

Julia Hayden Fung

politics & poetry  
all in



translation

by Julia Fung

An immigrants son,  
his goal was to learn as  
much as possible. And  
so he kept attending  
school and fostering  
new passions.

## Early Life

As clouds settle over the historic Fox Theater of Redwood city, history in a slick blue suit sits fiddling with a microphone and fluffing the collar of his shirt. His name is Antonio Lopez Jr, and he is the youngest to ever be elected as East Palo Alto's mayor. He is the poet, politician, and son of Mexican immigrants who led the formerly known Murder Capital to a homicide-free city. And all in a year's time. His character shines, and the animation in his face presents a palpable passion in politics, poetry, and art.

Lopez grew up with a big family, its own community big enough to present his young self with awareness to issues that not everyone thinks about. A perfect match in the ever-changing politics of today. "I had a family that was always around. It was always music and food and culture being, you know, being a son of Mexican immigrants. It was a bi cultural house. ...We were just as Mexican as we were Americans. So it was a beautiful time" Because young people take up such a large part into today's political climate, much of his experience and drive for change came from living in the area. East Palo Alto in the 90s was drastically different from its neighbouring cities, and Lopez always felt like kids from his neighbourhood had to work harder than those who were privileged. He always loved school, and for high school he was awarded a full scholarship to Menlo School, which set him on a drastically different path than those he lived around.

## His Immigrant Story

Similarly to many immigrants, Lopez was brought up hearing the same thing leaving home for the day: work hard in school, mind your manners, and always remember where you came from. His large household brought a strong sense of community. Everyone came together in times of need and everyone was affected. Lopez recalls, "It was hard working. It was intimate. But there were struggles." Because he spoke Spanish at home with his family, but spoke English at school, he became a translator at times they needed to communicate beyond their language skills, therefore spending a lot of time going between worlds of home life and private school as the translator of marginalised communities through politics. He was one of six Hispanic students at the time he attended Menlo High School. He experienced living "a stone's throw away" from Palo Alto, where Stanford University stands proudly and houses grow in size by each street. It drove him to be a strong student and to make a difference in his community.



He moved on to attend Oxford University. His father Antonio Lopez Senior recalls coming here in the 80s and working two jobs to support his family. He also remembers many simple joys of Lopez Jr as a kid. “My son, he liked to play video games. And go to the park, and he loved his school.. He used to go to bed before he was made to study, and the second day it started. He loves the school.”

## The Statistics

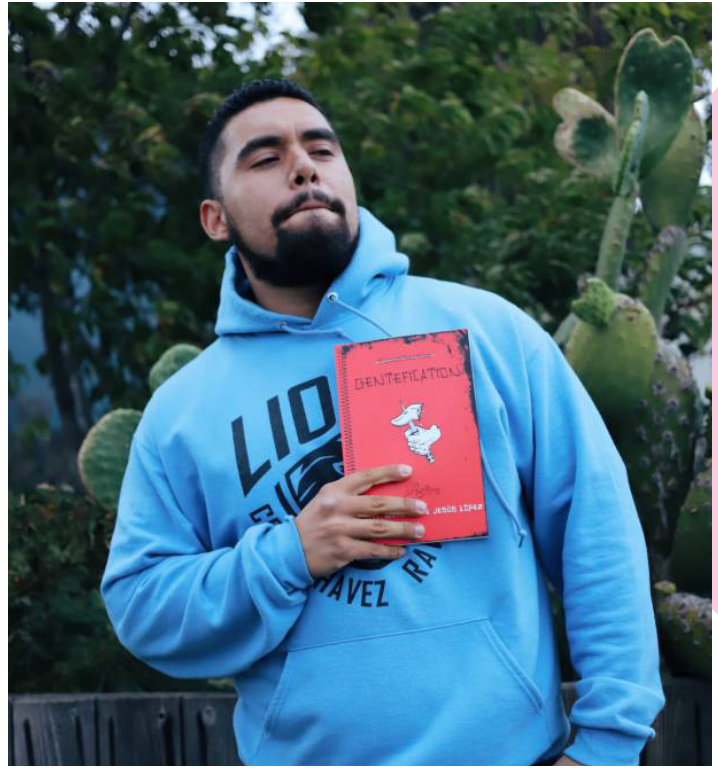
According to a source by the Federal Bureau of Investigations, even hatred-based crimes increased in 2022 in predominantly black and hispanic neighbourhoods. Among this community were tragedies that happened too often and disproportionately affected. [Jr] goes on to say that without art he might be in jail. Another statistic of lower income immigrant families in one of the largest tech industries in the world. East Palo Alto before the World Wars was a significantly sized area for agriculture that drew in Japanese, Italian, and Spanish immigrants that made up this country. (County of San Mateo). Though he is now a strong power in local politics, those aspirations didn't begin as early as high school. Around the time he was 15 and 16 he found an early love for the arts, His first love was writing. He longed to be creative and use writing and performance poetry as a way to express himself and stretch his mind to new ways of understanding his world. “...you can imagine the culture shock, the academic shock coming from East Palo Alto. But writing saved my life because it gave me the ability to tell my story, to be able to express who I am, like all the different parts of what makes me, me.”

Something that always stuck with Lopez was Show kids his age or younger had to watch their friends die and suffer in circumstances they were born into. He explains, “...for me it's super emotional having lost quite a few friends growing up and it's what gets me out of bed every day knowing that if we can accomplish that be murder capita 92 and 30 years later be homicide free” (Lopez). He spent the duration of this past year ensuring that law enforcement and trust was built within the community. He knew first hand how mistrust can hinder a communities ability to connect and feel safe with one another and this drove him to fight for a deeper connection among law and society.



courtesy of KQED

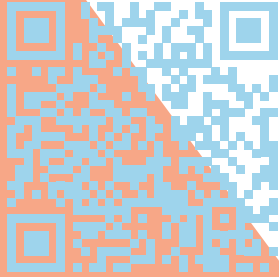
So often, people of colour, specifically black and hispanic youth are a target of violence that costs teenage lives. Additionally, people have a lot of bias surrounding marginalised communities because of historic records of white people and social/economic issues. According to the New York Times, force is met with force, so in acting in self defence, many Latino, or African American males are met with undue physical control by cops or other authority figures.



curtesy of KQED

## Translating

His spoken language to spoken word, his job in a world of hurt. He translates everyday experiences from the polar opposite sides of his life, he credits his education and background to where he is today. "... I wouldn't be here. I probably would have been in the gang..... Because the thing is, poetry helps me to slow down. It helps me to process a lot of the trauma that I experienced when I was a kid growing up in these parts, having lost quite a few of my friends." From Spanish to English, politics to poetry all propel him into the role he has so comfortably stepped into.



Hey! I'm Jules, I'm a film student, and my life has basically revolved around the arts since I was born. I love all things theatre, music, film, and photography so I definitely intend on keeping it a prominent part of my life. I hope to go to school for film and eventually become a cinematographer. For those keeping score there aren't a whole lot of 'em that come from a background like mine! I've been in dance, and theatre since I was around 4 and performed in too many shows to count. Recently I've started more individual projects that have helped me figure out who I am as an artist and as a person. I LOVE songwriting and organising crazy cabarets to give back to the arts since I don't think I'd know what to do with myself without it.

