In 1995, John Dilulio published an article in the Weekly Standard entitled “The Coming of the Super-Predators”. This paranoid, racist, and fear mongering rant disguised as a scholarly article has had direct consequences on laws that have led to the mass incarceration of African American and Latino boys and men and to the direct loss of life suffered by males of color from, mostly white, police officers across our country.

Mr. Dilulio was the Director of the Brookings Institution’s Center for Public Management and was also an Adjunct Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. Mr. Dilulio said, then that too many, (inner city,) children were growing up in “moral” poverty surrounded by deviant, delinquent, and criminal adults in abusive, violence-ridden, fatherless, Godless, and jobless settings”. He went on to say that “moral poverty will create super-predators, as young as 7 years old”. He continued this disturbing article by concluding that on the horizon are tens of thousands of severely impoverished juvenile super-predators. They are capable of committing the most heinous acts of physical violence...they live by a code that reinforces rather than restrains their violent, hair-trigger mentality...

So, “for as long as their youthful energies hold out, they will do what comes “naturally”: murder, rape, rob, assault, burglarize, deal deadly drugs, and get high”. Dilulio predicted that by 2010 there would be an estimated 270,000 more young predators on the streets then in 1990.

Other criminologists joined in the rhetoric saying that “unless we act, we will have a bloodbath when these kids grow up”. Unfortunately, a bloodbath has ensued although not the one predicted, two people of color have been killed by the police per week, on average, during the past 20 years.

Go back and look at the testimony of Officer Wilson or even George Zimmerman during his trial for killing Treyvon Martin.

Although Mike Brown and Treyvon Martin were unarmed and their killers were, each shooter said, “I feared for my life”, i.e., from the aggressive and demonic teenagers before shooting and killing them. These descriptions come right out of the Dilulio article. Coincidence? I think not.

The first week of April, 2014 The New York Times ran a report on the “super predator” 20 years later. This theory had led nearly every state in the country to pass legislation that dramatically increased the treatment of juveniles as adults for purposes of sentencing and punishment. Many school districts followed suit by enacting zero tolerance policies that, as we know, has led to boys of color being suspended or expelled at an exponentially higher rate than other students.

Interestingly, the ‘super-predator’ prediction proved to be completely false, violent juvenile crime rates had started to decrease about the same time the article appeared in the Weekly Standard. By the turn of this century the crime rates for juveniles had fallen to pre-1985 levels.

Mr. Dilulio finally admitted his prediction was wrong and in fact testified that forcing juveniles into adult courts and jails “had no material effect on the subsequent decrease in crime rates”. Although the ‘super-predator’ prediction proved to be a myth almost all of these laws remain on the books and thousands of children remain in prison and many children of color are being funneled into the school to prison pipeline because of misguided policies.

I believe it is imperative for this nation’s public schools to reach out to all children and reaffirm that everyone’s life has value and matters to each and every one of us. We must eliminate zero tolerance policies from our books and ensure a positive school climate for all children.

This issue does not just concern people of color or citizens who reside in urban areas, it is a moral imperative for all Americans to address and the best place to begin the conversation, and continue it, is in our public schools.