Public debate over school violence in the 1970s escalated as fears of juvenile crime, which had been building for more than two decades, reached a crescendo. Race was certainly central to that dialogue, as school violence surfaced not only in conflict over school integration but also captured conflict among students. Teachers, teachers’ unions, police, and elected officials all pursued relief in policies that would fence in—suspend, expel, and cast out—violent offenders. Such Zero Tolerance policies, however, had unintended consequences, pushing minority students into the school-to-prison pipeline but also permanently altering schools and classrooms as teaching environments. This paper is a thought piece on rethinking public education today—by exploring the range of school violence in the United States—from cyberbullying and personal violence to mass shootings in the past few decades—and its effects on public education as a learning environment, a workplace, and a building block of democracy.

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