Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools Study Guide

Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools by Jonathan Kozol

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

In 1964, the author, Jonathan Kozol, is a young man who works as a teacher. Like many others at the time, the grade school where he teaches is of inferior quality, segregated (teaching only non-white students), understaffed, and in poor physical condition. Kozol loses his first job as a teacher because he introduces children to some African American poetry that subtly questions the conditions of blacks in America. Years later, after holding many other socially conscious jobs, Kozol misses working with children. He decides to visit schools across America to see what has changed since those early days of reform. What he learns is saddening: many schools have student bodies that are still separate and unequal. The remainder of the book details his observations over that year and suggests causes for this shocking state of affairs. *Savage Inequalities* is published in 1991, and the author warns that the situation may have changed since his investigation.

Kozol's journey starts in East St. Louis, Illinois. Traveling with a woman from a religious order, Kozol takes a look around the crumbling inner city. The town lies on a flood plain below beautiful homes that have been built on nearby bluffs. Factories pour sewage and toxic waste into the city. Playgrounds are found to contain heavy metals that sicken children. An attempt has been made at building a new grade school in one area, but cheap construction methods result in a roof that collapses. Local grade school children tell Kozol horror stories of family and friends who were murdered in violent encounters.

A visit to the East St. Louis schools reveals a complete lack of facilities. Sewage frequently floods lunchrooms, making it impossible to serve food there. Students desperately need books, computers, chalk, even toilet paper. Science classes lack test tubes, tables, running water and even heat. The ceiling is about to collapse in one school, the gym and locker room stink with toxic mold, and even the industrial arts classes have no tools. Dedicated teachers make poverty wages teaching super-sized classrooms yet choose to bring in their own teaching aids and pay for them out of their meager wages. Most telling of all, almost every student in every dilapidated school is not white. Minority children know they are receiving inferior education in ugly, filthy, dangerous buildings but seem most troubled by the fact that they are all pushed aside and not accepted into nearby white schools. They wonder why they are not liked or trusted.

Next Kozol travels to Chicago, Illinois, in the area of Lawndale where Martin Luther King has worked and experienced the worst racism of his life. The conditions are much the same as in East St. Louis with filth, decay and danger permeating mostly non-white schools. Kozol focuses on the inept, unkind and indifferent teachers, the only people the Chicago school system has been able to hire for these segregated schools offering such low wages. The author disagrees with government officials to claim that schools don't need more money, only better teaching methods. To prove his point he talks about a dedicated, brilliant teacher working in the slums who manages to fire kids up. She is just down the hall from uncaring teachers. If they wish to learn her methods, all they have to do is watch.

Lack of money is the problem and racism is the reason these schools are not getting the money they need, concludes Kozol. Thousands more dollars are spent each year on each white pupil attending better schools in the nearby suburbs. Blaming teaching methods or parental involvement for the horrible problems in segregated schools is easier than raising money and finding solutions.

The author begins to make a case that the way schools are funded allows inequalities to continue. Local property taxes fund schools, meaning the money a school receives is based on the value of the houses in the area. Houses in richer areas can be afforded by whites who pay more property taxes and get better schools (even if they are dumping sewage onto non-white areas situated below them without paying taxes to those areas to help clean up). Richer homeowners also get tax relief for paying their mortgages. Meanwhile, poor black areas are dumping grounds for toxic waste and garbage incinerators which benefit the wealthier citizens, but they tend to be the only places poor non-whites can afford to live. Low property values result in badly funded, dangerous schools. Wealthier whites flee these public schools and move to suburbs where their property taxes go toward building elegant public schools. Trier school is an example. It attracts a highly trained staff, and boasts an Olympic swimming pool as well as other luxuries. An article about this suburban school brags that most of the students in it are white.

Kozol says that magnet schools (special public schools built for the most talented students) seem like a good idea, but are also unfair. The inner city disadvantaged non-white students usually lack head start programs or educated parents who can help them push for admittance. Student bodies of magnet schools remain mostly white. Worst of all, disadvantaged students watch television and know they are being treated like something less than human. This is savagely cruel.

In the next area, New York, Kozol sees the same pattern of filth, indifference and degradation. The difference between money spent in inner city schools and outlying suburbs is more than double in the New York districts. The school system administrators admit they don't even know how many kids become discouraged and drop out of these schools. Kozol finds this shocking in a town where every penny stock on Wall Street can be accounted for every day. Yet, the school system cannot compile a list of names of dropouts. In fact, several school administrators admit that they actually hope kids will drop out because they have so many students, they can't teach them all.

Health care for disadvantaged minorities is pathetic, which shows society's indifference to the non-whites, says Kozol. As in Illinois, funding inequalities in New York are not just a local matter. The State of New York actually funnels more money to the richer schools. Visiting a fancy school in Rye, NY, Kozol is disappointed to learn privileged kids are indifferent to the suffering of non-white students in other schools. According to Kozol this is not true of students in his day.

Conservative media adds to the misconceptions about poor schools, according to Kozol. For instance, *The Wall Street Journal* claims that minor cuts in class size won't

help test scores much. Kozol argues that if that is the case, why not double the number of children in each white public school classroom? Nobody would stand for this.

He visits Camden, NJ, the fourth-poorest area in country. At Pyne Jr. High there are no computers. At the local high school the computers have literally melted because of the extreme heat in the airless dilapidated building. Kozol wonders why African American teachers at these schools dance around the issues of race as if they just accept matters as inevitable. High school kids in Camden tell Kozol about being unable to read the classics because pages are missing from their books, and one promising student is told by her guidance councilor to give up her dream of becoming a lawyer because her English isn't good enough. As in other cities, dangerous chemicals escape from nearby factories (the factories do not pay taxes here) and children suffer major untreated illnesses. The only principal who earns media respect in this region is a man who walks around the school with a bat and tosses 300 students out of school. This doesn't help the school, but it gets him on the cover of magazines.

When parents of a New Jersey child named Raymond Abbott go to court to protest the inferior education he is receiving as a poor non-white boy, expensive lawyers are hired by the State to fight the lawsuit. Eventually the court decides that Raymond is indeed being unfairly treated. However, the decision comes too late to save his educational career. Raymond ends up a dropout cocaine addict in jail.

Before introducing readers to the problems in Washington, DC, Kozol observes that seldom do disadvantaged people ask for totally equal education when they go to court. Why not? He takes readers to Washington, where the elegance of the city contrasts starkly with the reality of the non-white slums a few blocks away. A city planner observes that the very poor accept a dual system with richer magnet schools so the whites won't leave altogether and take political power and money to the suburbs. His observations in Washington seem to bear this out. Children actually suffer battle trauma like soldiers. The news media seem to "blame the victim" portraying the people who live in ghettos as dangerous fools who spend too much on expensive tennis shoes and jewelry. Kozol says TV viewers in the suburbs don't understand this stuff is being pushed on ghetto residents who have no access to things of real value.

One failed method of improving non-white schools has been to hire non-white administrators. Kozol says this cannot help. Detroit has had non-white administration for years and the underfunded schools are still in a predicament. When a U.S. District Court finds that Detroit schools are both separate and unequal, the U.S. Supreme Court is called in to consider the charge. The Supreme Court at this time is heavily packed with conservative Nixon appointees. These judges say that making things fair in the city of Detroit for the poor would unfairly punish the suburbs. An important Justice of the Supreme Court, Thurgood Marshall, disagrees with the majority opinion and sees that the country has taken a giant step backward in values. Later, President George H.W. Bush says money is not the answer to solving school problems.

Kozol swings around to San Antonio where he begins by claiming that Americans hesitate to directly discriminate against other people's children because this would make

them feel guilty. However, he thinks, laws have allowed discrimination to exist in a less direct form. In the 1920s in America the Foundation program is established. It is supposed to mean that everybody is taxed on local homes and businesses at the same rate, and the federal government comes in to make up the difference in money raised by sending extra subsidies to poor schools. Nevertheless, white schools historically get more of this "make up" money. Kozol thinks it's strange that when it comes to equal funding for public schools, officials fight for local control, but the federal government is happy to overrule federal control when it comes to which books should be read, and other important issues.

In 1968 in San Antonio, the parents of Demetrio Rodriguez and other students go to court to fight for equal funds for their inferior school. Justice Powell of the Supreme Court suggests that a quality education is not guaranteed by the constitution, although lawyers argue the students need the skills to vote, which is guaranteed by the constitution. Twenty-one years later it is found that unequal funding is in fact unfair, but of course this decision is too late for the kid who brought the lawsuit in the first place.

Kozol visits Alamo Heights near San Antonio where the wealthy live on beautiful hills. He then descends to the shacks below the bluffs where 99.3 percent of the kids are Hispanic and poor enough to rely on the school lunch program for their main meal of the day. Down in the valley, the teachers are underpaid, the buildings are crumbling and the schools can spend only a fraction of what they spend in Alamo Heights on each student. Yet most of the State's extra funding goes to Alamo Heights.

