

**A Book Review of Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption
in an American Prison by Shaka Senghor**

by Zachary A. Smith

I read this book after another prisoner received it as a gift from his mother. The first thing that stood out to me was Shaka Senghor's (aka James White) claim that out of respect for the victims' family and their privacy, he changed the name of the man he killed. If Shaka truly wanted to show respect for the man he killed, wouldn't he have honored it instead of concealing it? (pages 3-6)

The next thing I noticed was its ring of untruth. At the beginning, Shaka writes that he was in the Wayne County jail for only six weeks, following his arrest and conviction for second degree murder. Anyone who has ever faced a murder charge knows that these cases go through the judicial system at a snail pace. Furthermore, it is questionable whether Shaka actually witnessed a rape of a "white boy," a robbery, and a murder of a corrections officer. (pages 12, 33-36). (Actually, he didn't witness the murder, only heard about another inmate smuggling a gun into the county jail.)

When he arrived at prison, Shaka writes that another "white boy" fell prey to a booty bandit and thereafter committed suicide. (pages 94-95). Although Shaka wants to give the reader the impression that he liked the "white boy" and would have saved him if he could have, the opposite is conveyed: Shaka's

hatred toward white people. I was left with the impression that Shaka enjoys degrading them, killing or assaulting them, manipulating them, and exploiting them at every opportunity. This was the theme throughout his book.

According to Shaka, part of his rehabilitation consisted of joining "I hate the white man" groups and reading their recommended books. These groups condone violence and discourse toward whites and correctional officers. (pages 103-105, 119-123, 140, 146, 148-151, 164-165, 166-168, 178-181, 186-187, 203-204)

Shaka further writes that four $\frac{1}{2}$ years in administrative segregation for assaulting a corrections officer brought real change within him. But he then contradicts himself when he writes that after getting out of solitary confinement, getting transferred, and getting a girlfriend, he paid another inmate to stab a guy in the prison yard. (pages 224-225)

The book ends with Shaka being granted parole and released from prison four years later. Despite his claims of change and transformation, the only thing Shaka changed was his methods of getting what he wanted through manipulation, intimidation, and subtlety. (pages 1-6, 192)

This book is nothing but promotional hype. If Shaka is a leading voice on criminal justice reform, and an inspiration to thousands then it's no wonder the recidivism rate is so high. Shaka hasn't changed, he's only gotten better at concealing his true sociopathic personality. Oprah, Cory Booker (United States Senator), and Van Jones (CNN Contributor) should be ashamed of themselves for ever recommending such a book to

anyone, let alone prisoners. If you want to read something useful, or send a friend or family member a self-help book, send "How to Make Peace With Anyone" by David Lieberman instead.

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