



**Dreams Deferred:
The Sakia Gunn
Film Project**
by Charles B. Brack

Third World Newsreel
545 8th Ave., 10th Fl, New York, NY 10018
(212) 947-9277 ext. 17, distribution@twn.org, www.twn.org

DREAMS DEFERRED: THE SAKIA GUNN FILM PROJECT

Charles B. Brack, 2008, 58 minutes, English, United States

SYNOPSIS

One line description

Exposes the little known story of Sakia Gunn, a 15 year old high school student who was fatally stabbed in a gay hate crime in Newark, New Jersey in 2003.

Two line description

This documentary tells the little known story of Sakia Gunn, a 15 year old high school student who was fatally stabbed in a gay hate crime in Newark, New Jersey. This story depicts the homophobia behind this brutal murder, while examining Sakia's short but loving life and family and the world of Aggressives, homosexual women of color who dress in masculine attire but do not necessarily identify as either lesbians or female-to-male transgenders.

Long Description

This documentary tells the little known story of Sakia Gunn, a 15 year old high school student who was fatally stabbed in a gay hate crime in Newark, New Jersey. Sakia was an Aggressive, according to the GLAAD web-site, a homosexual woman of color who dresses in masculine attire but does not necessarily identify as either lesbian or female-to-male transgender. She held promise as a basketball player and was an "A" student, looking forward to becoming a senior at Newark's West Side High School. On the night Sakia was murdered, she and her friends were returning from socializing at New York City's Greenwich Village piers, at Christopher street, a popular spot for Lesbian, Gay and Transgendered youth. Two men targeted the group at a Newark bus stop station first flirting with and then propositioning them. The girls rebuffed the sexual advances of the much older assailants. Words were exchanged, a fight ensued, and Sakia was stabbed. "Sakia and her friends didn't mean anybody any harm that night. They were coming back from having fun at the Pier in New York, a place where they felt safe to be who they were." says Laquetta Nelson of the Newark Pride Alliance.

Dreams Deferred: The Sakia Gunn Film Project depicts the homophobia that caused this murder to occur and questions the lack of media coverage of the murder of a Black Gay teenager. "This 15 year old black lesbian was murdered, and I didn't know about it", says activist Swazzi Sowo of Black Rap in San Francisco. The documentary follows the reaction of the Newark community where several rallies and vigils were held, galvanizing the community and prompting several LGBT organizations to form, including the Newark Pride Alliance and Sakia Gunn Aggressives & Femmes, as well as a scholarship fund in her name. May 23, the day Sakia was murdered, was declared by the Mayor of Newark as "No Name Calling Day".

The story unfolds with the testimonies of Sakia's family and friends during the sentencing hearing of the murderer, interviews of LGBT community leaders, opinions of people in the community, interviews of Sakia's best friend, Valencia, and exclusive footage of Sakia's vigil. *Dreams Deferred* pays homage to this young Aggressive and exposes the sensitive issues not often addressed regarding gender-identity, homophobia and racism.



FILMMAKERS' BIO

Charles Brack studied documentary arts at Antioch College, matriculating with a degree in communications. Upon his arrival in New York City, Brack became involved in Men of All Colors Together, NY – an anti-racism organization as the co-chair, national representative and Political Action Committee co-chair.

Brack took a position at the New York City Commission on Human Rights in the Lesbian and Gay Discrimination Documentation Project/ AIDS Discrimination Unit as Associate Video Producer. During his tenure, Brack co-founded and performed with Lavender Light Gospel Choir for over 15 years. As a result of his work with Lavender Light and the Black LGBT sacred community, Brack became a charter member of, and ordained as, a deacon in Unity Fellowship Church, NY.



Brack's professional career continued at The Gay Men's Health Crisis as producer of their weekly AIDS information television magazine, *Living With AIDS*. Brack now works at Third World Newsreel as Fiscal Sponsorship Officer while producing *Dreams Deferred: The Sakia Gunn Film Project*.