At last Kozol sees that when white children are impoverished and discriminated against, their schools are poor, too. He visits a community of poor Appalachian children thrust into one school. It suffers from overcrowding, the building is in shambles and teachers lack resources, just like all of the non-white schools all over the country. He is told that soon many of these children will be bussed to non-white schools nearby

Kozol's observations are haunting. Time and time again the pattern is repeated: Non-whites pushed into nasty, dangerous conditions through history or fate, whites unwilling to share their fortune with the people of color they fear, government finding endless excuses for doing nothing and actually blocking the success of poor schools in corrupt ways. Kozol's conclusion is that this is illogical, unpatriotic and deeply unkind.

Foreword and Prologue, "Looking Backward: 1964 to 1991,"

Foreword and Prologue, "Looking Backward: 1964 to 1991," Summary and Analysis

In a short but important note, the author explains that his research takes place between the years 1988 and 1990. Readers who read the book now must be aware that certain observations are decades old and may be out of date.

Also, names of students are sometimes changed. Adult names are often left unchanged unless the adult has asked that his or her name not be used.

The author, Kozol, remembers his first teaching job in 1964 in a poor, predominantly non-white Boston school. Conditions are terrible. His students have 13 different teachers in one year and use part of the school gym as their classroom. They test far below their actual grade level. To reawaken the children's interest in school, Kozol reads them poems by Langston Hughes. One poem about broken dreams makes a little girl cry, and she memorizes the poem because it seems to reflect her life. Kozol is fired for teaching poetry that is not on the approved list. Next he lands a job at a rich all-white Boston suburban school where children are happy and the rooms are bright and cheerful.

Life takes Kozol on many adventures. He misses children, however, and decides to go learn more about what's happening in American schools. For two years he travels around America to inner city schools in Illinois, Washington, DC, New York, San Antonio and anywhere he happens to have a friend or school contact.

What shocks and outrages Kozol is that so many schools remain segregated more than 30 years after the Supreme Court rules that it is unconstitutional. (In this book, *segregated* means allowing white children to go to one school and forcing non-white children to go to another school.)

National reports of the problems in the non-white schools avoid discussing the issue of segregation, focusing instead on low test scores, poor discipline and high drop out rates. Kozol also says that teachers and staff at these schools refuse to talk about African American education reformers like W.E.B. DuBois.

The author describes many of the non-white schools as similar to prisons in foreign countries They are surrounded by barbed wire and deserted warehouses and the halls are filled with guards. Many are located in areas called "death zones" by Boston news reporters because so many babies die so frequently in these ghettos. The people making the laws for these schools are unlikely to ever visit the schools. Most taxi cabs will not even drive Kozol into these neighborhoods because they fear the residents.

The children he meets in these schools seem to know what's wrong with the way they are being treated. The author decides that their voices need to be heard so that adults will understand the problems.

Chapter 1, "Life on the Mississippi: East St. Louis, Illinois,"

Chapter 1, "Life on the Mississippi: East St. Louis, Illinois," Summary and Analysis

East St. Louis is a city in ruins with no doctors or hospitals that care for pregnant women, no garbage removal service and no escape from poverty. The buildings on the main street are abandoned and chemical plants pour pollution into the air. Because unemployment is so high, the city can't make money from tax revenues and has to close down city hall and fire service workers who do things like pump out the flooded sewers. Almost everyone here is black and desperately poor.

The city is located below some bluffs where white, wealthier residents live. The sewage and factory runoff from these residents' homes pours into East St. Louis but the more wealthy citizens do not contribute any funds to cleaning up the lower area. Kozol says many black communities across America lie in low flood plains and get the trash and runoff from more prosperous cities. East St. Louis experiences sewage-flooded playgrounds, typhoid, cholera and a high level of mercury arsenic and lead in the ground from chemical factory runoff and smelting. Children from the area test dangerously high for lead in their blood.

Kozol pays a visit to the area with a religious worker named Sister Julia Huiskamp from the Daughters of Charity. He sees burning garbage, threatening teenagers, and the playground where sewage is sometimes puddled. Now, greenery hides the dangerous chemicals and germs beneath. The sister and Kozol stop to talk to some children. One seems only to know herself as "Little Sister." The other kids tell him about how a friend has been recently beaten to death with a brick and her body dumped behind the playground. The children point out that one of their teachers comes to the murdered girl's funeral. Another child remarks that his grandmother has been shot dead. All this is said matter-of-factly, along with prattle about pets and squirrels.

Kozol sees the children's trashy school. Next to this dilapidated building is a new school that has been constructed incorrectly. The roof is too heavy and the walls are sinking into the ground, so the kids can't use this new school. When it's almost time to go, Sister Huiskamp has to call a cab before dark, or the driver will not enter this neighborhood.

At night in East St. Louis, plumes of brown smoke pour out of the chemical plants, leading to a higher-than-average rate of asthma for children growing up here. People on the bluffs are out of the path of this air pollution, but East St. Louis is downwind of all the toxins. The author describes shack-like homes next to factories of Monsanto, Big River Zinc, Cerro Copper and a garbage burning plant. Many residents have been given $400 payments to keep them from suing the plants for the damage they are inflicting.

Chemical plants do not pay taxes to the city because they incorporate their factory areas into small, independent towns within the township of East St. Louis. Sauget, one such town, consists only of strip clubs, a factory and a lottery outlet. Kozol notes that the lottery money is supposed to support state education, but most of the money does not end up there. Ironically, desperate minorities are the people who play the lottery most frequently.

The author describes a creepy cityscape at night, with boarded up buildings, railroad trains carrying dangerous chemicals across endless tracks, liquor stores with bars on the windows. In his investigation Kozol is accompanied by a man from India named Safir Ahhmed who can't believe this is allowed to happen in the United States. Safir believes people should get off the freeway and come see what poor children have to put up with. When Jessie Jackson visits, he says, the audience is so grateful to hear the important leader that an old man burst into tears. Although the factories are causing many of the problems for Black people in this region, factory managers don't hire African Americans from nearby because they don't have enough education to do the jobs required. It's a vicious circle.

Children have few outlets for fun in East St. Louis. There's a porno theater, but no family theater. On one occasion the walking bridge to St. Louis is closed to East St. Louis during the big yearly Independence Day Street Fair, but later the courts reverse this outrageous decision.

Of all the cities in Illinois, East St. Louis has the highest rate of unborn child death, premature birth and infant death, and some of the sickest children in America. Poor children's dental problems are intense, and it's hard to get them dental care because of medical red tape, so many children simply live with inflamed and abscessed tooth pain. Scores suffer from bleeding gums and low energy. Many kids are hungry, and many have not received all the required immunizations. Insects bring polio and hepatitis, asthma makes people irritable and shooting deaths are common. These are types of problems that are more common in third world countries.

Kozol gives a quick history of how East St. Louis becomes so poor. In the 1800s it is a thriving railroad center, which attracts ex-slaves from the South looking for jobs. Corporations use the threat of black labors to keep white labors from complaining and forming unions. Whites become furious with black people and in 1917 start a bloody riot that results in beatings and lynching. One child is killed, his mother scalped. During the Depression, factory owners take their business elsewhere to use even cheaper labor. Coal becomes less important so coal plants are shut down. WWII brings some military work to the city for a while, but then the mafia gets control of the place and sets up mostly black prostitution for whites. After the war the factories are completely unnecessary and the remaining ones shut.

Today, problems of the city literally wash into the non-white schools when sewage runs into the lunchroom kitchens. Teachers are laid off in droves. The teachers have no chalk, no paper, and no paychecks. The governor refuses to send money saying East St. Louis has to solve its own problems. Even high school sports programs, a possible

way out of the ghetto for some, are being cut. A coach named Bob Shannon talks about how it is easier to fight the Ku Klux Clan than to fight money managers who don't care about poor people's problems and who blame the poor for their own condition. Shannon describes the rot, filth and lack of equipment his sports program must endure. Other vocational teachers reveal that they have no equipment to actually teach mechanics or home economics. There's no water in the science lab, there are no tables in the biology lab and the chemistry lab is seldom used because teachers have too many students to supervise around dangerous chemicals. Irl Solomon, a highly respected history teacher, brings in his own VCR, and feels cut off from other educators. Kids drop out and get pregnant. Very few who make it through high school get to college or tech school. Solomon makes less than $40,000 a year after 30 years of teaching.

Solomon arranges for Kozol to talk to some students with energy and opinions. These kids ask questions about other schools, and demand to know why they can't go to other schools. One asks, "Is that a matter of race or money?" Some say that they are stared at rudely even when they visit other schools to purchase books. Most agree that even if their school had all the best equipment and finest teachers they would still feel their racial separation is a bad thing. One girl is certain that even if her school had a special offer, like for instance the best computer class in the area, white children would not ride buses to come to her school. A final visit to the principal's office reveals his many needs and dreams for the school. During the interview, the police notify the principal that his house has been robbed. Strolling around the school, the author happens across children singing "sometimes I feel like a motherless child" which he finds achingly beautiful and tragic.

Kozol next visits what has been called the best public school in the city of East St. Louis. Nevertheless, it's segregated and a mess. One teacher points out the irony of naming this prison-like institution after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a man dedicated to freedom.

