

FROM “SUPERPREDATORS” TO “MIGRANT GANG BANGERS”

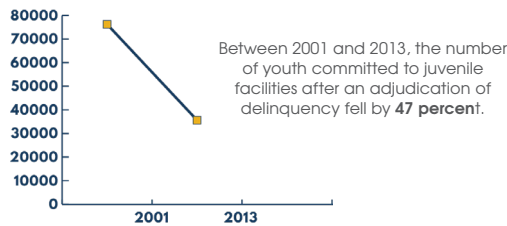
The Criminalization of Young People of Color

1990s The 1990s saw widespread panic over the notion that there would be a proliferation of youth “superpredators” in the coming years. While the superpredators never arrived,¹ the myth of the superpredators was powerful enough to spawn significant policy changes, including increased policing and detention of young people, particularly young people of color. Even though youth crime is at a 30-year low,² youth and communities of color are still paying the price for these damaging and ineffective policies.

MYTH



REALITY



EFFECT

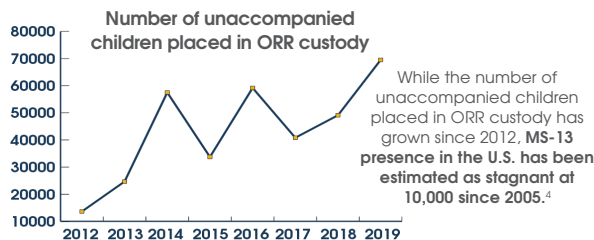


NOW We are now in the midst of a similar panic moment, spawned by a federal administration dead set on depicting all young immigrants of color as violent gang members. The Trump Administration has targeted young immigrants by publicly linking gang violence to the “surge” of unaccompanied minors who have entered the United States. Rather than being supported to develop into successful adults, immigrant youth are more often being targeted for arrest, detention, and deportation.³

MYTH



REALITY



EFFECT



We must see this myth for what it is – a fear-based narrative meant to criminalize rather than support young people – and learn from the history of reform in the youth justice system to see that **increased policing and detention are NOT the answer** when young people in our communities need support.

1 Between 2003 and 2013, the rate of youth committed to juvenile facilities after an adjudication of delinquency fell by 47 percent. Joshua Rovner, Youth Commitments and Arrests, THE SENTENCING PROJECT (Apr. 1, 2016), <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/racial-disparities-in-youth-commitments-and-arrests/>.

2 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Juvenile Arrest Rate Trends, OJJDP STATISTICAL BRIEFING BOOK (Oct. 31, 2019), https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/JAR_Display.asp?ID=qa05201.

3 See e.g., U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement, Joint Operation nets 24 transnational gang members, 475 total arrests under Operation Matador (Mar. 29, 2018), <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/joint-operation-nets-24-transnational-gang-members-475-total-arrests-under-operation> (“Ninety-nine individuals arrested during this operation crossed the border as unaccompanied minors, all of which were confirmed as MS-13 gang members.”).

4 Hannah Dreier, I’ve been Reporting on MS-13 for a Year. Here Are the 5 Things Trump Gets Most Wrong (June 25, 2018), ProPublica, <https://www.propublica.org/article/ms-13-immigration-facts-what-trump-administration-gets-wrong> (stating: “Trump’s Justice Department says there are about 10,000 MS-13 members in the U.S., the same number as 10 years ago.”).