SCREENINGS

World Premiere, NewFest Film Festival, New York, 2008

Oakland Int'l LGBT Film Festival, 2008

Newark-Essex Pride's Queer Black Cinema Film Series, 2008

St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Chicago, 2008

Reel Affirmations, Washington D.C., 2008

Syracuse University, 2008

ActNow Foundation Fundraiser, New York, 2008

Queer Black Cinema Int'l Film & Music Festival, New York, 2008

The LGBT Community Center, New York, 2008

Pace University LGBTQ Symposium, New York, 2008

Documentary Fortnight, MoMA, New York, 2009

London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, 2009

Harlem International Film Festival, New York, 2009

AWARDS

Best of NewFest at BAM, Brooklyn, 2008

Nomination for the Derek Oyston CHE Film Prize, London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, 2009

REVIEWS

"An emotional examination of the Gunn case."

- Sewell Chan, *New York Times*

"This compelling documentary raises tough questions about a biased media that ignores hate crimes against African Americans, while also examining the circumstances surrounding Gunn's tragic death, the lost promise of her young life (she was a straight-A student and a promising basketball player), and the difficulties facing inner city youth who choose to be openly and unapologetically homosexual... A fine asset for collections with an interest in LGBT issues, media studies and race relations, this is highly recommended."

- Phil Hall, *Video Librarian Magazine*

"Although the title leads us to believe that the documentary is solely about Sakia Gunn, it tells a much wider story about the lives of Sakia and others who live similar lifestyles as aggressives, and the bias and potential violence they face. The documentary reminds us that LGBT youth are often dismissed, ignored, or rejected and frequently subjected to violence. They need safe spaces where they know they are not alone."

- Janice Wilson, *Eastern Connecticut S.U., Educational Media Reviews Online (EMRO)*

"The fact that a young woman, was waiting for the bus and this happened to her is enough to outrage anyone."

- Clarence Patton, *NYC Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project*

"The way the film alternates among the courtroom scenes, the interviews with family and friends, the coverage of the public rallies, and the interviews with others creates a moving and rich account of Sakia's life and her community, as well as the tragedy of her murder. It is a loving tribute to Sakia in her fullness, and a call to action. We hope many others will have the opportunity to see this film."

- Andrew S. London & Margaret Himley, *Co-Directors of Syracuse University LGBT Studies Program*

"An inspirational and moving documentary that drew concerned community members from all over the San Francisco Bay Area. As a matter of fact, by the time the screening was over, there wasn't a dry eye in the house."

- Joe Hawkins, *Oakland Int'l Black LGBT Film Festival*

"Race, homophobia, and gender identity examined in powerful documentary... Sakia Gunn's story must be heard"

- *Cherry Grrl Magazine*



Telling Sakia Gunn's Story, *Gay City News*, 4/10/2008

By: Christopher Murray

Director and producer Charles Brack is in the final, frenzied stages of completing a feature-length documentary about the 2003 bias crime murder of 15-year-old Newark resident Sakia Gunn. Media coverage of Gunn's murder was paltry compared with that of Matthew Shepherd -- though *Gay City News* was a notable exception -- raising questions about the way race and gender play out in discussions about bias crimes against queer people.

Brack, 48, who is called Chas by his friends, grew up in Chicago and has youthful memories of the disorder during the 1968 Democratic National Convention there. The June day he left Ohio's Antioch College in 1983 with a degree in communications, he drove through the night to arrive in New York for the Gay Pride celebration.

Brack worked for the New York City Commission on Human Rights in its Lesbian and Gay Discrimination Unit and later the AIDS Discrimination Unit as a human rights investigator, eventually becoming an associate producer in the Education Department.

In 1992, he joined Gay Men's Health Crisis where he was the co-coordinator of the Media Unit and associate producer of the "Living with AIDS" cable news magazine program. In 1996, he returned to the Commission on Human Rights, in its Community Relations Bureau, where he worked closely with the police on bias cases.

CHRISTOPHER MURRAY: Who was Sakia Gunn?

CHARLES BRACK: Sakia was a 15-year-old so-called "aggressive" [defined on the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation's website as a homosexual woman of color who dresses in masculine attire], living in Newark, New Jersey, who was killed by a gay basher. Sakia and her friends were returning to their homes after hanging out in Greenwich Village when they were approached by men making sexual advances. Words were exchanged and a fight ensued. Sakia was stabbed and bled out on the streets of downtown Newark. The assailant turned himself in to authorities and is currently serving an approximately 20-year sentence.