A black girl named Shakira talks about the time her mother manages to place her in a good quality white school. Children don't play with her and send her notes telling her to go back to Africa. Shakira astutely points out that news people investigate and report on ghetto crime, but not on the much larger crimes committed by chemical plants which dispose toxic waste in the region. A young man named Christopher suggests that the author go look in the toilet if he wants to see the results of Martin Luther King's dream of equality. Kozol does so and reports there are no paper towels or soap in the bathroom and many of the toilets don't even have seats. The author learns that East St. Louis schools lack basics like heating, cooling, sewage and books. One poor teacher actually has to Xerox pages from her only workbook in order to give assignments to students.

The author examines an argument that politicians and news media make about East St. Louis. These opinion leaders say that the school system of the town employs more people than almost any other industry, and some hint that teachers or staff should be laid off or fired. The author responds that conditions are so bad in East St. Louis even *more* money needs to be spent on education. Kids who have such a dirty impoverished home life need extra help when they get to school. The actual amount spent per child is

about half what other schools just outside East St. Louis spend, and if more teachers are let go, they too will end up on welfare. What would be the good of that? He claims that because nobody takes desegregation and low income housing seriously, the problems will remain.

Chapter 2, "Other People's Children: North Lawndale and the South Side of Chicago,"

Chapter 2, "Other People's Children: North Lawndale and the South Side of Chicago," Summary and Analysis

This chapter begins with observations by the author about the emotional and moral responsibility Americans have for each other. He wonders how Americans can allow this sort of tragedy to happen to innocent children. Kozol agrees that nobody can take the toxic chemicals out of the ground overnight or cure unemployment or asthma, but why not give kids a special educational resource that will help them overcome these disadvantages? Why do we make poor Americans beg for help from our own federal departments like the Environmental Protection Agency or the Federal Department of Housing or the congress or state boards of education? He believes all citizens should be automatically protected from dangers and inferior treatment.

Lawndale is a slum just outside of Chicago. Martin Luther King, Jr. once lived here and complained that it was the most racist place he had ever been. King's house has been bulldozed and only an abandoned truck and a gang of drug dealers spot-mark where he used to live. Like East St. Louis, there's no industry here. A local pasture, Reverend Jim Wolff, talks about how gangs have replaced factories.

Kozol visits North Lawndale's Mary McLeod Bethune School. The kindergarteners sleep restlessly in a dull classroom, and then obediently follow a teacher who doesn't seem to like her job very much. She scolds, and then reads them nursery rhymes in which the only black characters are the sheep. The fifth grade classroom is just as uninspiring. Even the flag is dirty. The teacher says several of the students have learning disabilities. The class practices penmanship and geography, and most of them ignore her. The author is cornered by another outraged fifth grade teacher who claims the parents are the problem with the school, not just the facilities. The school's principle explains how less inspired teachers end up in his building. Apparently when high school enrollment is down the school district dumps less qualified teachers from high schools here. Especially fired up teachers are attracted to work at the magnet schools. Significantly, kids in the Lawndale system don't expect to make it through high school, so they throw big parties on their 8th grade graduation.

Kozol meets Coral Hawkins, a truly original and brilliant teacher of 5th and 6th grade. She cleverly breaks kids up into non-completive learning groups called "departments" and has different kids work on creative math assignments and science projects. They get points for helping one another learn. One neat idea Hawkins develops, a cheap

plastic bottle filled with colored water to demonstrate wave action, calms the children. Hawkins pays for the items she uses in her teaching and the field trips she takes the class on from her own small salary.

In another room the gospel teacher screams at children and accuses them of not loving the Lord if they fail to sing properly. All this gets Kozol thinking about the blame often placed on teachers for school failure. Some say teachers need to be educated in better teaching methods and that will improve schools, but if these teachers want to improve their skills, all they have to do is walk down the hall to Ms. Hawkins's class and observe. The salaries are just too low to attract enough of the most enthusiastic and skilled teachers. Not every teacher is driven by a personal mission like Ms. Hawkins. Even if her methods could be taught, Kozol says, there aren't enough teachers to go around in Chicago. Each day around 190 children come to school and have no teacher. One student Kozol meets talks about having an auto shop class 16 weeks before the school finds a teacher who can show him how to change a tire. If half the students do not drop out per year, there will not be enough teachers to handle the rest of the students. Some teachers say it makes their job easier when the lowest performing kids drop out.

The author visits Lathrop Elementary School and discovers books are the problem. The few reference books Lathrop has are moldy because there is no library where they can be stored. At one point the entirely wrong workbooks are sent out of sequence, so the more advanced lessons have to be taught before the easy ones. Illinois Governor Thompson refers to these schools as "sink holes."

Over $8,000 is spent on each school kid attending a rich white public school around Chicago and only about $5,000 on each poor non-white public school kid. The reason is partly because of the way schools are funded — through property taxes based on the value of a home. More expensive homes bring in more tax money and that money is sent directly to their nearby schools. Cheaper homes bring in less money, and that goes to local schools. Kozol says this sounds fair at first, but richer homeowners also get a federal tax deduction for "mortgage interest paid" and a tax deduction for the property tax they've paid. Poorer owners don't pay enough taxes to get the deduction and poor renters don't get the mortgage interest break. Also, cities take money out of everybody's property taxes for free institutions like colleges and museums as well as police, fire and other services even though richer suburban people benefit more from these services.

The author says many wealthy people think it's OK if the children of the poor get fewer advantages like summer camps, nicer houses, doctors, and yes, worse schools; however Kozol points out that the government doesn't force children to go to summer camps - just to schools. He feels, therefore, that it is the government's responsibility to supply all children equally good schools. He criticizes ethnic leaders who don't want to talk about the racial and economic connections to school failure for fear of discouraging kids. Children already realize they are getting an inferior education by watching TV and seeing how the other half lives. By fifth or sixth grade many show how disappointed they are by skipping school altogether. By high school, between 76% and 86% of poor kids are dropouts. Those who do graduate are often so poor at reading, they can't move on to higher education or get good jobs.

The hope for many underprivileged students is to do well enough in classes to be invited to a magnet school, a public school designed to accept the best students and give them a better chance. Unfortunately, kids who get into these schools are most often children of parents who are already of higher social status, who push harder or who may have prepped their kids with preschool classes. Magnet schools siphon off superior students who are taken out of the other schools where they may have served as a model for others.

Kozol gives an example. In one nasty incident, a condominium development is built in an area called Dearborn. The new upper middle class residents get permission from the school board for a magnet school to be built, but then try to keep the long time residents from attending it. Arguments break out, but the wealthier whites win the right to keep kids from the nearby "projects" out until third grade, by which time they usually are too far behind to win a place at the magnet school.

Kozol notes that not all parents know about these magnet schools, and it doesn't help uneducated people to offer printed information about a new magnet school for their kids because many aren't great readers. President George Bush (the first) pushes for choice plans, but the reality is that wealthier whites get into these schools because they understand more about the success system. The author argues that parents simply won't believe the magnets will be available to them because they've been disappointed so often before.

Now the author visits a "better" public inner city school, called Goudy. The building is not as shabby as the other schools visited. Still, the history books are 15 years old. The bathrooms don't work and there are no swing sets. The writer watches in horror as a teacher who has failed as a high school teacher but who is moved to Goudy (because her teachers contract prevents firing her) bullies young children. Another teacher calls kids "stupid" and makes them jog up and down steps for a half hour.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is Glencoe's Trier public high school in a nearby Chicago suburb. The mostly white children roam a huge campus with three gyms for fencing and dance. The campus also features an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The school has a janitorial staff of 48 and a private guidance councilor per every 24 students. At Du Sable, an inner city black school, 420 students share one guidance councilor. Kozol notes with disgust an article in *Town and Country* about the Trier school which brags that most of the children are of Western European descent.

Policy makers at the time the book is written say that parental involvement, not more money, is the answer to better schools. The writer agrees that some Chicago schools have improved just a little bit, thanks to a plan to get families involved in their kid's education, but it's not enough. Du Sable High School is one example. The building has no campus, but does feature a playing field and the building looks as well kept as possible. A few great teachers are mixed with ones nobody can get rid of. While talking with students who want to go to college, Kozol realizes that most don't know how to file applications and really aren't prepared for the classes they will need to take. The principal, Charles Mingo, has made a huge effort to plant flowers and beautify the place,

believing this will give a sense of peace and harmony to the students' lives. A photo on this man's wall depicts his father being knocked down at the side of Martin Luther King. Shortly after this photo is taken King gives up on marching in Chicago because it is simply too dangerous, too racist.

Next the writer explains that many urban non-whites have an unrealistic understanding of what a good living is. (A young mother interviewed on TV says she hopes to make $2,000 dollars a year some day.) He implies that the poor don't demand more for their schools because they don't know how much more money should be available to them. He points out that the low allotment of money consistently applies to race, not social status. Even black middle income suburban children in Maywood are given funding at about the same per student rate as inner city blacks ($5,000 per child) whereas white middle income suburban children nearby get $3,000 more per child per year. Kozol admits that poor white rural children face deep financial challenges, too, but different types of challenges. They don't have to contend with the "ugliness" of racial separation, or deal with living so close to people who have so much more. This is adding insult to injury in the most real sense.

