hip-Hop. Joseph Coleman, a.k.a. Lil Jojo, was recently murdered in 6900 block of South Princeton Avenue in Englewood. Coleman's murder has also gotten extra attention because of his well publicized beef with rapper, Chief Keef. Chicago native, Kevin Cozart, a.k.a. Chief Keef, had been beefing with Coleman for months on various social networking sites. According to sources, Lil Jojo had been beefing with Keef and other rival rappers Lil Reese, Lil Durk, and members of the Black Disciple street gang. Keef took to Twitter after Lil Jojo's murder posting, "Its Sad Cuz Dat Nigga Jojo Wanted To Be Jus Like Us #LMAO". Keef claims his account was hacked, but the comments have brought Chief Keef some unwanted, yet timely media attention.

Many of Chief Keef's Twitter followers were outraged by his comments. Similarly, Chicago Hip-Hop artist Lupe Fiasco, seemed to be deeply disturbed by the situation as well. Chief Keef responded on Twitter posting, "Lupe Fiasco is a hoe ass nigga and wen I see him I'ma smack him like da lil bitch he is #300". In a recent interview, Fiasco admitted "he's scared of the culture that young rappers like Chief Keef promote in Chi-town considering the city's alarming murder rate". Fiasco insists he meant no disrespect and tweeted, " I cant go 4 that @ChiefKeef & I cant let the people I love, including you my nigga, go 4 that either. We kings not fuckin savages and goons". This situation has frustrated Fiasco so much that he says he's retiring from the rap game after his next album. Fiasco stated, "my heart is

broken and I see no comfort further along this path only more pain. I cannot participate any longer in this...My first true love was literature so I will return to that”.

Although tragic, many people could argue that Lil Jojo may have been asking for trouble. Otherwise maybe he should have considered a different path in life that might have rewarded him with longevity. Not only did Jojo make a diss track about Chief Keef and the Black Disciples, he also made a You Tube video called “3hunnak”. In the video, Lil Jojo is rapping “These niggas claim 300, but we BDK”. The term “BDK” or “Black Disciple Killer”, insinuates that Lil Jojo was willing to kill. The night of his murder, Lil Jojo seemed to be tempting fate. He sent out a series of tweets basically informing his enemies of his presence. Lil Jojo's first tweet says, “Im on #069 Im Out Here”. At this point, it seems like Lil Jojo was actually acting like a kid again. He thought everything was a joke, riding through Englewood on the back of his friend’s bike without a worry in the world. Did he really think this was all just a game? According to the Sun Times, “Colemans's aunt, Sonia Mares-Du Bose, said Lil Jojo had been trying to “do like a Tupac and Biggie thing and get under the skin” of Chief Keef and his rivals. Once again, corporate vampires and record labels will make a profit off the destruction of the black community.

In reality, Lil Jojo was traveling deeper into the belly of the beast. Hours before he was murdered, a video was posted to his You Tube account showing him in conflict with one of Chief Keef’s known associates. Lil Jojo tweets, “Just caught @LilReese300 N Traffic His Daddy tryna talk It Out #No Talkin #Bricksquad”. It's clear to me that Lil Jojo knew exactly what he was doing. He wanted to be the “man” and he was willing to play the role. Sure you can say he was about that life, but you also have to say it cost him his own.

In my opinion, Chief Keef and Lil Jojo are both products of their environment. They have heard, seen, and done things no person should have to endure. In the streets, most people live life stuck in survival mode. There is no room for compromise because compromise is considered weakness. The next man is viewed as competition; never as your brother. Neighbors become enemies simply because they are both fighting over the same limited resources. Let's be honest, Lil Jojo and Chief Keef's situation isn't unique. However, they receive more attention because they were both in the national spotlight for their music.

As a parent myself, I wondered where these kids’ parents were during all of this. Coleman's mother claims she didn't know the beef with Chief Keef was so serious. Call me cynical, but I find that hard to believe. Coleman's mother Robin Russell states, “It wasn't a gang thing, it was a rap thing. My son was going to get a rap deal like some of them have and they were jealous”. Chief Keef recently

signed with Interscope and Lil Jojo was rumored to have been discussing a deal with Waka Flocka Flame and Brick Squad.

Too many kids are growing up feeling like no one cares about them. It's sad but it's true. Our government has constantly ignored the issue as a matter of convenience. They know our voting turnout is so low that they don't have to help us in order to get re-elected. According to a Teen Gun Survey, "56% of teens nationwide reported that they believe the government wouldn't care if they were a victim of gun violence". Should we continue to blame these kids for the environments they grow up in? We place so much emphasis on individual choice that sometimes we ignore the obstacles others may face. Yes, we all have choices, but those choices aren't always equal. These kids come from poverty-stricken neighborhoods, everyday they are engulfed by violence, they sleep in broken homes, and they can forget about a quality education. The sad thing is, many of them have never known any different so they accept it. The only people doing "well" in these communities are the gang members, drug dealers, stick up boys, pimps, gamblers, pro ball players, and of course, the rappers.

Have you seen the news lately? The Chicago schools are so bad that the kids would rather stay in the streets, and the teachers are actually going on strike. Most students don't see the point in attending and the teachers lack the resources needed to really make a difference. Some of these kids just go to school so they can eat five days out of the week. Many of the schools struggle to attract good teachers because they are afraid to teach in these schools due to all the violence. For example, the Chicago Sun Times reported a man was found dead: "with crack in his hand and a bullet wound in his neck, Jeffery Smith was found early Sunday morning slumped over in the front seat of a car parked yards from a South Side grade school-- one of two killed and 24 overall shot in weekend gun violence". You tell me: does that sound like a place you would want to send your child to the next morning?

These days, kids are being brainwashed into thinking this lifestyle is their only option. Most of them live their lives without ever reaping the benefits of opportunity. When you grow up with nothing, you rarely live life thinking about your future. Consequently, many of these kids just conform and are lost to the streets. Think about it. Neither one of these kids had the pleasure of enjoying their childhood. Thousands of children around the country are growing up just like Chief Keef and Lil Jojo. We don't hear about them but I bet their families all suffer the same. When you're about that life, you have to be about the consequences too. So I ask you again: are you about that life?