CM: What was the impact on you when you first heard about the murder? **CB:** When I saw the report on television, the picture of Sakia said more to me than the newscaster. It was clear to me that there was a gender and/ or sexual orientation slant to the story that was not being reported. The person that the media described was a 15-year-old black girl, but I saw a 15-year-old black boy. I knew that there was more to be revealed.

CM: When did you decide to make the documentary? **CB:** I was approached by a colleague about doing the film, so I jumped at the chance to do what I do, which is to try to lift up black LGBT people. I was the co-founder of Lavender Light Gospel choir, a charter member and ordained clergy in Unity Fellowship Church --NYC, as well as involved in other community-based organizations in New York City. I don't know, I just love my people.

CM: How is a documentary going to impact the course of events? **CB:** I hope that LGBT youth will

know that my generation is watching. Although we've been through a different struggle, we care about them. I hope that the film will signal to the larger LGBT and black communities, respectively, that they are not disposable. I hope that Sakia's name will become widely recognizable and that her death was not in vain.

I believe even in this time of morally and ethically declining media coverage of important issues, that media is still a powerful tool for social change, if wielded well. I have learned a lot about the issues that LGBT youth face on a daily basis. I thought that we'd come farther. Sadly, obviously this is not the case.

CM: At what point in the process is the film? CB: We are in the post-production phase of the film, meaning that we have a rough cut. We hope to be finished in time for upcoming film festivals and New York City's Pride month. It's been a long road but well worth the travel.

CM: How can people support the film? CB: Donations always help! Just a few more dollars will allow us to actually pay the very generous editor, who has been working for pennies to take out any audio glitches, which can occur when filming off set. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of money out there for this kind of work, but we have managed to get this far. I want the film to serve Sakia's memory well. It needs to look good and sound good in order to get noticed in the vortex of pejorative drivel that is passed off as good representation of black LGBT people.

CM: How did your interest in human rights come about? CB: I have always been interested in diversity and social change from the time that my little Baptist church on the South Side of Chicago started visiting synagogues and nunneries. I can remember my first Seder at age 10. I guess that explains my past proclivity for Jewish men.

I knew that there was a world outside of the ghetto where I grew up. But I had no idea that that world would be so hostile to a little sissy boy with thick glasses who was accused of being uppity because I spoke proper English. So, all of my educational and employment choices have reflected that initial introduction to multiculturalism.

CM: What do you think LGBT people need to know about human rights and bias crime in our own community? CB: We need not believe the press on our community. The fight is far from over. Even if we win the fight for gay marriage, it will not be a social panacea to cure all the remaining social plagues inside as well as outside of the LGBT community, like homophobia, sexism, transphobia, and racism. We need to know that most incidents of bias go unreported. We need to know that simply being gay is not a point of departure for our quest for diversity, we still have to do the work to make our community unified.

CM: What else do you have going on? CB: I am currently working at Third World Newsreel as the operations director. Third World Newsreel is an alternative media arts organization that fosters the creation, appreciation, and dissemination of independent film and video by and about people-of-color and social justice issues.

CM: Do you think you could have been friends with Sakia Gunn? CB: For many years when I was a kid, I was mistaken for a girl. Let's just say that I was not the butchest boy on the block. So, yes, I think we would have been running in the same circles.

I too grew up in a big city that did not have a clearly established place for black LGBT youth. But like Sakia and many others, we created locations and activities where we could just be ourselves. Our rela-

tionships were valued and solid. We cleaved to each other. Although it was a very different time when I was 15, we still encountered the same prejudices that queer youth of color face today.

CM: Are there personal reasons why this murder moved you? CB: When I was young I even faced the disdain of my father, brother, and community because of my obvious feminine ways and appearance. It was a rough and simultaneously joyous time. Thank God for the Black Church! Despite their effort to cloak us, we are in force there.

But that little thing inside me, that I guess some would say was my spirit, would not be squelched. It's the same spirit that made Sakia and her friends strike back at their assailants.

CM: Can you explain the tangled interplay of homophobia, sexism, transphobia, and racism in Sakia's story? CB: It's as simple as the cards being stacked against you. For as with many minority groups, the struggle is more complicated. But, being a man of faith I now know that these so called burdens have only proven to make me stronger.