Kozol condemns business leaders who offer to help troubled non-white schools but who actually intend for disadvantaged students to prepare themselves for low quality factory jobs. Legislators whose own children go to private schools vote for more classroom trade school education in fields such as shop and cosmetology. On the flip side, when secretarial business classes are offered at Trier, the students refuse to sign up, as if insulted by the idea of taking that kind of work.

Poor parents make reasonable requests for more books and smaller class sizes. Immediately government officials say this spending of money is not a productive. President Bush's Education Secretary William Bennett says, "If the citizens of Chicago put more money in then they're free to do so. But you will not buy your way to better performance." The conservative *Chicago Tribune* newspaper agrees that money will not solve the issue and suggests instead that early childhood programs might help, but Bush has already turned down a plan to increase head start money too. Apparently any help the poor parents ask for is the wrong solution.

The writer is also irritated by corporations which pretend to "partner" in education. One mother blasts the power elite who only pretend to help but actually don't want her children competing with their children. Kozol concludes that many school officials have no choice but to emphasize blue collar and manual education in inner city schools.

Chapter 3, "The Savage Inequalities of Public Education in New York,"

Chapter 3, "The Savage Inequalities of Public Education in New York," Summary and Analysis

Speaking over a hundred years ago, a social critic named Lord Acton said that Americans allow all of their children the things they need to compete at the highest levels of success.

Kozol expresses sadness at how untrue these words are today, especially when it comes to education. He points out that in New York the unfairness is even more extreme since each kid in the suburbs receives an education worth $11,000 a year, whereas an inner city child receives only $5,500. The author wonders why the Board of Education of the United States complains about unequal spending between cities across the county but lets the spending be so unequal in communities side by side.

New York City schools are broken into 32 districts. Kozol visits the wealthier Riverdale in Northwest Bronx where there are few non-whites and where parents are mostly well educated and then he goes to other schools just blocks away to the south. Why are there twice as many computers per student allowed to the public schools in the richer area? The chairman of the local educational board says, "what is fair is what is determined...to be fair." This same chairman explains the difference between the school buildings by saying "demographics." Of course, "demographics" means the number, age, gender and race of a group of people in a particular place. The chairman is saying the school is a mess because of the people in the area, not because less money is contributed to the school's upkeep.

Kozol next travels to public School 261, using a nearby funeral home as a landmark to find the place. The building used to be a roller skating rink, so most of the rooms lack windows and proper air circulation. Only 900 people are supposed to be in this building at any given time, but 1,300 students attend daily. Some classrooms serve 37 students, and kids have no playground or recess area in which to play after their short lunch shift. They just sit on the floor quietly. Ironically, there's not much room to stretch one's legs in this former roller skating rink. The library is tiny and the collection lacks encyclopedias. There's no place for recess and only a small gym for everyone to share.

Ninety percent black and Hispanic, the rest of the students at 261 are Asian, white or Middle Eastern. The bilingual second graders have to share classes with a large number of English speakers and try desperately to keep up. Kozol makes notes to himself about how claustrophobic and cramped the building feels.

Next he visits school PS 79 where the principal explains that if more children enroll, he will have to bus them elsewhere because he is so short on space. Even though Head

Start programs have been proven to help children a great deal, there is not enough room to start such a program here. The principal argues that unless the students get direction and education now they will become dangerous drains on society in the future. A little girl with a toothache comes in for help. The nurse can't call the child's mom because the mother owns no phone. The girl goes back to her room with a horrible pain in her mouth.

There are holes in the ceiling, garbage bags stuffed into the cracks. The principal of the school believes that the problem is not simply poverty, but racism because such poor facilities would not be allowed in white schools of any economic level. In the kindergarten class, Kozol learns that one child rides the train three hours each day just to get to this dilapidated school. He questions why this African American boy cannot be sent to a closer and better public school. Clearly, busing would be a better alternative to this, no matter how often policy makers say busing places a hardship on the poor.

The school nurse recounts the story about public health care in the neighborhood. A child is shaking uncontrollably. The Medicare doctor says the girl must be nervous about problems in her home life, only the girl isn't having problems at home. The nurse urges the mother to take her daughter to a private doctor who correctly discovers the girl is suffering from a brain illness. The nurse concludes that all public services to non-whites are careless and inferior.

Kozol visits another school in Riverdale where middle class kids of all races do attend, but where most non-whites are routinely pushed into classes for the learning disabled. The few non-whites in the accelerated classes are Asian. In contrast to the school, which is mostly non-white, flowers, trees and beautiful building features are everywhere in this public school built with public money. The only manual arts classroom is reserved for the special "slow" class, which is composed only of black students except for one. The principal shows great sympathy for his teachers and principals at schools that are falling apart.

Another area of the city of New York suffers even more because it is "consistently underfunded." The state government adds to locally raised tax money and gives the poorest districts 90 cents more per pupil per year, the rich schools $14 per pupil from the state. *The New York Post* reports that money earmarked for fighting drugs in ghetto schools is funneled to richer schools. The paper backs off from directly stating that racism is the problem.

Morris High School in the South Bronx has blackboards so cracked, kids can't write on them without hurting themselves. Paint chips fall like snow from the ceiling. Water pours down the stairs like a waterfall when it rains. Despite all this, the school administrator tries hard to teach the best literature and encourages supposedly slow children to express themselves in theater, where many excel. Children correctly analyze the lines in a Lawrence Dunbar poem about freedom, titled "Why the Caged Bird Sings." Others perform music or recite Martin Luther King speeches. Most of these motivated children plan not to go to college, but to join the military. One boy named Alexander clearly explains why privilege goes on year after year. He says the wealthy don't want to share

and begin to feel a sense of entitlement the more generations they have more than others. He also points out that like free medical care, schools are free so the students and parents don't feel they have the right to complain about conditions. Other children say they believe it will be another 200 years before whites and blacks work together. The principal believes his school could be a place wonderful, caring, talented and hard working children could succeed if just a few changes were made.

The New York Times says that the better public schools are intended to attract or skim off the more privileged children. Some argue that it is good to concentrate the best teachers in these better schools. Kozol says that if more good schools existed instead of truly bad schools this would not be a debate. When ambitious parents are able to battle to reach these good schools and win their place in magnate schools, then the public has no reason to fight for better overall schools. This might be okay if parents were fighting for private schools, but is totally wrong when public schools are involved, according to Kozol.

Next follows more sad reports of students with high goals for college who haven't got textbooks for two months and teachers who hope for students to drop out because they don't have room in their crowded classrooms of 45. New York finds it impossible to track the city's actual dropout rate. Talking with children who have dropped out, the author learns most have felt anonymous and unknown in their schools. They don't know who their guidance councilor is and teachers don't know their names. Here Kozol feels outrage. New York is famous for ingenuity. Daily computer and fax information about every stock tick is registered. Information is piped, biked and faxed around the city, yet we can't get books to students or keep a register of their names? To symbolize how New Yorkers are allowing their schools to go into the toilet, he sites schools where actual bathrooms are being used as classrooms.

Jonathan Kozol says that one way to show how valuable we think people are is by the medical care we offer them. Medical care for non-whites in New York is so inferior that the infant death rate is the same as in the third word county of Malaysia. More babies here need neonatal care than anywhere else in the city. This indicates the possibility of brain damage in these babies). Nearby in Riverdale none of these problems exist in public hospitals. Public hospitals in the poor areas have no microscopes or blood collection tools. A doctor in the area says that because society is willing to help early born babies with amazing technology, the medical establishment is thought to be kind and caring, but really babies should not be born in such critical condition in the first place. Other doctors say better medical equipment and doctors are not necessarily all that helpful, and that too much money spent is "over serving" the ill. However, these same people don't seem to mind that the "over service" occurs for the rich.

Kozol thinks this is the same argument made about buying more books and improving schools. The kids at the poor schools won't benefit that much by a few more books, say critics, but the wealthy schools get these helpful resources anyway. Are excuses for underfunding schools part of a racist pattern? Kozol thinks so. He says that not keeping the young disadvantaged healthy and not giving them early childhood development classes insures that they will fail in school. Many will end up in prison. In fact, the city of

New York actually supplies ghetto schools with handcuffs. Weird statistics show other cultural bias. Black children are more often categorized as retarded. Hispanic children as have "speech disorders." White children are called gifted. Is this possible, or could it reflect teachers prejudices?

The differences between public schools within New York is nothing compared to the differences between New York city schools and outlying public schools. In one district an incredible $11,000 is spent per child per year. Real estate brochures brag about the good schools in these areas. People move to these suburbs, buy more expensive homes, pay more property tax, which goes to funding better schools. The reputation of the better schools, however, raises the value of their homes, so the cycle continues. Dropout rates at these schools are very low, but high school dropouts who have attended poor inner city schools will never be able to buy homes in these districts.

Kozol concedes that inner city problems would not be totally solved by better schools. Better-educated African Americans leave these areas so they aren't there to build better communities. Drugs and teen pregnancy exist. Families do need to take responsibility for their children. The government can't and shouldn't be responsible for families but they are responsible for the schools. Simply funding poor schools at the same level as rich schools would result in smaller classrooms, complete building repair, better teachers and loads of resources that could really benefit the children, states Kozol.

