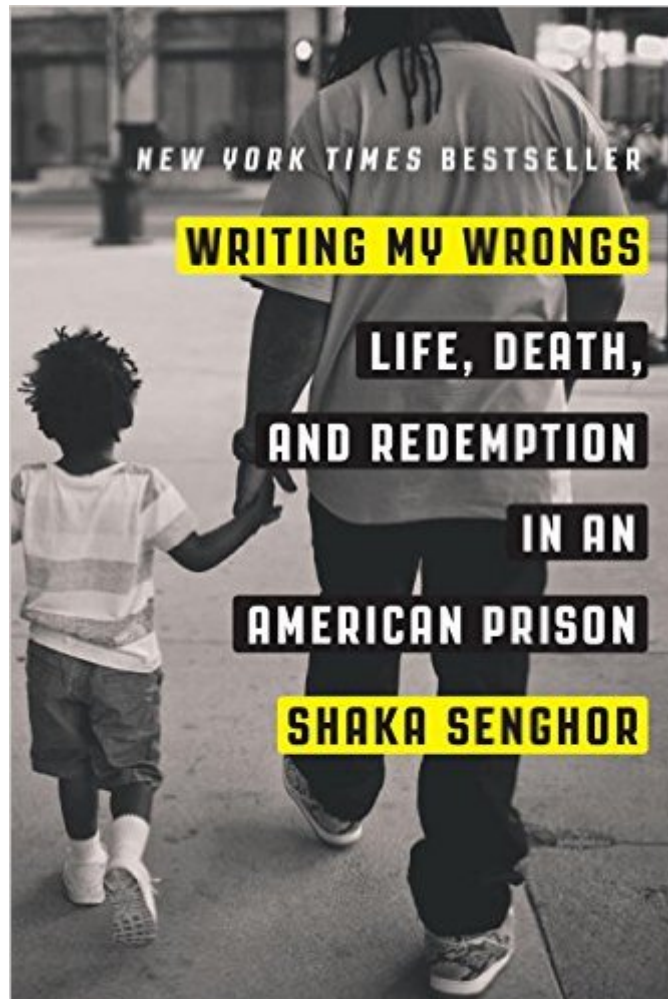


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# Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, And Redemption In An American Prison



## Synopsis

New York Times Bestseller  
In 1991, Shaka Senghor was sent to prison for second-degree murder. Today, he is a lecturer at universities, a leading voice on criminal justice reform, and an inspiration to thousands. In life, it's not how you start that matters. It's how you finish. Shaka Senghor was raised in a middle class neighborhood on Detroit's east side during the height of the 1980s crack epidemic. An honor roll student and a natural leader, he dreamed of becoming a doctor but at age 11, his parents' marriage began to unravel, and the beatings from his mother worsened, sending him on a downward spiral that saw him run away from home, turn to drug dealing to survive, and end up in prison for murder at the age of 19, fuming with anger and despair. Writing My Wrongs is the story of what came next. During his nineteen-year incarceration, seven of which were spent in solitary confinement, Senghor discovered literature, meditation, self-examination, and the kindness of others tools he used to confront the demons of his past, forgive the people who hurt him, and begin atoning for the wrongs he had committed. Upon his release at age thirty-eight, Senghor became an activist and mentor to young men and women facing circumstances like his. His work in the community and the courage to share his story led him to fellowships at the MIT Media Lab and the Kellogg Foundation and invitations to speak at events like TED and the Aspen Ideas Festival. In equal turns, Writing My Wrongs is a page-turning portrait of life in the shadow of poverty, violence, and fear; an unforgettable story of redemption, reminding us that our worst deeds don't define us; and a compelling witness to our country's need for rethinking its approach to crime, prison, and the men and women sent there.

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## Customer Reviews

I had never imagined living life any other way than my own. Living in white, suburban America, never in real danger or fearing for my life. I had always heard stories of rough neighborhoods where drugs and street crimes were problems but never sat down to think about it. When I found out I had to read *Writing My Wrongs* by Shaka Senghor, I thought, "Great, another book I have to read for class." I never thought that it could change my whole perspective of those who are incarcerated, cities with an abundance of drug and street crimes and the entire prison system in America. The biggest disappointment that came to me was the fact that America will spend more money on prisons than on schools. Senghor wrote, "One of the things I noticed when we pulled up was how neatly manicured the lawns were and how new the buildings looked. The prison stood in stark contrast to the dilapidated schools that sat like scabs across Detroit's dying landscape | The state was more willing to invest money in the upkeep of prisons than they were in schools" (87). How could America be more willing to maintain the pristine look of prisons rather than invest towards a brighter future for the children of our country? This was a huge wake up call to me that I'm glad Senghor gave me. I have such a hard time dealing with the fact that instead of trying to keep youth off the streets and out of prison by putting more money into schools the state is trying to keep prisons in tip top shape because chances are always leaning towards arrested once, arrested again. How could keeping the places where people go to serve their time be more important than the place youth goes to learn the difference between right and wrong? The place they go to learn how to build their futures and to all that life has to offer.

*Writing my Wrongs* by Shaka Senghor is a powerful and honest autobiography about a man who faced endless amounts of adversity, but through his journey realizes more and more that there is plenty of life to salvage. On the front of the paperback cover that I own in small print under his name, a simple line is written that sums up exactly his adversity. "The story of a teenage drug dealer and convicted murderer who used writing to heal wounds from his childhood and reclaim his humanity." Shaka proved to me that the adversity I have faced in my life so far and the things that I complain about on a daily basis are nothing in regards to everything that he went through. I recently did a proposal for my Sociology class based on our prison system and the flaws I believe it has and how we can fix them. I was able to discuss it with my friend's brother Traves who was in jail for six years. In *Writing my Wrongs*, Shaka said something that was almost exactly the same as

what my friend's brother said during the interview. "The state was more willing to invest money in the upkeep of prisons than they were in schools. They had it all backwards. Instead of treating the disease, they spent millions of dollars treating the symptoms." (Senghor 87) I did more research on my own and agree with both of them. It hits home more for Shaka than for me because he talks about how bad the schools are in Detroit and claims that clearly these politicians think that black communities are "being set up to fail." (Senghor 87) It's really funny because before I read Shaka's book and talked to Traves, I really had no idea what it was actually like to be in jail. You see movies and instantly think that's what it's like. Not the case at all.

I am looking forward to the next phase of my journey challenging others to right the wrongs that exist in our world. Shaka Senghor ended his story, *Writing my Wrongs*, with a quote that tied his whole journey into one sentence. This quote ties together both the main purpose of Shaka Senghor writing his story and his reasoning behind showing it to the world. The book itself is interesting in that it puts its readers into a whole new world and a whole different realm of thinking for most audience members. In this world of adversity and prison that Shaka experienced, readers are able to relate to him and also get a glimpse into a different type of living. For example, within the epistemic community of prison, there are similarities in how typical society functions. Before reading this book, I believed that those who were incarcerated often did not have inner feelings of guilt, regret or remorse for being in prison. The text communicated to me in a way that put me in the shoes of Shaka Senghor and gave me a whole new insight into the eyes of someone who is in prison. When Shaka spoke about the confusion he felt when his parents were constantly separating then getting back together, it really helped me to get a better understanding of who he is as a person. "As her words barreled into my ears, my heart began crumbling into pieces like saltine crackers." (24) His words reminded me of the many people I know who have come from broken homes. His thought process at that young of an age going through divorce was heart wrenching. Shaka writes in a way that appeals much to pathos. He grabs his reader's hearts, and holds the hearts in his hand. Through his diction and presentation of ideas, he is able to manipulate the audience's emotions.

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