So, for instance, while the straight black community and the white gay community stand on the precipice of the ongoing discourse about who is the most tortured protected class, black LGBT folk exist in a crevasse where we know that none of us is free until all of us are free.

I fire of the question, "Which is worse: being called a nigger or a faggot?"

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2008

THE RECORD

YOUR VIEWS

Dreams deferred: Remembering Sakia Gunn and Matthew Shepard

By CHARLES B. BRACK

THIS WEEK Americans mark the 10-year observance of the brutal murder of openly gay college student Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyo. In 1998, the death of this promising 21-year-old college student, who was tied to a fence, savagely beaten, and left to die in the cold night simply because he was gay, gripped the nation and dominated the national news headlines.

Five years ago, Sakia Gunn, a 15-year-old black lesbian, was attacked while waiting for a Newark bus after a night out with friends. Sakia and her friends were approached by two much older men who made sexual advances. The girls rebuffed them and stated they were lesbians, whereupon 30-year-old Richard McCullough fatally stabbed Sakia while berating her with homophobic slurs.

She bled to death at the intersection of Broad and Market during the early morning hours, held in the arms of her best friend, Valencia Bailey.

Unlike Matthew, after Sakia's mur-

der there was no national outcry, no demands for justice and very little media attention. The heinous murder of Matthew deserved the national focus it received, but Sakia's murder deserved this attention as well.

When we lost her, it was heartbreaking to see that the media were hesitant to tell her story. The mainstream media had an obligation to tell it and to question where the evident hatred had come from. But the mainstream media failed to be objective and inclusive in their reporting.

When I first saw the report of Sakia's murder on television, the picture of her said more than the broadcaster. It was clear to me that there was a gender and/or sexual orientation element to the story that was not being reported.

The person that the media described was a 15-year-old black girl, but I saw a black boy. I knew that I was only being told a small part of the story, and I was disturbed.

The lack of visibility for Sakia is what prompted me to pursue a film telling her story. "Dreams Deferred: The Sakia Gunn Film Project" tells us

a story beyond the brutal murder, doing the job the mainstream media should have done.

The film reveals the homophobia behind this brutal murder, while examining Sakia's short life, her loving family and the world of "aggressives," women of color who defy gender categorization.

When I premiered my film in New York City, the theatre was sold out. People traveled across several states to see this piece of history. Audience members told me they were hungry to see a film that treated the story of a lesbian woman of color with honor and dignity, a film that told her whole story and illuminated the many lives she touched.

We are hungry for these stories because they are not being told. Our community must learn how to demand the same respectful and accurate coverage of our lives, as any other person would.

We must cry out when a murder like Sakia's goes unmentioned. We cannot wait for others to tell our stories; we must bring the margin to the center by participating in the telling process.

If we can learn a lesson from the

senseless deaths of Matthew and Sakia, it is that we must love our gay and transgender youth every day, amidst the homophobia and transphobia they face. Beyond that, though, we must advocate for them while they are still with us.

In New Jersey, we are fortunate to have both sexual orientation and gender identity covered in our hate crime laws. But that was clearly not enough to stop the hate that killed Sakia.

So we must turn our forces to the venues where people like Richard McCullough learn to hate. We must create a national outcry that shows the collected hurt of our community. When a lesbian youth of color is murdered, we must let it be known that her life was valued.

Media can and must play a vital role in encouraging law enforcement and community activism. By covering our community accurately and inclusively, our lives are put in context and can be understood as vital and important.

Charles B. Brack is the Brooklyn-based executive producer of the Sakia Gunn Film Project.

grandparents:
Does she consider him worthy?

William Dietz
Midland Park, N.C.

Regarding "A refreshing change" (Opinion, Page O-1, Oct. 5):

Well, doggone it, you betcha. I'm so not a Washington insider, I don't have clue.

Have we dumbed everything down such a level that:

■ This is what passes for vice presidential material?

■ The ability to use words of more than two syllables is deemed "elitist?"

■ Intelligence is perceived as a liability?

Folksy? The inability to pronounce the word *nuclear* is not folksy. Folksy has been used to describe Warren Buffet, too. Sarah Palin is no Warren Buffet, too.