Kozol says that it's easier politically to blame school administration or families than it is to change the way money is distributed to school or the way non-white children are packed into the worst schools.

Kozol goes out to the suburbs and tours a beautiful nearby school in Rye, NY where he talks to children in an advanced class. He is surprised to learn how little they care about the plight of poor children because when he went to school in the '60s, students their age risked their lives to fight racism in the South. One teen honestly says she doesn't see what good sharing facilities or money with other children would do her. Most of the students want "separate but equal" schools, just so blacks do not come to their neighborhood. Only one youth seems to have a concern for these other children. A young man named David suggests a plan for redistribution of the property tax system in order to improve schools and tax incentives to attract young teachers to these inner city schools.

While thinking about the fight to desegregate Southern schools during his youth, Kozol talks about schools in Mississippi today. Surprisingly, these schools are now more desegregated than New York schools, but all are very poor. A plan to improve some of these schools is posed, but the oil companies who would face a mild tax increase to fund the improvements lobby hard and defeat the plan.

The chapter ends with a patriotic call to rescue all children—all of whom salute the same flag.

Chapter 4, "Children of the City Invincible: Camden, New Jersey,"

Chapter 4, "Children of the City Invincible: Camden, New Jersey," Summary and Analysis

The *Wall Street Journal* says that money does not buy better education. This conservative newspaper says that average achievement scores in New Jersey haven't gone up even though spending has. However, the paper doesn't admit that the money was funneled at a faster rate to the schools where kids do perform better. The poor schools with low grades pull the overall average down, but these are the schools that are not receiving more money. The *Wall Street Journal* also says spending more on teachers won't help, and even that higher spending gives "diminished returns." However, the financial newspaper does not suggest that rich schools should therefore not get such high rates of increases.

The conservative *Wall Street Journal* also wants to prove that minor cuts in class size won't help test scores much. Kozol says that the answer would be to make large cuts. He argues that any experienced teacher knows smaller classes would help. Again, why not shove more rich kids into each classroom if size does not matter?

Kozol goes to Camden, New Jersey to visit the fourth poorest people in America. Camden used to be an important manufacturing town, but now all the property in the city is worth less than one big Atlantic City casino. Like many crumbling cities, it has hundreds of burned out buildings, bars and liquor stores, but no wholesome entertainment. Here sits Pyne Point Jr. High. The school nurse tells Kozol about all the untreated seriously ill children she sees, including one girl who has such bad diabetes she should be in a coma. The typing teacher has no computers to teach with and even the typewriters are outdated. In the science room half the ceiling tiles are missing and the only experiment kids can do with their poor equipment is to drip drops of water into glasses of water to observe ripples. Kozol sees this experiment in controlling the variables as a metaphor for what America isn't doing with our nation's schools - not controlling variables so that the problem grows like a ring of water.

The principal chases some high school kids out of this middle school building and says one of his students has just recently been shot by an older youth. He points out his school's ruinous playing field with a burning trash fire behind it. A Molotov cocktail is found in the building and one student sets the science room on fire.

The Camden high school Kozol visits next doesn't even have a lunch facility. The English teacher works hard to help his students, but admits he doesn't send his own children here. The principal of the school complains that President Bush talks fine words about preschool, but where will the money come from? She thinks that decision makers believe that these non-white children are destined to fail. She reminds the author about

how the news media praises a principal who walks down the halls with a club, as if to say if these children fail they should be thrown out or beaten. The principal goes on to suggest that the standardized tests actually slow down children without preschool and resources because they fail time after time and become convinced they are losers.

Kozol goes to dinner with some of the teachers, driving past the church Walt Whitman once attended. Now it's a homeless shelter. The only bright clean building in the area is the new prison. An incinerator and a sewage treatment plant don't pay taxes here for all the waste they emit, but these two businesses decrease the property value, so there's less money for schools.

At the other high school, Woodrow Wilson, 58.5% of the students drop out of school. Here the many non-white students must contend with heat so fervent it actually melts the few computers they have. Principal Herbert Factor says his students also have to work extra hours after school to help families make ends meet. Children here who deserve college prep classes can't get them.

The author wonders why the African American teachers and principals refuse to come out and say racial discrimination is the real problem, as if they simply accept it. Woodrow Wilson students have seen the other schools and know how much better they are, with more challenging work, better facilities and a fancier campus. However, even if offered equal money for separate but equal schools, these kids say they'd rather go to school with children of different races. Kozol listens to their heart wrenching stories of kids who can't read classic books because pages are missing, or a Cambodian immigrant girl who is told to forget her dream of becoming a lawyer because her English is poor. (Never mind that more bilingual lawyers might be useful to society.)

Yet another comparison is made between privileged and non-white school campuses. One predominantly white school has four gyms, a dance room, a wrestling room, tennis court, and places for fencing and archery. The other non-white public school doesn't have a gym or enough jump ropes and students must wait a quarter of an hour to get one. In one school, children enjoy golf, ice hockey and lacrosse, ten music teachers, and a music suit. Poor kids have to buy their own instruments. Art education budget for each poor kid is less than the price of a pad of paper. Computer classes are held in a closet and there's no shower facility in the so-called gym.

The principal of the Camden school has mentioned Joe Clark, a man who gains national fame for a tough administrative approach of walking down the halls of a school with a bat. Kozol says Secretary Bennett praises this man for throwing 300 students out of school. For wielding a bat and throwing children out he earns the front page of *Time Magazine* and a career lecturing, though the school he became famous at is no better off than before he came.

When one nearby non-white Asbury Park neighborhood runs out of room and asks a white community to let them rent school space, they are told they will only take a few and the schools must be kept separate. One trial judge asked to consider the inequalities in New Jersey says that the reason schools are so clearly unequal is

because of community choice. This is completely wrong, according to Kozol, because many poor communities tax themselves at a higher rate than others in order to pay for schooling.

When Raymond Abbot's family tries to get him a better education, they take their case against the State of New Jersey to court. After hearing evidence, the judge agrees that there really are two separate but unequal types of education in New Jersey. The court asks a wealthier public school superintendent what would happen if he was given only as much money as the poor schools. The superintendent admits this would be a disaster. The judge goes on to remind the defendant (the state of New Jersey) about a list of terrible differences between schools, then wonders how anyone can place a money value on something so important as giving a chance to potentially gifted and talented children. Two years later a higher court agrees that the defendants in the case are wrong for suggesting the poor schools can't benefit from better schools. All schools in the state need to be equal.

Following the decision, newspapers hear from outraged wealthier taxpayers who fear their children will lose out at their schools in order to make other schools better. *The Wall Street Journal* congratulates these frightened parents for protesting. Raymond Abbot, the child originally named in the case against the state, is now a cocaine addict in jail, unable to read the decision that has been delivered years after his education is ruined. A 67-year-old ex-nun who helps Raymond in his case against the state notes how ridiculous it is to hire expensive lawyers to fight against a little extra money to schools in need.

Chapter 5, "The Equality of Innocence: Washington, D.C.,"

Chapter 5, "The Equality of Innocence: Washington, D.C.," Summary and Analysis

Kozol complains that discussions about educational problems seem to ask for almost equal treatment, but never identical treatment for the poor. He actually points out a case where the state comes out and says 100 percent equity isn't possible. Maybe 75 percent is possible.

John Coons of Berkeley University says all children are technically "poor" because they depend on someone else to give them money. Most people are uncomfortable today saying dark people deserve less because their parents aren't worth as much, but the treatment of non-white children shows this is accepted, just not admitted. Kozol says the white and wealthy seem to think they deserve their success and should be the ones to decide if the poor and non-whites get anything. This attitude allows the luckier children to believe they deserve their advantages. He quotes a well-meaning white parent who says his kids suffer from having too much. Of course this makes light of the serious need suffered by the poor.

African American parents are frequently outraged by hearing the theory that problems in society stem from past injustice. The injustices continue today, and blaming slavery and immigration issues of the past takes luckier citizens off the hook. (It leads to a way of thinking, 'Someone else did it. We are not at fault.') In the city of Chicago the recent building of an expressway that avoids the poor African America housing projects is an example of current injustice Kozol sites.

The unfairness is apparent in Washington, too. On the city's main streets there are cherry blossoms blooming, harpists playing and people dining at expensive restaurants. In the nearby poor district, a small child named Tunisia dreams of having enough money to plant a flowerbox, paint the dirty walls and buy her teacher pretty pink curtains. The principal of her school sadly reports seeing children pocket chicken nuggets so they have something to eat at home. About a third of the little girls will be pregnant by fifth grade and many of the boys will be dead by 28. Kozol spends delightful moments interviewing Tunisia and her friends about god, wealthy people, and why some girls get pregnant. Octavia tells him the girls want to be like rock stars by growing up fast and maybe getting a swimming pool. Monique says if she had a lot of money she'd give it to poor people, but later admits she is a poor person.

Delabian Rice Thurston is an urban planner who compares Washington schools with those in the suburbs. Her conclusion is that African American people are shocked to learn the lengths whites will go to avoid blacks even if it means moving out of the city. The very poor accept a dual system with richer magnet schools so the whites won't

leave altogether and take political power and money to the suburbs, according to Delabian.

