

DAMIEN VALENTINE'S POV OF SOUTH CENTRAL

Damien Valentine profiled by **Darrion Clark, Ray'Ven Kelly, & Daniel Trujillo**

Damien Valentine is a Black man and the Administration and Facilities Associate at Community Coalition (CoCo) South LA. He was born and raised in South Central L.A. in the Vermont Knolls area. You'll know him because of his long locs and his chill vibes. He really cares for his community and culture in South Central. He loves volunteering to help his community through food and clothes giveaways to support the needy and his community.

In 1997, Damien Valentine was born. He grew up watching South Central develop into the community it is today. He believes that the neighborhood has improved a lot. He observes that more people are beginning to care about their communities and environment, become more involved in protests, and lend a hand to those in need.

He champions South Central's prosperity, highlighting its vibrant underground economy where Black people and people of color unite in support. In LA, he emphasizes the abundance of opportunities to make money through various side hustles like selling clothes or food. He celebrates the resourcefulness and resilience ingrained within the community, fostering a thriving environment where one can always find a way to earn a living. The website "South Central United" is one of many websites about being involved with the community which is more than ever. Like Damien said, he sees a lot more people being involved with the community than he did when he was younger and this proves his point.

He likes to support the Black community and people of color the best he can by going to peaceful protests to support but unfortunately by doing so he was shot in the head with a rubber bullet. He participated in the George Floyd riots in 2020. In the article "Beverly Hills Police Deployed Tear Gas as Protesters Gathered Friday Night" written by Samuel Braslow, Braslow explains what Damien went through that night as a protester as well as how other peaceful protesters felt about the situation: "Black Lives Matter L.A. filed a class action lawsuit against the LAPD on June 5 for its "excessive force with batons and rubber bullets, and prolonged handcuffing and improper conditions of confinement."" Damien feels like the police are the main cause of problems in LA. He initiated a peaceful protest to encounter "police brutality" for the first time and feared for his life. He stated that "When I was out there protesting I got hit with batons" just to protect what was right. He also explains the difference in how the police respond in different areas saying "...it's gonna take the police at least 30-45 minutes to come out and look at it. When we started all we did was step foot out there and they were surrounding us." Damien Valentine feels like there can be positive protests; it just depends on the intention of the other people that's protesting. For example, some people go to protest to fight for justice and some people go out to the protest areas with the wrong intentions that can make the protest negative. Damien hopes in the future that people can come together to help make South Central—his home—a better place.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Darrion Clark

My name is Darrion Clark. My family has always lived in South Central. I've lived in South Central my whole life since I was born. I relate to Damien because he's younger so he is closer to our age, so I feel like we can probably run into similar situations as him. He shows that he's all for the Black community and so am I. He talked about how the police were the problem and I agree with him. I do feel like the police is the problem. There are good police, but there are a lot of bad ones. Sometimes police escalate the situation and blow it out of proportion. South Central's greatest strength is the graffiti. Every street you turn down there's a different story and different art. My plan after high school is to go to college and start a career.

Ray'Ven Kelly



My name is Ray'Ven Kelly. I'm 18 years old, and I was born and raised in South Central. My grandmother came to LA in the late 60's as soon as she turned 18 from Louisiana and she's been here ever since. Damien was a very cool person to interview. It was his first time being interviewed but he did it like a pro. He didn't have a problem talking about his experience with police brutality or any questions that we asked him. I do feel like one of South Central's greatest strengths is the community and how everyone is willing to come together to make their home a better place.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Daniel Trujillo



I am currently a senior at Mann UCLA Community School, and my journey has led me from being born in Nevada to moving to Los Angeles at the age of two. South Central has been my home for the majority of my life, and it's where I was raised. Similarly, my mom was also born in Nevada and spent her childhood there, while my dad was born in Los Angeles and has lived here for most of his life. While reading the interview, one aspect that really resonated with me was Damien's vision for the future, where people unite to create a better South Central. This deeply connects with me as I have witnessed the challenges and issues he addressed within our community. In my opinion, South Central's greatest strength lies in its people, who are driven to bring about positive change and actively work towards improving our neighborhoods. I hope to see more people actively engaging in helping communities and working towards creating a safer environment for the future generations. My plan after high school is to be more positive towards my community and help out more in my community.

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