The last eight years were indicative of what happens when we elect someone because "awww shucks, he's the kind person I'd like to have a beer with." The last thing we need is yet another "Joe Jane" Six-Pack" running the country.

How about we go for a little more substance this time and see what happens?

Rich Pelleg
Rochelle Park, N.J.

Remembering Sakia

Chances are you haven't heard much about Sakia Gunn, a 15-year-old lesbian stabbed to death in 2003 in Newark, N.J. -- and it's filmmaker Charles Bennett Brack's mission to change that.

By Louis Virtel

An Advocate.com exclusive posted September 30, 2008

Sakia Gunn lived in Newark, N.J., forging a defiant but ultimately innocuous teenage existence as an out lesbian. On the night of May 11, 2003, Gunn and her friends were waiting for a bus at a Newark street corner when two men approached and propositioned them from a car. The girls rebuffed their advances, claiming to be lesbians, but the two men emerged from the vehicle and initiated a scuffle. The confrontation evolved violently, and one of the men, Richard McCullough, pulled a knife on Gunn before stabbing her in the chest. Valencia Bailey, one of Gunn's friends at the scene, flagged down a motorist to take Gunn to the hospital, where she died that night.

The 15-year-old's slaying ignited outrage in Newark, as LGBT residents lobbied the mayor's office and proposed a number of initiatives, including an LGBT community center. The Advocate and The New York Times also ran stories on Gunn's death. However, reverberations from the crime proved finite, or at least obscure, as only 21 articles about the murder were published in newspapers nationwide. Comparatively, the murder of gay college student Matthew Shepard in 1998 yielded more than 650 national newspaper stories.

Brooklyn-based filmmaker Charles Bennett Brack, in his first independent documentary, *Dreams Deferred: The Sakia Gunn Film Project*, takes viewers inside the courtroom with Richard McCullough, who came forward and pleaded guilty to aggravated manslaughter. The film focuses on those close to Gunn, who give tearful, infuriated, and startlingly articulate insight into their loss. But another major collective voice of the film, which Brack takes to Syracuse, N.Y., and San Francisco next, stems from outside the courtroom -- the activists and everyday citizens who ponder racism, classicism, and homophobia within the media and American society.

Such a daunting list of topics requires filmmaking experience. After graduating from Antioch College in Ohio, Brack moved to New York and eventually worked on AIDS-related safety and prevention films sometimes played for patrons at gay bars. Working for both the Gay Men's Health Crisis and the Commission on Human Rights as well as cofounding the Lavender Light gospel choir helped Brack acquire an indispensable sense of both community and disjunct within the gay populace.

Brack showed his film in Oak Park, Ill.'s St. Martin's Episcopal Church, which devotes itself to progressive social activism, including issues regarding LGBT people of color. The Advocate caught up with Brack, a native of Chicago's south side, after the film screened and its several dozen viewers filtered out of St. Martin's. While Brack intends for the film to strike a chord with viewers, the documentary's subject has already provided him with buoyancy and hope in facing complications in his own varied, often difficult life.

You're from Chicago. Did you have expectations about how the film would play to LGBT people here?

You know, I don't know. I haven't been gay in the city for over 30 years. I left for New York when I was 18, and I came back a couple of times, but I have no idea what the gay culture is like here. I'm from the south side; I was a little butch queen running around the south side of Chicago being fabulous. So I really don't know anything about the culture here now.

Unfortunately, I remember when I was growing up here that the gay community was really segregated. I don't know if that's still the case. New York is not much better, but it's a little bit better. I just hope that the film brings to light the issues that LGBT people of color face, especially young people. The main thing is I hope the film will incite service. Because the thing I lacked growing up was good role models. It's so cliché, but it's so true. It wasn't until I was out of college at 23 and moved to New York that I actually found some mentors. I called them my moms and my dads -- they raised me. They taught me to be careful, to excel. I have to credit those people.

Some people reading this will still be hearing of Sakia Gunn for the first time. What do you want them to know about her?

She was a 15-year-old kid. The glory of what I was trying to do is black, white, gay, or straight, she was a 15-year-old kid.

This film really lends a voice to Sakia Gunn's loved ones. What does the voice of the film say?