The author repeats lines from the *New York Times* saying that children are showing battle fatigue, crying all day, hiding in the dark. Doctors agree that the pressures of death, decay and destitution are significant. Kozol describes one scene of a mother and daughter in a city like a battleground with rough, drug dealing men and choppers overhead. A child tells the author a local midget crawls along the ground at night looking for discarded crack cocaine rocks. Others breathe the exhaled breath of drugged and sleeping street people in order to get high. A transvestite ice cream vendor also sells condoms.

He believes that people are confused by the TV images of police arresting non-whites wearing expensive shoes and large jewelry. Most suburban people don't know these men are being aggressively sold trashy expensive things, and they buy these overpriced items because they can't expect truly fine furniture, cars and homes. Children soon learn beautiful things are not for them, so the cheap showy items are the best they can hope for. The fact that many people see slum conditions and have no sympathy for those who live there means ghetto dwellers are seen as strange and as less than human, suggests Kozol. When one paper reports high infant mortality rates in the ghetto, middle class citizens write in calling the mothers and fathers "leeches," immoral and irresponsible pigs.

One psychiatrist believes many whites believe more money won't help inner city schools because the non-whites are actually born inferior. They think money would be wasted on these people's education. This therapist also feels that crack and drug addiction is a form of slow suicide caused by years of abuse and rejection. Kozol talks about how the press tends to blame the victim when it comes to the ghetto. They don't connect failure to poor education. As a contrast he talks about a boy who is learning disabled, ignored, undereducated and ends up on the street, jobless and dressed like a pimp. Now to any onlooker, he's threatening and no longer an object of pity.

Non-white leaders are often picked to solve local school problems. The press hails them as the answer, but of course they are unable to do much against such a system stacked against them. These token leaders are blamed as poor managers. The pressure often destroys the administrator's career in the end.

Switching to his focus to Detroit, Kozol says there has been non-white administration for about two decades but conditions have not improved. The governor continues to protest that funding increases will not help the poor schools. Just like in New Jersy, Detroit's government makes two different no-win arguments. One, that more money won't help schools, and two, that it might help, but then that money would have to be taken away from the successful white schools.

Kozol points up how affluent schools like to brag of a high percentage of success in testing. However, many of those figures are based on how badly other schools are

doing. (When averages are calculated, the bad and good are added together. Doing better than some of these horrible schools isn't much of an accomplishment.)

In one interesting case, a U.S. District Court finds that Detroit schools are both separate and unequal. The U.S. Supreme Court, at the time heavily packed with Nixon appointees, says that making things fair in the city of Detroit would unfairly punish the suburbs. The Supreme Court judges that disagree with the decision say that there's no reason to think the fairness rule should be stopped by state or county lines. Thurgood Marshall calls this a step back from the earlier era when it was ruled in Brown vs. the Board of Education that all children deserve equal and not separate education.

Because of this ruling, Detroit children are locked into a hopeless, no-win situation. This is also true in Massachusetts classrooms where teachers are laid off and fired, etc. President Bush says, "More spending on public education isn't the best answer." He, of course, went to the Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, which spends $11,000 on each student.

Chapter 6, "The dream deferred, Again, in San Antonio,"

Chapter 6, "The dream deferred, Again, in San Antonio," Summary and Analysis

John Coons writes that every time low-income schools go to court to get more funds, wealthier citizens fear it will ruin free enterprise if these schools win; but he argues that keeping some groups uneducated for generation after generation leads to a real diminishment of the free enterprise system.

Kozol thinks that if Americans were forced to directly discriminate against other people's children they would feel bad about it. However, tax realities make things unfair without forcing people to feel guilty about the inequalities. 1920 brought America the Foundation program which is supposed to mean everybody is taxed on their local homes and businesses at the same rate, but the federal government makes up the difference in money to poor districts to bring them up to a level that's about equal to others. The problem is this "foundation" is considered whatever is "sufficient." Apparently, for the poor, "sufficient" does not mean enough education to compete with the rich.

Also, to keep voters happy, government administrators offer to send some money to all districts, and as *Savage Inequalities* so far shows, the most money ends up coming to the ones that need it less.

Now the author turns to the idea that the federal and state government should not interfere with local control of schools, but really, the state and federal governments do overcome local control in the choice of textbooks, teachers' exams, in taking over districts, scoring kids on a national level and so on. Why is educational funding still a matter of local control? Why should the cleanness of the building, the number of textbooks, the number of reference materials, novels, sports equipment, computers and number of children per classroom be a matter of local control if this is leading to inequality?

Kozol even says that local districts actually have negative control, because they have so few resources.

The author analyzes historic trends in education. During this century until the 1950s the courts do not intrude on local control. With Brown vs. Board of Education, up until the '70s concerns are more about racial factors not the money. From the early '70s until the time the book is written local control is back in charge.

In 1968 Demetrio Rodriguez' parents and other parents go to court to get equal funds for their poor school in San Antonio. The high court says they haven't proven "absolute deprivation of a fundamental interest" and that equal education isn't a fundamental right

guaranteed by the constitution. The lawyers for Rodriguez argue that kids like him need to be educated to vote, and voting is a fundamental right guaranteed by the constitution. Now many wonder, how much reading skill is enough to allow one to vote? What is adequate? Obviously the rich are given the chance to decide what is good enough. Supreme Court Justice Powell says the decision does not unfairly discriminate against the poor because there is "no proof that poor live in the poor neighborhood." Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall considers this absurd and points out that just because a basic right isn't spelled out in the constitution doesn't mean we shouldn't protect it. For instance, the right to have children isn't spelled out in the constitution, but we protect that right as part of the right to pursuit of happiness clause. Marshall says there's no minimum standard of "enough education" mentioned in Brown vs. the Board of Education. Equality is called for. Justice Marshall also finds the idea that more money won't help schools completely foolish. Nevertheless, Marshall is outvoted and the case is lost.

Kozol says another way funds become unfairly distributed is when a court makes a ruling asking for fair funding and the voters turn out to destroy this rule. For example, Prop 13 is voted in by conservative Californians to cap property tax rate increases. The result is a fair distribution, but all schools become impoverished and test scores drop. Rich communities in California have developed their own super school funds. This extreme reaction proves to Kozol the fear that must be conquered before things will change for the better.

Back to the Rodriquez case in San Antonio, it has been 23 years since the ruling and the poor remain poor, the rich schools remain rich. He visits Alamo Height where the wealthy live on beautiful hills, then he descends to the shacks below Cassiano where 99.3 percent of the kids are Hispanic and have to rely on the school lunch program to have enough to eat. Down in the valley, the teachers are underpaid, the buildings are crumbling and they only have a measly $3,600 to spend per student. This should mean this school gets most of the state and federal funds, but, no. Additional funding goes to Alamo Heights, to the tune of $8,000 per every 20 kids.

In 1989 the Texas funding system is finally found unconstitutional. People are literally cheering and hugging after hearing the decision. Rodriquez, now a sheet metal worker for the Air Force, says 21 years is a long time to wait, but he is happy. Immediately, the governor, chairman of the Texas Railroad commission, U.S. secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos and conservative newspapers begin a drive to slow down the possible fix of the system and to protest possible tax cuts. By spring of 1991, the Texas legislature has put in a plan with many loopholes that allow the old system of unequal funding to exist.

At the end of his nationwide tour, the author visits Cincinnati where white poor Appalachian children live. He finds exactly the same sort of problems with the school classroom size, quality for the building and teachers, lack of resources, crimped programs and most important of all, listless and discouraged children. Prejudice and unequal funding can ruin white schools too.

These little respected white children will soon be driven by bus to poor black schools nearby, saving the privileged kids from being included in the busing program.

As a last note Kozol looks across the broad expanse of the Ohio River and wonders how a beautiful land like ours can be so unfair and stingy. All our children should be allowed a stake in such richness, he says.

Characters

Jonathan Kozol

Raymond Abbott

Alexander

William Bennett

George H.W. Bush

David

Coral Hawkins

Sister Huiskamp

Little Sister

Justice Thurgood Marshall

Charles Mingo

Justice Powell

Shakira

Bob Shannon

Irl Solomon

Tunisia

Objects/Places

Camden New Jersey

Camden is located just across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. Once the center of railroad and shipping traffic for other East Coast cities, it falls into disrepair when GE, RCA Victor and Campbell's move out of the area. Now it is the fourth poorest city in America. Like the other troubled areas mentioned in this book, the streets are filled with destroyed buildings, liquor stores and other dangerous businesses. The schools in this region are a total wreck. Schools in nearby Cherry Hill and Princeton offer a vast array of classes and opportunities.

Chicago

Chicago remains a huge a powerful city in Illinois with a mix of ultra exclusive suburbs, housing projects and slums. As an educational system, Chicago suffers from a lack of teachers. Money from showy public institutions like art museums, colleges and hospitals drain cash needed by ghetto schools. The magnate school system draws the best teachers over to the better school. The Eisenhower Expressway rudely separates much of Chicago from impoverished South Lawndale. Over the decades, Chicago sees much racial tension and violence.

