

Always remember Shaka Sankofa

written by Stephen Millies

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Shaka Sankofa was framed for murder in 1981 at age 17. In 2000, he was executed

in Texas under George W. Bush, then governor.

Shaka Sankofa was executed 25 years ago on June 22, 2000. Texas governor and future president, George W. Bush, ordered the legal lynching in Huntsville.

Sankofa spent half his life on death row. He was only 17 years old when he arrived there in 1981. Then known as Gary Graham, he was framed for the murder of Bobby Lambert, a drug dealer and police informer.

Lambert was killed next to a Houston supermarket. Six thousand dollars was found on his body. Obviously, this was a contract killing, not a robbery.

So why did the cops and district attorney pin the rap on Sankofa, a convicted robber? Was it just convenient? Or was it part of a cover-up?

Six eyewitnesses said Sankofa wasn't the shooter. Four people who said they were with him at the time of Lambert's murder passed lie detector tests.

Two workers at the supermarket who got a good look at the killer said Sankofa wasn't the shooter. These witnesses were never interviewed by Sankofa's court-appointed attorney. Nor were they called to testify.

Bernadine Skillern was the main witness to identify Shaka Sankofa as the shooter of Bobby Lambert. She claimed to have seen Sankofa's face for a few seconds through her car windshield at a distance of 30 to 40 feet.

That was enough for a jury to send the Black teenager to his death. Three of these jurors later signed affidavits saying they would have voted differently if they had known all the evidence.

Executed to get Bush elected

The hustler Malcolm Little entered Walpole State Prison in Massachusetts and left

as Malcolm X. Gary Graham went to death row in Texas and died as the revolutionary Shaka Sankofa.

After changing his life and educating himself, Gary Graham took the name of the African military genius Shaka Zulu.

Even Pope John Paul II pleaded with Texas Gov. George W. Bush not to execute Sankofa. So did the Rev. Jesse Jackson and the Congressional Black Caucus.

Bush went ahead and murdered him. Sankofa's execution was part of Bush's election campaign for president.

This war criminal killed hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq and Afghanistan while he was in the White House.

The U.S. Supreme Court would later outlaw the execution of those who had been minors when they allegedly committed murder. The 2005 ruling came too late for Shaka Sankofa and 21 other inmates who had been sent to death row as teenagers and executed between 1985 and 2003.

As he lay strapped to a gurney, with poison about to flow through his veins, Sankofa remained defiant. "They know I'm innocent," he said. "Keep marching, Black people. They are killing me tonight. They are murdering me tonight."

Around the world, millions of people are marching against the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and the looming war against Iran. The fight against racism and police murders in the United States is part of the same struggle.

Among those moved by Shaka Sankofa's courage was a white cheerleader from the prison town of Huntsville. This young woman joined the protest against the execution after finishing practice.

Texas is filled with poor and working people — Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and white. They will avenge Shaka Sankofa.