[The point of the film is] really to see us. There's the black community and there's the gay community; they have this discourse, and like, LGBT people of color don't exist. We're like in this crevasse. Our communities are always bickering back and forth, and that's a dangerous and dysfunctional argument. So I want to bring us up out of that crevasse and be a part of that conversation. Because it doesn't help anybody if people are competing to be the most depressed. It just doesn't work. We should be coalition-building.

Can you describe what it was like filming inside the courtroom?

First of all, I had never been in a courtroom dealing with anything other than landlord and tenant rights or human rights or something like that, because I come from an activist background. So to be in a courtroom dealing with a murder -- the contempt, the confusion, the pain ... it was palpable. It was just thick with angst. It was unfortunate because [McCullough's] family sat on one side and Sakia's family sat on one side, and there were a fair amount of glares coming from one side. [Sakia's best friend] Valencia's family was actually very forgiving. The other side, I think they simply don't get it. I think they weren't remorseful; they were very recalcitrant, actually.

Was the Gunn family ever reluctant to have you film the hearing's proceedings? Did they require any convincing?

When I first talked to them, it was interesting. I just did it as a cold call. I just went to Newark and basically Googled "Gunn." Her family was very receptive. After all, I was that kid. I wanted to do a loving tribute as well as get that message out. Now they call me their brother, and they, you know, harass me on the phone. I'm a part of their family, and it's great.

This film touches on so many large-scale problems: problems within the gay community, problems outside the gay community, racism, classicism, and media matters. It seems like a lot to understand comprehensively. How do you gain this kind of knowledge?

I come from an activist background, so there's always those discussions about the "haves" and "have-nots." And also I'm ordained clergy. So in terms of the choices I made professionally and my political involvement, it always involves the disenfranchised. And that covers so many people, including LGBT women. It runs the gamut, so I'm not intimidated in talking about anything.

Is the media's coverage of LGBT people of color improving? Would you call it a crisis?

I wouldn't call it a crisis because it's been going on for so long. Someone once said to me that you can only maintain crisis mentality for like, eight weeks. This is something that's been going on for a long, long time.

But I mean, the media is about selling a product. Yes, the news is there, but it's molded. It's about, What's going to be hot and lusty for people to come after? That's electronic media. Our media literacy has created this animal where we want something that's always going to be new, hot, and lusty. You know, it's the MTV age.

While this is your first independent feature, you've worked with film before. How does this filmmaking experience compare to your earlier work?

It took me a long time to do it. I'm not a fund-raiser. At the Commission of Human Rights, we had a budget. And at GMHC, we had a budget. Then I had my own studio. After my predecessors left, it was just me, and I did the best I could. I had a budget, though it was dwindling, but I had a studio and my own equipment, editorial decks, and that kind of stuff. This project was like, "Make a little money, spend a little money. Make a little money, spend a little money, and it just went on and on." A lot of people donated. It was a collective effort of people being very generous, and I got a few grants, but I'm not a grant writer.

How did the film affect you personally?

Sakia was like my angel. I was newly in recovery from drugs and alcohol addiction, and this project gave me a sense of purpose. This kind of fueled my motivation to get back to doing what I love to do, which is storytelling. I always talk about being HIV-positive and being in recovery just because our communities, the black and gay communities, have such a high rate of substance abuse as well as HIV. It's like, we do have those things in common that we can use as a point of departure somewhat. The struggles are different, but there's something we can come together on. And that's that we're hated. That's the thing that upsets me about racism in the gay white community and homophobia in the straight black community. It's like, both groups should know better. It's that simple. They should know better. I don't want to be called a nigger or a faggot. They both hurt.



New York Times

February 18, 2009, 9:30 am

Film Examines a Newark Hate Crime

By Sewell Chan

In 2003, Sakia Gunn, a 15-year-old lesbian high school student, was fatally stabbed in downtown Newark by a man who had approached her in the street and made sexual advances to her and her friends, which they declined.

The case, which was prosecuted as a hate crime, drew widespread attention in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities, though considerably less news coverage than that of Matthew Shepard, the 21-year-old gay college student who was abducted, beaten, tied to a pole and left to freeze to death in Laramie, Wyo., in 1998.

