

Youth Justice Coalition - LOBOS

Emilio Lacques: School → Jail Track Story

I grew up poor and with a single mother. When I got to Kindergarten, I was considered a "genius" to the teachers and staff. I grew up in the Mid-city area after moving from Echo Park to avoid gang violence and theft at our apartment. The public schools were crappy. It was mostly black and brown kids in my original elementary school and my mom told me a lot of the parents did crack.

As a student, I was considered "smart" and got placed and tracked immediately. My Mom worked her butt off to get me and my sister the best education possible, given our economic status. My sister's Pre-school was poisoned by an old gas toxic waste storage by the oil company Chevron. That set our family back and the dozens of black and brown families and staff at the school we were all sick and suffered terrible illnesses for years. My sister and I health still suffers to this day. Our first experiences with school were not great, and if my mother hadn't fought within the corrupt LAUSD system to get us a better education, things would be turned out much differently.

Luckily, I got entered into a lottery and was one of a few kids who got selected on scholarship to attend a good elementary school in a majority Korean neighborhood near Hancock Park. Later on, I realized that the Asian and white students were treated differently, and the black and brown students that excelled were usually middle class.

Middle School was where stuff got very real for me. My middle school was on the border of Koreatown, and very diverse. There was a Magnet Program for the "smart" kids and the regular school which was evenly split between Black, Latino, and Korean.

When I first got there in 1999, the school was much more hood and less gentrified. The gang tension, violence, and racial segregation and rivalry between Black, Latino, and Korean youth was very real and intense. At times I would get caught in the middle of "race fights" which broke out a lot between the Korean bangers and the Latino or Black ones. A Latino crew tried to recruit me a few times, but I knew the repercussions of violence from a young age. The chain fences, increased security, and ~~the~~ ~~ex~~ military teachers who patrolled the campus made it feel like a prison. The Boys' Lockerroom was crazy sometimes, with fights breaking out all the time and I was always paranoid of getting jumped. One time a security guard was chasing some kids and grabbed me because he thought I was with them. He pushed me to a wall and patted my backpack out. All my books and papers fell everywhere. I didn't even know the kids. I got a fresh taste of Dog-eat-dog, protect yourself from everyone experience, in middle school. If you weren't a magnet or Honors student, the teachers and staff treated you differently and was much more harsh and intimidating. I got jumped two or three times in middle school and had my stuff jacked. ~~The~~ When I went to the security and they seemed to blame me and treat me like a criminal, I quickly learned that the police were not here to help. I had suffered physical abuse in my family at a young age, so I was a very sensitive and emotional kid. One time a Korean friend was saying racist things to an Ethiopian classmate about his "dark, ugly skin." I started getting upset and crying. I seemed to have a high level of empathy and I hated the race fights. The ugly hell sounds, asshole police, uniforms we wore, race fights, and violence and theft did make me feel like it was a jail at times, and all I wanted was to survive without

getting punked or jacked, or harassed by the cops. By 8th or 9th grade going into high school, I had a growth spurt and learned how to protect myself better. I was lucky to have been accepted into the magnet program, which put me on a track to higher education. This was critical to my future and all because my mom fought to make sure my sister and I had better opportunities than her.

But on the playground, locker room and off-campus I was just another brown kid. On my baseball team, tension arose between myself and some of the black and white guys on the team. I ended up fighting two of them, and after that I became fearful of my own anger and rage and strength. It helped me want to become an activist and not a fighter.

High school felt like a jail when two black dudes or girls would get down on the yard and the cops would come in and cuff them and beat them down. One time a girl fought back and beat up a white lady cop. Another time a cop was hurting my homie's wrists taking him away after a fight and me, and some homies yelled at the cop and approached him. The cop pulled out his baton and threatened us.

The schoolyard was completely segregated between Black, white, Latino and Asian and Southeast Asian. The Black students part of the yard was called "Compton," the Latino "The Bell," the white "Disceplad" and the Asians got no love but the Pakistani's were called "Terrorists" sometimes. Racial segregation, just like in a prison yard.

CARTOON:

- 1) Chevron - Kindergarten
- 2) Elementary - Kureans
- 3) Middle school - race fights
- 4) Cop stop and frisk
- 5) Protect myself
- 6) High school fights + segregated playground
- 7) Activist Cinema