East St. Louis

East St. Louis is a factory town in Illinois across the river from the more glamorous and prosperous St. Louis. Once a thriving railroad town and later a factory town, East St. Louis is situated on a flood plane and populated with African Americans, many of whose ancestors migrated to the area after the civil war. A huge race riot occurs in 1900s when blacks are hired to weaken white labor unions and the whites take to the street killing and maiming many African Americans whom they fear will take their jobs. At the time of the writing of this book, factories pour in pollution, raw sewage into the town, leading to disease. Nearby towns contribute these pollution factors, but do not have to pay property taxes to clean up the area.

New York, NY

Kozol describes New York as a place of deep imbalance. The ghetto area schools in New York are so packed with Latino, black and Asian students that the board of education cannot make an accurate count of all the drop outs and teachers hope for about half the students to leave so that they will have more space in classroom. There are 32 school districts in NY, and the total inequality of schools is clearest in District 10. Here the Bronx is predominantly white with better schools and the South Bronx are non-

white with crippled schools. The amount of money spent on poor public schools in NY is about half of what goes to the suburban schools.

Sauget

Sauget, a town within the town of East St. Louis legally created by one factory so that it can avoid paying taxes to clean up its own toxic waste. It consists only of strip clubs, the factory and a lottery outlet.

San Antonio, Texas

San Antonio faces 23 years of wrangling in court over the how much money should be equally divided between schools, but by the time of this book's publication only manages to offer each student $2,000 a year, whereas the rich students each get around $19,000 per year. The poor live in crowded neighborhoods near water ditches. Crack houses, prostitution and early pregnancy face the underemployed residents. Their children must attend grossly inferior schools, despite the on going battle of parents to get more for their kids. Alamo Heights a few moments away is scenic and wealthy and residents report the air is cleaner and the grass greener there.

Segregated Schools

The most disheartening aspect of this book is that the problems in all segregated schools visited by Kozol are so clearly similar. To begin with, these schools exist in areas where poor non-white people can afford to live. (Never does Kozol encounter a middle class white area where uncaring parents or poor management techniques result in a terrible school.) The segregated schools are uniformly in disrepair with holes in walls, backed up sewage pipes, falling brickwork, nonexistent heating or cooling systems and even rain leaking into the buildings. Despite the efforts of some faculty, the schools tend to be ugly. The classrooms are terribly overcrowded because too few teachers can be found. Books are tattered and old. Computers, reference books and gym equipment can't be found. Teachers are exhausted. Most of all, the innocent children in these schools feel discouraged and unwanted by society.

South Lawndale

South Lawndale is an outlying area of Chicago where even Martin Luther King Jr. finds there is too much racism for him to organize freedom marches. As Kozol is writing the book, it is a vast industrial slum which has been abandoned. The entire neighborhood has only one grocery store and one bank but there are almost a hundred bars. Unemployment is shockingly high because factories like Sunbeam and business like Sears have moved out. Gangs have taken over.

Trier

Trier is an extraordinarily well kempt magnet high school in Glencoe, Illinois. The facilities remind the author of a private school. There are large, nicely manicured grounds; computers, library facilities and lab equipment abound, and special classrooms have been set aside for dance, play practice sports and Olympic level swimming competitions. This contrasts sharply with the Lawndale schools where air conditioning and books are critical issues.

Washington, DC

Washington says Kozol is a city shockingly divided between the touristy areas full of fancy restaurants, high-level entertainments and beautiful landscaping and broken down slums where non-whites live. In one slum neighborhood helicopters circle as in a war zone. A child playing on the filthy street near a crack house tells the author of a small man so desperate to get high that he actually breathes the breath of addicts as they sleep. Perhaps Kozol means this vision of the nation's capital to shock readers into patriotic action to benefit the American underclasses.

Themes

Children who live in horrible conditions deserve extraordinary help

The author builds his case carefully before revealing this theme, but once he has come out with the idea, he repeats it in several different ways. First, Kozol introduces readers to the bright, cute, precocious children who are clearly victims of an uncaring world. Kozol takes pains to show their innocent acceptance of war zone type surroundings, street violence, drugs and even "germ warfare" visited on them by plumbing disasters and factory runoff. He paints a clear picture of their world; these kids live in dangerous, filthy, nightmarish conditions where most middle class people would not survive a single day.

Next, Kozol takes us into the deeply disappointing schools where they have to try to concentrate even when inferior health care has left them with dental pain or the shakes, and when they can't even get their one full meal of the day because sewage has swamped their lunchroom. He shows readers the pathetic attempts some teachers make to brighten these kids lives for the few hours they attend school each day and reveals how again and again the smallest comforts are denied to students. Finally, he comes out and says it: to achieve their best, Kozol argues that these kids need a pretty, restful, nurturing environment but they are given just the opposite. Because life has left them so few options, schools should offer vision, direction and hope; and because the problems of non-white students have been compounded for generations, extra effort must be made to get their minds off the horrors of the inner city street life and help them to stretch their study skills and enhance their stunted talents.

Kozol gives readers an emotional stake in the children. Once readers are "rooting" for these kids, they may begin to believe as he does that equality isn't even what's needed at this critical stage. Maybe kids whose lives are so terrible need a little more help than the others to get up to speed. Maybe these children we have been treating so savagely deserve something special and better to make up for poverty, danger and ugliness of their lives.

Racism drives inequalities in schools

Except for one, the troubled schools all over the country that Kozol visits are almost exclusively non-white. Yet, at the time of writing the book, non-whites are the minority population in America. How is it possible that consistently the worst schools teach the darkest-skinned children? Unless a reader wants to take the racist stand that non White people intentionally make their schools bad, or are too foolish to make them better, one is forced to see some kind of racism operating in the public school system.

Indeed several of the judges, politicians and federal government leaders quoted seem bent on blocking any kind of legislation that will mix students from white suburban schools with the other schools. Many of the historic notes in the book point to the fact that non-whites have settled in particular regions because there are jobs in these places and housing is affordable. However, at the slightest provocation businesses pull out of these regions leaving the stranded citizens to make do, and soon these impoverished minorities have too little money to fund their schools. Whites do not typically move into these neighborhoods. In fact, upper class society literally dumps on these areas and schools when they allow dangerous chemical treatment facilities to operate here.

The children at the non-white schools themselves site many shocking instances of racist behavior toward them, and Kozol says the reason mostly white people with money or power discourage change in the public school system is that they have come to feel they deserve better and, in fact, are better, than the underprivileged. This must be the ultimate form of racism.

Kozol admits that many of the problems facing non-white students may have their basis in old racism from the days of slavery, but he also says that new racist actions are happening all the time. (For example, Chicago building an expressway that avoids the poor housing projects. The tendency to look at equal education as an unsolvable problem that started long ago is an excuse. If America blames past racism instead of our current behavior, nothing will change.

Money could solve many problems, but the powerbrokers won't admit it

As the old saying goes, "Talk is cheap." Politicians know that their voters fear losing the economic and social edge they have over a growing number of non-whites and at heart may not desire change in the status quo. These leaders win votes by pleasing voters with solutions that will not require public funds, or by making villains out of competing politicians who might ask Americans to sacrifice to help fund poor segregated schools.

Kozol sites many quotes from politicians and media leaders who blame parents, bad management, local will, teaching methods and other factors for the troubles in these schools; but it is hard to take these claims seriously when the problems are as simple and obvious as the need to fix a hole in the roof. Inferior teaching methods do not result in melted computers, raw sewage in lunchrooms, books missing pages or overcrowded classrooms. Parents who vote to tax themselves at a higher rate than others in order to improve their schools are not to blame if books are missing pages and labs lack running water. Kozol focuses on these disruptive physical problems to make a point. No reasonable person could argue that these damaged buildings are good places to study. On the other hand, the author shows how expensive, well-staffed new facilities grind out highly successful students. Clearly, money has made a difference.

It is more difficult for the author to support the idea that more money for teachers will attract better teachers. (After all, if racism drives school segregation, it's possible that

many racist teachers might not work at a non-white school for any salary.) When he wants to prove that fewer students per teacher will improve learning, he is only able to point to personal experience as a teacher and common sense. Still, it's hard to argue with the statistic that a vast number of children show up to school every day and get no teacher.

Kozol is less clear about why the media shy away from raising questions the true economic problems with U.S. schools. Perhaps a news report saying, "This school needs money" stokes less interest than a report about gang violence at a local high school.

The author thinks the federal government should take over the job of distributing money to schools because money is not equally shared on a district or state level.

Style

Perspective

As stated in his opening chapter, the author has a long history of working for progressive social issues in various fields, but his first love is teaching. One can tell from his description of the interviewees that he likes children and respects all sorts of people equally. (He even comes to admire a callous, selfish teen because she speaks her mind honestly instead of hiding behind political correctness.) Kozol seems to feel that if the general public would think of the students as children instead of dangerous "others" they might demand these kids be treated better.

Perhaps it is his basic love of humanity that prevents the author from expressing rage, or hatred for those who treat these children so savagely. The overwhelming feeling throughout the book is one of sadness, sympathy and concern. His perspective is not one of a firebrand or blamer, it is a person worried and filled with love.

