

## Close Reading of Chapter 8, “All God's Children”, of Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*

In this chapter, Stevenson tells the stories of several children who were criminally prosecuted in the United States. He theorizes about the societal background that might have influenced their sentences and presents the narrative of the “super-predators”.

1) Reread the passage about super-predators in *Just Mercy* (from “The Stinney execution [...]” (p. 159) to “[...] postconviction challenges almost impossible.” (p. 160)).

2) In your own words, explain what super-predators are, who supported the idea and what it was based on.

”Super-predators” are a concept that arose out of a social narrative about rising rates of criminality among the US-American youth. Fears became loud that gangs of teenagers and even children, who were somehow corrupted to be violent and remorseless criminals, would sweep the nation. They would be the cause of rising crime rates and civil unrest with which the criminal justice system, especially the juvenile justice branch of that system, would be unable to cope.

The theory was supported by influential criminologists and advanced by state legislatures, who enacted policies to preempt that coming wave of crime. As such, juvenile offenders would be punished as adults and sent to adult prisons, with all the lack of care and protection that it entails.

Bryan Stevenson believes that this narrative was influenced by racial prejudices and born out of politics of fear and anger that had directed the justice system for decades to become a weapon to control the population. These politics now turned against the nation's children, without any real evidence to support the claims that were being made. This tragedy was exacerbated by the fact that the justice system was designed in such a way that decisions once made by the courts are incredibly hard to reverse, which means that the victims of the super-predator narrative continue to suffer the consequences even though the people who supported the theory at first have now abandoned it.

