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Graffiti expert: Gang tags were an invitation for gang activity in Newark schoolyard



(<http://connect.nj.com/user/juliaterruso/index.html>) By **Julia Terruso/The Star-Ledger**
(<http://connect.nj.com/user/juliaterruso/posts.html>)
on January 16, 2013 at 4:46 PM
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NEWARK



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John O'Boyle / The Star-Ledger
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Michael Marone, an attorney for the victim's families, during opening statements in the schoolyard murders civil trial. The families of the victims are suing the Newark School District and the State of New Jersey. 1/14/13 (John O'Boyle/The Star-Ledger)

Newark schoolyard civil trial
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(<http://www.nj.com/newark>) — Multiple gang sets had previously tagged the Newark schoolyard where four friends were shot — three of them fatally — in August 2007, establishing the area as a harbor for gang activity, an expert in gang culture said today in court.

The names of the Piru and Brim sets of the Bloods gang were sprayed all over the schoolyard and on jungle gym equipment, Lisa Taylor-Austin, the plaintiff's expert in gang signage said.

"(The graffiti) says gangs are welcome here and gang activity is welcome," Taylor-Austin said.

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Taylor-Austin's testimony served to paint the schoolyard as in "dangerous condition" prior to the crime. Jurors in the civil trial alleging the state-run Newark school district failed to properly secure the yard, must determine whether the area was dangerous and whether it caused the Aug. 4, 2007, triple murder to occur.

Austin said the fact gang graffiti existed posed a threat. "Gangs in the street and in the community can see it, administrators can see it, staff members can see it and most importantly the children of the school can see it," Taylor-Austin said.

The school's policy, Taylor-Austin said, was to photograph any graffiti, report it to the Essex County Prosecutor's Office and remove it. "They didn't do that." she said. "Newark Public Schools were on notice there was a gang problem. They were on notice that Pirus and Brims existed so when graffiti was seen outside that said Piru and Brims, it should have been removed immediately."

Gang graffiti can invite violence, Taylor-Austin said, because rival groups will paint over or re-tag graffiti called "wall banging." "Sometimes just the wall banging, just the disrespect escalates into assaults and murders," she said.

The four college-aged victims, three of whom were fatally shot in the schoolyard and one of whom survived, had no gang affiliations but were attacked by members of the violent MS-13 street gang, according to testimony.

The six murderers are behind bars, but the victims' family members are suing the Newark school district, alleging conditions in the schoolyard that night, namely an open gate, allowed the slayings to occur. The six killers are also named in the lawsuit but are not the focus of the civil trial since they have conceded fault and likely cannot pay damages.

Taylor-Austin identified the devil horn hand sign two of the killers were making in a photo taken in the schoolyard months before the killing as the sign for the MS-13 gang.

On cross-examination, Taylor-Austin said none of the graffiti identified at the yard belonged to the MS-13 gang.

The trial continues tomorrow when Newark Councilman Ronald Rice Jr. is expected to take the stand to testify about a memo he sent to the district warning that the open gate to the schoolyard was a "crime waiting to occur."

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tgbatg51 (<http://connect.nj.com/user/tgbatg51/index.html>)

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Please don't misinterpret my question. I wonder what credentials a graffiti expert has. I am just curious.

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