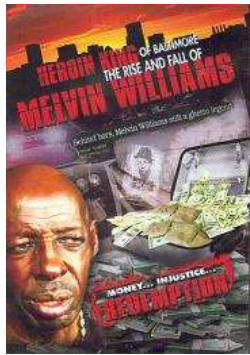


2 weeks ago Heroin King of Baltimore – The Rise and Fall of Melvin Williams



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I have a weakness for documentaries, especially those whose subjects I am not too familiar with, and those which teach me something new. “Heroin King of Baltimore – The Rise and Fall of Melvin Williams” is one of such films. It takes a fascinating look at a quite a smart human being who was apparently pushed to violate the law, and then find redemption.

Melvin Williams was a gifted, young African-American that was meant to triumph in whatever he did. Growing up in Baltimore, he sold newspapers in his early years, and being in the streets, he also got hooked on gambling during that time. He was master at playing dice – he studied the game in detail -- and was kicked out of school. By age 15, he was already a millionaire. With this sudden flush of money, a time came in which he had to hire a bodyguard, especially because he made some people really angry. As time passed by, he is sold by an informant – and good friend -- to the DEA, and is accused of cocaine trafficking – at that time, Williams was only a mayor gambler. According to Williams, “A rat is not a rat because he chooses to be; a rat is a rat because that’s his nature.” So Williams went to trial on fabricated charges, and, after finishing his jail time, he promised himself that he was going to be the best dope dealer ever. And that he did, for sure, and the documentary focuses on his successes and mistakes. In the end, he realizes that crime doesn’t pay. It is also important to note that Williams was respected in his town, to such a degree that he was asked by local politicians to help mitigate the anger in the crowds after Martin Luther King’s assassination. Late in life, and based on his experiences in seeing the prisons significantly crowded with black men, he concludes that, “It’s not a war against drugs; it’s a war against black folk.”

Although “Heroin King of Baltimore – The Rise and Fall of Melvin Williams” is mostly narrated by Williams himself, David Simon (producer of “The Wire”), Leroy Carroll (former District Attorney) and Clarence Mitchell IV (former State Senator) are also interviewed in the film. In addition, even though the film was about the life in crime and redemption of Melvin Williams, it also deals on how the system is abused by politicians and cops as a matter of convenience. This is a definitely a story that needed to be told. (USA, 2013, color, 60 min)

Reviewed on May 29, 2013. **Eyes Wide Open Films.**

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