

14-YEAR-OLD CHARGED IN DEATH MARRED GRAFFITI COSTS TEEN'S LIFE - DETROIT COPS: GANGS KNEW GUNMAN AS LITTLE CAPONE

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The penalty for defacing the gang's graffiti is death.

Shortly after midnight Feb. 11, a masked teenager known as Little Capone set out to punish such blatant disrespect of his gang's name and symbols, Detroit police said Thursday.

Police said 14-year-old **Caleb Sosa**, accompanied by two or three other young gang members, was carrying a semiautomatic pistol when he chased down a 19-year-old man for painting over the gang's tagging on buildings in southwest Detroit.

As the 19-year-old ran to a friend's house in the 7000 block of St. John, **Sosa** opened fire, wounding his target, police say, but also wounding 13-year-old Christian Sanchez in the head as he opened the door. Christian died instantly.

On Thursday, **Sosa** was charged as an adult in Detroit's 36th District Court with first-degree murder, assault with intent to commit murder and possession of a firearm during a felony. He faces possible life in prison without parole.

Sosa is an eighth-grader at Earhart Middle School near Detroit's Clark Park and has no criminal record, police say. **Sosa** admitted to a lengthy history of being involved with a gang, said Detroit Police Homicide Investigator Dwight Pearson.

Sosa is being held in the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility without bond pending a March 22 preliminary examination in district court.

His attorney, Lillian Diallo, appeared at the teen's arraignment but wouldn't comment afterward, saying she had not yet gotten copies of police reports on the case. **Sosa**'s mother and sister also attended the hearing but declined to comment.

The 19-year-old victim, known by his graffiti as A.B., declined to be interviewed when contacted at his home by the Free Press on Wednesday. The Free Press is not naming the artist because he was a witness to a gang shooting.

Sanchez friendly, popular

Christian Jesus Sanchez, who was born in Ft. Worth, Texas, moved to Detroit with his family about 12 years ago and was an eighth-grader at Academy of the Americas school in Detroit.

Christian also was featured in video story posted Jan. 20 on the Free Press Web site about a program through Latino Family Services in Detroit. He also wrote a poem titled "Where I'm

From" last year while working on his writing skills in a program at the southwest Detroit agency.

"Where I'm from you're scared to go to the corner," Christian wrote in the poem. "Wearing the colors you're not supposed to because the folks might get you."

Naomi Khalil, assistant principal at Academy of the Americas, said Christian was "very friendly, a very popular kid."

"Christian was a very artistic student," she said Thursday. "He loved drawing. He was not the best academic student, but he had a good heart and tried to do his best in school."

The eighth-grade class has only 55 students, and Khalil said most of them, including Christian, had been together for years.

"It's a very close-knit group," Khalil said. Christian's death has "really affected the kids."

Christian's mother, Norma Sanchez, and father, Alejandro Sanchez, were present for Thursday's arraignment.

"He was an exemplary child. He never talked back. He was always successful," his mother said in Spanish through an interpreter. "He wanted to be a mechanic like his dad.

"He was afraid of everything going on in the street," Norma Sanchez said. "He didn't like to go out."

Christian was staying at the home of his father when he was shot.

Graffiti grows with gangs

Brenda Morales, who works with Latino Family Services in the Springwells area of Detroit, said gang-related graffiti seems to be popping up more frequently in the area.

"I'm seeing more and more kids aged 14 to 15 all the way up to around 19 years old hanging out in groups around the neighborhood," said Morales, who has three children, including a 13-year-old boy. "In my apartment building, for example, it was brand new, and within a couple of weekends the walls were filled with gang graffiti."

Morales and others say gangs exert a greater influence on the youth in the area, as economic conditions grow worse in Detroit.

In recent years, more than a dozen known gangs have increased their use of violence in neighborhoods in southwest Detroit, according to experts familiar with the growth of gangs in the area.

The violence has gotten the attention of Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick. On Tuesday, he announced his desire to have the city's gang squad patrol Detroit Public Schools.

Matt Allen, spokesman for Kilpatrick, said the mayor told him Thursday that Christian's death "illustrates the problem we're having in our community, and it demonstrates what I talked about in my speech.

"This is why we as adults need to reengage with our children," Allen quoted Kilpatrick as saying. "We need to engage in our schools; we need to engage in our households; we need to engage in our communities and neighborhoods."

James Tate, a spokesman for the Police Department, said it has several initiatives to address the gang problem, including gathering more intelligence on gang activities.

"We're going to the neighborhoods and talking to these young guys," Tate said. "When they do get arrested, we sit down and debrief them."

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(sidebar: CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN)

A rash of violence in Detroit has involved children. On Thursday, 14-year-old **Caleb Sosa** was charged as an adult with first-degree murder in the death of 13-year-old Christian Sanchez.

* Feb. 23, 11-year-old Darren Johnson and 13-year-old Orlando Herron were shot execution-style in a suspected drug house on Detroit's west side. Six suspects are charged with first-degree murder in connection with the slayings.

* Jan. 22, a 34-year-old woman allegedly strangled her 16-month-old son, Ulans Shepherd, in Detroit. She is charged with first-degree murder.

SOURCE: Free Press reports

(sidebar: VICTIM'S POEM)

Excerpt of a poem written about a year ago by Christian Sanchez, who was slain last month at age 13:.

WHERE I'M FROM

Where I'm from you don't mess around.

Because if you mess around,

You might get killed ...

F* FULL POEM PLUS A VIDEO AT FREEP.COM

ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION: IN COURT: Eighth-grader **Caleb Sosa** , 14, with his attorney, Lillian Diallo, during his arraignment on a charge of first-degree murder.

Killed: Christian Sanchez, 13, feared the streets.

WILLIAM ARCHIE / Detroit Free Press

Caleb Sosa , 14, has no criminal record, police say. He admits to a lengthy history of being involved with a gang, said Detroit Police Homicide Investigator Dwight Pearson. **Sosa** could face life in prison.

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MEMO: SIDEBAR ATTACHED

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