

THE YLPR INTERVIEW:

Jonathan Kozol

Jonathan Kozol is one of the country's leading advocates for poor children. Born in Boston, he graduated from Harvard and received a Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford. Kozol began his career as an educator, but he always combined teaching with activism, designing and helping to initiate adult literacy programs that served as models for many others. He also founded The Fund for the Homeless, a nonprofit organization that provides homeless families and their children with emergency assistance.

*In *Savage Inequalities*,¹ his latest book, Kozol describes the disparities that exist between cities and suburbs, within city school systems, and inside individual schools—disparities that are more severe than those he documented over two decades ago in his first book, *Death at an Early Age*.²*

In February, Kozol talked by phone with the Yale Law & Policy Review's Michael Barr, Sarah Cleveland, Bryan Tramont, and Richard Winchester. What follows are excerpts from that conversation.

YLPR: Why did you decide to write *Savage Inequalities*?

Kozol: First of all, I don't really decide what books I'm going to write. I don't choose topics; the topics tend to choose me. This one came about almost inevitably because my previous book had been about homeless families in New York. I spent a couple of years in a place called the Martinique Hotel and wrote a book about the families I knew there.³ A number of those families ultimately moved into the Bronx, and I kept in touch with them. The kids I've known over the years tend to call me up—particularly collect late at night—high school kids especially. So, I would hear what they were going through in their public schools in New York. One young man in particular, whose mother I'd written about, was telling me some really chilling stories. . . . So, I went up to the Bronx to visit him and his mother and to talk with them. Then I started visiting the schools, and before I knew it I was writing a book. I didn't really plan it. That was the immediate impulse that drew me into it.

1. JONATHAN KOZOL, *SAVAGE INEQUALITIES: CHILDREN IN AMERICA'S SCHOOLS* (1991).

2. JONATHAN KOZOL, *DEATH AT AN EARLY AGE* (1967).

3. JONATHAN KOZOL, *RACHEL AND HER CHILDREN: HOMELESS FAMILIES IN AMERICA* (1988).

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But the other aspect was this. I started writing about children in public schools more than twenty-five years ago. . . . I just felt it was time—after a quarter century—to go back and see if anything had changed. I think there was that longing in me all along. And then prompted by the calls I was getting from these kids in the Bronx, I actually got on the plane and started to do it.

YLPR: What kind of changes did you discover?

Kozol: By and large, public schools around the United States—certainly the inner city schools—are still separate and still unequal—and in most cases more separate and less equal than they were when I began. The sole exceptions are in Mississippi and some of the other districts in the South. Ironically the schools in Mississippi today are among the most integrated in the United States. The most segregated schools are in New York and Chicago, home of all those former liberals.

YLPR: Why do you think that is the case?

Kozol: Well, the obvious reason is that the federal courts enforced desegregation in the South by court order. When the issue came North, an awful lot of former liberals suddenly grew circumspect. They were all in favor of busing black and white kids in Mississippi, but they weren't so keen on busing black kids from Harlem to Great Neck, or from Camden to Cherry Hill in New Jersey. Part of it was simply that northern liberals lost heart when their children were at stake. Another part is that the Supreme Court ruled out desegregation with the suburbs in the *Milliken*⁴ decision in the 1970s. That, I think, allowed the white suburbanites in the North to take their conscience off the hook. It's not a sufficient explanation because they certainly could have acted out of ethics rather than under a court order. They chose not to.

THE ETERNAL MANDATE

YLPR: Do you think that desegregation efforts should be reinvigorated? If so, how comprehensive should they be and what should they look

4. *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717 (1974) (holding interdistrict school desegregation plan could not be imposed unless racially discriminatory conduct by state or school districts was substantial cause of interdistrict segregation).

like? Would one component be busing between inner cities and suburbs?

Kozol: This subject is so unfashionable nowadays that it almost takes an effort of will to speak the word—to say that buses are a damned good way, short of violent revolution, to transform a society, and a much better way of course. The fact is that there are successful busing models, usually on a small scale, even in the North. Boston has a voluntary suburban busing program with at least fifty suburbs, and it's a remarkable success. Virtually every black child who rides the bus to the suburbs of Boston graduates from school and goes to college. And the majority finish college, which is even more unusual. For a black student who remains in Boston, the odds of graduating high school and going on to college are about one in four. [Those statistics] alone should represent a mandate to increase that kind of program on a massive scale. But of course, the climate isn't hospitable to such notions. . . .

