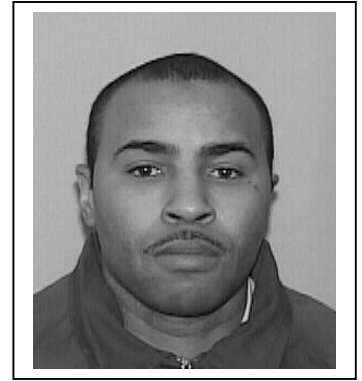


JUSTICE FOR CORTEZ BROWN TORTURED, INNOCENT & WRONGFULLY CONVICTED



In 1990, at the age of 19, Cortez Brown, whose real name is Victor Safford was arrested for a traffic violation in Park Forest, IL. After sleeping on the floor of a cell without food overnight, Cortez was taken to Area 1 Chicago Police Department for questioning in two murder cases. Cortez immediately told them he wanted to make a phone call and wanted a lawyer present during questioning. He phoned his mother and told her he was at Area 1 and she arranged for a lawyer to go to Area 1. Before his mother or lawyer could make it to Area 1, Cortez was taken to Area 3 police department. He did not have a lawyer present during questioning and it subsequently took his mother two days to find him.

At Area 3 police headquarters Cortez's nightmare began. He was beaten by detectives John Palladino, Anthony Maslanka, and John O'Brien -- all who worked with the notorious Jon Burge. To make the abuse stop, Cortez signed a false statement with a false name, Cortez Brown. He hoped that by signing a false name, he could explain to the court that the statement was false. Instead the state used that made-up name to identify him. Burge and his detectives sent several men to death row based on coerced confessions. The men victimized by the police are known as "The Death Row 10." These detectives beat and threatened Cortez and his family. These police went to his mother's house and beat his two brothers.

Cortez was convicted of two felony murders and sentenced to death. There were many problems with his case. Cortez was beaten into a false statement which even though it did not include a confession to murder, was used to convict him. There was no physical evidence linking him to either crime. There was no eyewitness who claimed to have seen Cortez shoot the victim in either case. In the first case, a witness claimed to have seen Cortez a block away from the shooting. The witness stated he called his brother at his mother's house and his brother told him he saw someone lying dead in the backyard. However, the brother told police he was at work when the shooting occurred and never spoke to his brother. In addition, this witness had cases pending in front of the judge who tried Cortez and was released from jail after testifying against Cortez.

Similarly, in Cortez's second case there was no eyewitness who claimed to have seen Cortez kill the victim. At Cortez's trial, a man who was present when the victim was murdered could not identify Cortez as one of the shooters. Two beat officers testified that they were in the area of the shooting, heard the shots and called in the incident over their radio. In Cortez's trial, they testified that they saw Cortez jump into a get away car with a large assault rifle. They pursued the car, but lost them after several blocks. Cortez's codefendant in this case plea bargained for 30 years. At this plea hearing, the State's Attorneys testified that these same two beat officers reported to the State's Attorney's office that it was the codefendant (not Cortez) that they saw jump into the vehicle. Amazingly, not only do these stories of the same incident contradict each other, but neither of the officers followed procedures by filing an official police report the night of the crime nor has the State's Attorney's office produced this descriptive report to the defense in Cortez's case.

Cortez's case is an example of what is wrong with our legal system. It is arbitrary: If the two cases had been tried in reverse order, Cortez would have never been eligible for the death penalty! When our police are corrupt our courts send innocent people to prison. Cortez should never have been behind bars for this crime. This is racism: Two thirds of Illinois' death row (before the commutations) were Black and Latino. All of Jon Burge's torture victims were Black and all the detectives involved were white. In October 2002, Cortez's death sentence was vacated. In January 2003, Illinois Governor Ryan commuted all death sentences to life without the possibility of parole. Yet, the struggle to free this innocent man continues.

For more information on this case contact the Rev. Larry E. Turpin at the United Church of Hyde Park, 1448 E. 53rd St., Chicago, IL 60615
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