

# THE Skanner®

Challenging People to Shape  
a Better Future Now

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# Opinion

## New Discipline Policies Put Children at Risk

I'm sure President Obama's heart was in the right place. A few years ago, his Department of Education, in conjunction with the Department of Justice, studied school discipline data and came to a troubling conclusion: African American students in the 2011-12 school year had been suspended or expelled at a rate three times higher than White students.

This news sent shock waves throughout the community and government. Here were already concerns of a "school-to-prison pipeline" that funneled disadvantaged children to jail. Now, there was renewed agreement that things had to change.

And so, in 2014, the Departments of Education and Justice put public schools on notice. If they suspended or expelled students of any racial group more than any other, they could face a federal investigation. In place of discipline to punish bad behavior, they were urged to use positive reinforcement instead.

As the grandmother of five school-age kids, I watched this closely. And as one of the Black students who integrated an all-White Richmond, Va., school in 1961, I was hopeful.

I hoped this policy would lead to safer schools. I prayed it would help students get a



Kay Coles James  
Pres., The Heritage Foundation

better education. And I felt confident it would open the door to a brighter future for our kids.

But like so many other parents and grandparents, I was wrong.

The federal government's warning had an immediate impact. Schools across America quickly changed their dis-

**“They know teachers have lost control**

cipline policies and reduced their suspension and expulsion rates. In doing so, they avoided the investigation threatened by the President. But at the same time, they put our children at risk.

Today, kids who bully and assault their classmates too often do so without fear of punishment. They know teachers have lost control. And they realize they can get away with behavior that never used to be tolerated.

As a result, when this summer is over, many students

will once again face the fear of going back to school. That's a tragedy! Schools should be joyous places where learning takes place. That's what my classmates and I fought for in 1961. And it's what should be the reality today.

Instead, danger lurks behind schoolhouse doors.

Joevon Smith is a heart-breaking example. A 17-year-old student with special needs who attended Ballou High School in Washington, D.C., Joevon was beaten up in his classroom and sprayed with a chemical. He was rushed to a nearby hospital, but never recovered. A few weeks after his brutal assault, Joevon died.

According to media reports, Joevon's assailants wanted to steal his cell phone. That may be so. But because they were repeat offenders, loosened school discipline policies are also at fault.

That's the case up the road in Baltimore, too. There, Jared Haga (age 10) and his 12-year-old sister Tamar have been bullied and threatened with violence. Tamar has even been sexually harassed and assaulted. In school!

As chronicled by "The Daily Signal," Jared and Tamar's mother tried to get this to stop. But when she complained to the principal, she was told nothing would – or

could – be done.

Joevon, Jared, and Tamar aren't alone. According to numerous reports, public schools are now less orderly and more dangerous. As Walter E. Williams has observed, the policy President Obama put into place has allowed "miscreants and thugs to sabotage the education process."

Teachers apparently agree. In anonymous surveys, they describe how badly school safety has deteriorated. As one stated, "We have fights here almost every day. The kids walk around and say 'We can't get suspended – we don't care what you say.'"

That sentiment was echoed by another teacher: "Students are yelling, cursing, hitting and screaming at teachers and nothing is being done but teachers are being told to teach and ignore the behaviors. These students know there is nothing a teacher can do."

This is crazy.

Every child deserves to get the tools they need to make their dreams come true. But if they are too scared to focus, they won't get them. Many will drop out, limiting their chance to get a job, raise a family, and pursue their life goals.

Read the rest of this commentary at [TheSkanner.com](http://TheSkanner.com)

## Black Clergy Shackled and Jailed for Praying

Faith and prayer have been the backbone of the African American community since we came upon these shores. We have counted on our faith leaders (the roll call would include Revs. Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, James Walker Hood, Martin Luther King, Jr., Wyatt Tee Walker, Jesse L. Jackson, William Barber, Vashti McKenzie, Barbara Williams Skinner and many others) to articulate the justness of our cause and to mobilize us to work for the justice that is called for in the New Testament, especially in Matthew 25: 35-45. Our ministers are revered leaders who often stand in the face of injustice. We are not surprised, and indeed, encouraged, when their firm stands in the face of oppression lead to collisions with the law. Still, when faith leaders are treated harshly, it forces us to examine the injustice in our system. When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote the "Letter from the Birmingham Jail" in 1963, he chided White ministers who made a public statement about his methods, suggesting that segregation should be fought in the courts, not in the streets. His letter moved the White faith community to confront some of the injustices of segregation and to



Julianne Malveaux  
NNPA Columnist

form alliances with the Civil Rights movement.

King spent eleven days in the Birmingham jail in extremely harsh conditions. However, the oppressor does not learn from its excesses. On June 12, nine faith leaders

**“No threat to anyone, they were shackled, placed in handcuffs and leg irons, confined to roach-infested cells with nothing to rest their heads on, but a metal slab**

were shackled and held for 27 hours after being arrested for praying at the Supreme Court. The multicultural group of men and women are part of Rev. William Barber's Poor People's Campaign (A National Call for Moral Revival). Their effort is to bring attention to the amazing inequality and moral bankruptcy of our nation. Their prayers at the Supreme Court were extremely timely given the court's recent actions to make it more difficult for peo-

ple to vote in Ohio, and given the injustices, this court continues to perpetuate.

Like Dr. King, the nine who were arrested—Poor People's Campaign co-chair the Rev. Liz Theoharis, D.C. clergy the Revs. Jimmie Hawkins, Graylan Hagler and William Lamar IV, and the Revs. Rob and Hershey Stephens from the Fort Washington Collegiate Church in New York City—were subjected to extremely harsh conditions. No threat to anyone, they were shackled, placed in hand-

of economic expansion. Like Dr. King's Poor People's campaign, this 21st century Poor People's Campaign, launched fifty years later, is an attack on poverty, racism, and militarism, and also ecological devastation and our nation's "moral devastation."

At the 2018 Rainbow PUSH International convention on June 15, Rev. Barber railed against interlocking injustices that did not begin with our 45th President, but have been exacerbated by the depravity he represents. In a rousing address that wove humor, statistics, public analysis and a scathing attack on our nation's immorality, Barber argued that "the rejected," which may comprise more than half of our nation, will lead to the revival of our nation.

Who would have thought that nine faith leaders would be among the rejected?

Who would have thought that Dr. King would have been? But Dr. King eagerly embraced the status of "rejected." He once preached, "I choose to give my life for the hungry. I choose to give my life for those who have been left out of the sunlight of opportunity."

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