A documentary released last year, "Dreams Deferred: The Sakia Gunn Film Project," offers an emotional examination of the Gunn case. The filmmaker, Charles B. Brack, obtained permission to record the trial of Richard McCullough, the girl's killer. His was the only camera in the courtroom — a fact that, at a screening of the film at the Museum of Modern Art on Saturday evening, Mr. Brack called "disgraceful."

(The Times covered the killing of Ms. Gunn, along with the arrest and indictment of Mr. McCullough. A follow-up article a year after the killing examined the growing awareness of the plight of gay minority teenagers in cities, and in 2007 The Times examined the relative isolation and invisibility of Newark's gays.)

The film weaves trial footage with interviews; one of the earliest scenes depicts Mr. McCullough's defense lawyer citing his relatively thin criminal history — a juvenile conviction for possession of marijuana — as a mitigating factor for the purposes of sentencing.

Some of the film's most wrenching scenes are of Valencia Bailey, Ms. Gunn's best friend, in whose car Ms. Gunn bled to death on their way to a hospital; of Anthony Hall, a cousin of the victim, who described her as an A student who enjoyed playing basketball and did not cause her family any trouble; and of Latona Gunn, Ms. Gunn's mother, who tells Mr. McCullough in the courtroom, "Your rage has caused me 23 months of sleepless nights."

Thelma Gunn, the victim's grandmother, says of Ms. Gunn and her friends: "All they wanted was to go home and get in their beds. Her bed turned out to be a coffin."

Ms. Gunn's death had a galvanizing effect on gay activists, and the film includes interviews with several: Laquetta Nelson, co-founder of the Newark Pride Alliance; Clarence Patton of the New York City Anti-Violence Project; and Bran Fenner of Fierce, a coalition of gay minority young people.

A candlelight vigil held in Newark a year after the killing, in which dozens of community members gathered at the corner of Broad and Market Streets, where the crime occurred, highlighted the extent to

which the gay population mobilized after the slaying — and sought the support of straight allies. At the vigil, Cory A. Booker, then a councilman and now the mayor of Newark, angrily asked why “there was not a national outcry” over the crime.

As part of a plea agreement, Judge Paul J. Vichness of Essex County Superior Court sentenced Mr. McCullough in 2005 to 20 years in prison for aggravated manslaughter, aggravated assault and bias intimidation — less than the maximum penalty of 25 years. The judge said he considered Mr. McCullough’s lack of a previous criminal record a mitigating factor, but rejected the defense’s arguments that the circumstances leading up to the crime were unlikely to recur and that Mr. McCullough was unlikely to commit a crime again.

The defense had initially argued that Ms. Gunn fell on Mr. McCullough’s knife during or after a scuffle, a version of events that prosecutors and Ms. Gunn’s friends disputed.

“I don’t know why you didn’t walk away from this,” the judge told Mr. McCullough.

Mr. Brack, who grew up in Chicago and manages operations at Third World Newsreel, an activist filmmaker collective founded in 1967, said he hoped the film would raise awareness about Ms. Gunn and her life and death.

“It’s about access,” he said when asked why the case had received less attention than that of Matthew Shepard. “Lack of access to the media.”

CREDITS

Dreams Deferred:
The Sakia Gunn Film Project

Third World Newsreel presents
an Eamonn Simone Film
by Charles Bennett Brack

Editor
Felix Rodriguez

Producer
Sam Castrillo

Trailer
Jack Dennelsbeck
Aljernon Tunsil

Camera
Dorothy Thigpen
Aljernon Tunsil

Post Production
Standby.org
Media Services for Artists and Organizations

Creative Bubble
Online Editor
Dan Stephens

Sound
Miriam Perez

Sound Mix
Alex Noyes

Production Assistant
Curt Ciesinski

Additional Footage
Dennis Brumm
Daniel Peddle

Stills
Al Cunningham
Latona Gunn

Music
"I've Been Bucked" (Traditional)
performed by
Lavender Light: The Black and Peoples
of Color Lesbian and Gay Gospel Choir

"Sakia Rising"
Original Score
by John "Kojak" Negrón

Website Design
Sam Castrillo
Rucyl Mills

Consultant
Christopher Murray, MSW

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