Kozol goes to great lengths to show us these children as children, rather than faceless or even menacing "others." He hopes this approach will appeal to the better nature of voters and decision makers who can go out and demand social change. Other writers may work for social change through rousing speeches or shocking challenges, but Kozol wants to make readers feel shame for allowing such unfeeling treatment of little children.

Tone

Kozol seems to realize that the schools he is not the first person hoping to help students at inferior schools. In fact, he is only one in a long line of authors and social scientists and politicians arguing for change but failing to make change. For reasons he explains in the book, an emotional appeal to fairness is not helping matters. So instead, Kozol takes a patient, logical tone in building his argument step by step. He looks for reasons why others might challenges his ideas, examines the challenges then defeats them one by one. He builds up a mountain of evidence as he travels from city to city observing. The author builds trust with readers through this method and does not come across as an outraged or knee-jerk reformer.

The style is not informal, but it is somewhat personal. In other words, the author does not directly address the reader as "you" or include the reader in "we" statements; however he does seem to assume the reader is a good, fair person who, knowing the facts, will do the right thing. This attitude that the reader is a friend is more personal than perhaps trying to impress the reader with difficult language, or dazzle the reader with statistics. Also, Kozol tries to make the reader feel he or she is in the room with the author during interviews with children and teachers. He does not attempt to interpret what the interviewees say, but of course, he edits out material that does not lead to his

point. In this way the author shares many intimate moments with teachers and children but expresses trust that the reader will come to the right conclusions. Kozol comes across as a genuinely nice, likeable individual and in this way builds trust.

The author is uniquely sympathetic and has a knack for choosing heartbreaking details. He helps readers to care about the poor students in the inferior schools and even to understand the more privileged students who go to the better schools. The idea of interviewing children instead of simply asking authorities about students is a masterful stroke of genius. Children are guileless, which means they haven't the skills to hide their feelings. Often in *Savage Inequalities* the most touching moments occur when a youngster says something a grownup would be ashamed to confess. However, Kozol does not reserve his sympathy for the children living in sewage-laden slums, attending schools where books are scares and qualified teachers a dream. He also shows a measure of understanding and sympathy for those who don't demand change in education because they simply want the best for their own children. Kozol's sympathetic understanding may help win over readers who are frightened to rock the boat of educational status quo. The book is very much about race discrimination, yet it is impossible to tell what race Kozol identifies himself as, because he seems fair to all.

Savage Inequalities is thorough as can be in tracking down detailed pros and cons on various issues. The book covers over a decade of time and lists before and after results of numerous court battles. The author asks difficult questions then roams the halls of schools seeking out anyone who will add to his knowledge of the issues. He even investigates a very poor white school next to wealthier suburban schools just to confirm that the lack of money and respect given to these kids means disaster for their futures.

Kozol's entire argument leads up to a moral conclusion: fixing these schools is the correct thing to do because we are Americans who believe in the moral principle of equality. Another author might have written almost the same book but concluded that fixing these schools would ultimately make better workers out of the students or prevent crime - more selfish reasons, but valid reasons nevertheless. The point is, for all his reason and logic, Kozol believes in doing right for right's sake.

Structure

Some authors start out with a general overview then go back to prove the ideas laid out. Kozol does just the opposite, and this approach makes a powerful impact. He begins by showing specific, terrible injustices then examines how the troubles have come to be, sometimes by reviewing court decisions or by tracing the movement of labor away from a particular area. Next, he talks about those things standing in the way of improvement, often vague attitudes or fears. Finally, toward the end of the book, he begins to outline his vision for getting past the roadblocks and improving all schools. The result is that the reader is hooked right away, wondering how in the world such awful things have come to pass.

The writer takes a ping-pong approach to his work that is sometimes helpful but occasionally a little confusing. The idea is to juxtapose or place opposites together in order to show severe contrasts. This tact is effective most of the time. Occasionally, the author will hop too quickly from one school to another making the reader suspicious about what may have been missed. Kozol seems unwilling to simply skip a school because he wants to prove that in almost every case the non-white schools get the short end of the stick. The most helpful use of this back and forth is when he quotes court cases and arguments against different legislation. Kozol is very good a boiling down cases that may have stretched out for years.

The sentence structure is typical of a newspaper journalist or TV report with brief, clear language. One does not get lost in subjunctive clauses or parenthetical statements. The author wants readers to get caught up in the realities not to be distracted by style.

Quotes are the primary tool of the author. Not only does he allow us to hear children in their own voices giving pathetic testimony to the tragedy of their lives, he also uses quotes to show how callous and unfeeling some people are. Racism, fear and selfishness are all revealed through the words of lawyers, congress people, judges, school board members and the ordinary Joe.

Quotes

"In certain ways," he says, "it's harder now because in those days it was a clear enemy you had to face, a man in a hood and not a statistician. NO one could persuade you that you were to blame. Now the choices seem like they ar left to you and, if you make the wrong choice, you are made to understand you are to blame." Chapter 1, page 26

"I have four girls right now in my senior home room who are pregnant or have just had babies. When I ask them why this happens, I am told, 'Well, there's no reason not to have a baby. There's not much for me in public school.' The truth is, that's a pretty honest answer. A diploma from a ghetto high school doesn't count for much in the United States today. So, if this is really the last education that a person's going to get, she's probably perceptive in the statement. Ah, there's so much bitterness—unfairness—there, you know. Most of these pregnant girls are not the ones who have much self esteem..." Chapter 1 page 26

"We have a school named for Dr. King. The school is full of sewer water and the doors are locked with chains. Every student in that school is Black. It's like a terrible joke on history" Chapter 1, page 35

"This is the point of it," she says, teaching them three things. Number one: self-motivation. Number two: self esteem. Number three: you help our sister and your brother. I tell them they're responsible for one another. I give no grades in the first marking period because I do not want them to be too competitive." Chapter 2, page 48

"To ask an individual to break down doors that we have chained and bolted in advance of his arrival is unfair." Chapter 2 page 62

"If the citizens of Chicago put more money in then they're free to do so. But you will not buy your way to better performance." Chapter 2, page 81

"The same bank presidents who offer gifts to help our segregated schools" a Mother in Chicago said, are the ones who have assured their segregation by redlining neighborhoods like these for 30 years. "Maybe they may like to train our children to be good employees. That would make their businesses more profitable. Do they want to see our children taking corporate positions form their children? If they gave our kids what their kids have, we might earn enough to move into their neighborhoods." Chapter 2, Page 81

"I don't think the powers that be in New York City understand, or want to understand that if they do not give these children a sufficient education to lead healthy and productive lives, we will be their victims later on. We'll pay the price some day in violence, in economic costs." Chapter 3, page 89

"You have children in those neighborhoods who live in virtual hell. They enter school five years behind. What do they get? Then, as he spreads his hands out on his desk he

says, "I have to ask myself why there should be an elementary school in District 10 with fifteen hundred children. Why should there be an elementary school within a skating rink? Why should the Board of Ed allow this? This is not the way that things should be." Chapter 3, page 98

"The perception that the poorest districts are beyond help still remains" Chapter 3, page 99

"...after a while they being to say,' Well, I have this. Why not keep it for my children?' In other words it locks them into the idea of always having something more." Alexander, Chapter 3, page 105

"Here's what we should do. Put more money into preschool, kindergarten, elementary years. Pay college kids to tutor inner city children. Get rid of the property tax, which is too uneven and use income taxes to support these schools. Pay teachers more to work in more places like the Bronx. It has to come from taxes. Pay them extra to go to the worst schools. You could forgive their college loans to make it worth their while." Chapter 3, page 130

"In order to get these kids to pass the tests, they've got to be divided up according to their previous test results....What does it do to character? The children in the highest groups become elitist, selfish and they separate themselves from other children." Chapter 4, page 143

"And because they fail time after time they give up or quit. She says "If you don't believe money makes a difference, let your children go to school in Camden." Chapter 4, page 145

"Is it possible that the defendants in these cases do not sense the irony," she asks," of spending so much money to obtain the services of experts to convince the court that money isn't the real issue?" Chapter 4, page 174

"Thus as in New Jersey, equal funding is opposed for opposite reasons: either because it won't improve or benefit the poorer schools - not "necessarily," the governor's assistant says - or because it would improve and benefit those schools but would be subtracting something from the other districts view this as unjust." Chapter 4, page 199

"It is" he said, "an inescapable fact that if one district has more funds available per pupil than another district it will have greater choice" in what it offers to its children." Chapter 6, page 218

Topics for Discussion

How could you discover if the unfair conditions reported by Kozol in the 1990s exist in schools across the country today?

Does Kozol present a balanced view of public school separation? Why or why not?

Do you believe racism will ever end? How might changes be made?

If you could wave a magic wand and change reality instantly, what would you fix first in the public schools that are suffering? What would you change next?

What was Kozol's reason for quoting children instead of only talking to adults and authorities?

Have you ever attended a school or event where everyone was of a different race? How did this make you feel?

Do you agree with Kozol's idea that equal federal funding might change educational realities for a lot of people?

Which child or situation (if any) touched your heart most?