



What It's Like Being A Black Girl In A South African Private School

Description

In the year 2018, the idea of a black girl is deeply rooted in the concept of #BlackGirlMagic and doing all things possible to beat The System and come out shining. An era many and myself had been yearning for. By now you should know any school with the prefix *St* is problematic AF. It is engraved in systematic oppression; racism and sexism, covered in the idea of a having a better future or as they say, "Becoming a better lack" Ever heard the term similar to "You're not like the other black people?"

Being a black girl at a Private/Model C high school in South Africa is one of the most traumatic experiences ever. It's crazy because we never really understood what was happening until we got out and were able to call a spade a spade. I am still good friends with some of the black girls I went to high school with and as we achieve various things in our lives, we often sit back and laugh at some of the atrocities we allowed or were put through in those 5 years. SHOCKING!



The national uproar for black girls to be allowed to wear their natural hair last year reminded us of our own struggles. My school also had a policy of no afros, dreadlocks and certain braids for black girls as they deemed them untidy and distracting. Imagine?! MY HAIR! The hair that naturally grows on my head, the hair I was born with, is “distracting”. The saddest part is, back then we accepted defeat and conformed to whatever hairstyle the school found appropriate, while our fellow white female students were free to dye and experiment with theirs. I’m sure many of you are thinking, “it’s just hair” – yes, but it is MY hair!

Although hair was just one of the symptom, the policing of black girls and their existence went beyond it. I remember how we were so often told that we were too loud or that we should control our laughs and the way we acted. As if happiness on a black girl is forbidden. Luckily, none of us had ever had the “K” word thrown at us but words like Zot, Coon, Ratchet and Ghetto were often used to refer to us. We were told how black girls were not the preferred type, but that it had nothing to do with racism. We learned the hard way, that racism does not necessarily have to be loud for it to be violent or felt. Existing in a white space and feeling like your skin is not the right shade is enough.



The craziest thing about being a black girl in a private school is that we were shamed for being ourselves, however, were used for these talents when creating war cries, singing, acting, sports or anything that required some form of talent or culture in the school. The saddest thing is just like cultural appropriation in current times – we would never be credited for it, The thing about being black in a private school is that the system is often designed to allow only a set number of black people to thrive. It romanticizes the idea of there only being one black succeeding “out of the odds” or the idea of the first black person to achieve, thus also creating a sense of divide within.

The black leaders that were meant to stand up for us often fell into the trap of privilege and we all know, in order to conquer you must divide. Black girls being at the bottom of the food chain systematically gave everyone else freedom to disrespect us, including the ones that were

meant to protect or be there for us. I came across a tweet recently it read, “There is no human that disrespected black girls in high school more than black boys”, no words resonated with me more than ever. It is as if their laughs, remarks, and disrespect towards us naturally gave the white boys and girls the same right.



Sometimes we look back and wonder why we let so many things slide, but then we remembered how standing up for yourself as a black girl would get you labeled as aggressive or bitter. The funniest part about that was if our white counterparts did the same, they were praised for their assertiveness and courage. Luckily, there is a sliver lining. As we grow older we realize how much stronger those experiences made us. Being told we weren't good enough, being victimized and told how we should change. **It is as if the universe had a plan for us and knew that we would do nothing but slay after the oppression of those years and we will continue to slay.** Seeing my fellow black girls graduating, starting companies, falling in love, making waves and just succeeding in all they do makes me so happy.

My heart also warms to see that black girls who currently face that oppression in these schools are standing up for what they believe and getting justice with the support of the nation, as years like these,

could break some. As Oprah told us, a new day truly is on the horizon and I can contest there is nothing more magical than being a black girl.

“They tried to bury us. They didn't know we were seeds”
– A Mexican Proverb

(Submitted By Palesa Buyeye)

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