So long as white people flee the cities to live in their protected suburbs, what are the options? One option is to go to court and to force these suburbs to build thousands of units of low-income housing so that poor black people can live there. Another option is to reinvent the busing agenda all over again. To say the least, that is politically unpalatable these days. But I don't know too many other answers to that question, and frankly, I don't believe that anything is ever going to change significantly in inner city schools so long as they remain the repositories of segregated children.

YLPR: What about creating schools designed specifically for certain at-risk groups, like young black males. Would that be an alternative?

Kozol: The entire school reform discussion over the past ten years has been posited on the acceptance of the ghetto and the ghetto school as permanent disfigurements on the horizon of democracy. There has been abject cowardice on the part of many scholars [on this issue]. I've just lived too long to take much interest in a plan to build a better ghetto school. The ghetto is itself an evil and diseased construction. So long as kids go to ghetto schools, we will see ghetto apathy, ghetto anger, ghetto pathology, ghetto disfunction. I don't think anything can change that. . . .

So far as I am concerned there is no such thing as good segregated education, not in the United States. And I sometimes despair at hearing the romanticized utterances of certain black teachers in

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Detroit, Milwaukee, or somewhere else who are waving the banner of Booker T. Washington all over again and saying, "Well, we can do it on our own. We can create an enclave of black excellence." Sure, a handful of people can always do that, but the way our economy works and the way our society works, segregated schools in large numbers will always be unequal schools. And they will always be unhealthy schools. That to me is very important.

YLPR: Some busing programs are now winding down like the court ordered program in St. Louis. Is a busing program ever done? Is there a point at which you reach completion, where your goals are achieved?

Kozol: On the day when one out of every five or ten kids in Great Neck, Long Island is black or Hispanic, and when there's no public school in New York City where 100% of the children are black, I'd say yes, forget about busing; we have at last transcended apartheid; we don't need to use buses anymore; we are one society. But until then, I think it represents an eternal mandate. . . .

The notion that we're still dealing with the vestiges of "past" discrimination is absurd. There is nothing past about racial discrimination in America. We remain one of the most racist nations in the world. You need only spend ten days in [some inner city] schools . . . and then spend another ten days in the rich suburbs to understand that we have a dual system. This is not a relic of the past; this is today. . . .

I walk into Morris High School in the South Bronx, and there's a waterfall in the main stairwell on a rainy day. You can't find a computer in the school. There are no advance placement classes because they can't afford them. The plaster is crumbling out of the ceiling. In the guidance counselor's office, there's a rain barrel next to the desk because the roof's leaking. . . . At Rye Senior High School in Rye, New York, one of the wealthiest white suburbs in the country, they're spending almost twice as much per pupil [compared to the South Bronx]. I see 100 IBMs and a beautiful carpeted library. I see a building that's in perfect repair. The campus looks like that of Andover or Groton. I meet teachers who are teaching half as many students as you find in classes in the South Bronx.

I go into another high school in New York where there are forty-five kids in every class—where the teachers literally can't remember the names of all their students because they have five

classes of forty-five kids each. The principal reassures a teacher and says, "Don't worry about the large classes; half of these kids will drop out by Christmas." And the kids obligingly do. The New York City public schools are budgeted on the assumption that we can persuade half of these black and Hispanic kids to quit. If they all stayed, there would be nobody to teach them.

YLPR: What do you mean that they're budgeted on that assumption?

Kozol: These schools are run on the assumption that we can induce one half of these kids to fail because we expect them to fail. And that expectation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. New York City is now spending \$7,000 for each student in public school; in Great Neck right now, which is a very wealthy suburb, they spend about \$16,000, more than twice as much. If all these kids in the South Bronx didn't drop out of school, the per pupil funding would be even less. . . . If there were twice as many kids, there would be half as much money. They'd be down to less than \$4,000 per pupil.

YLPR: Doesn't that point to the need for a more equitable funding mechanism than one based on property taxes?

Kozol: What is at stake, frankly, is not a technical dilemma about how to change the funding system. That's not really the issue because if it were just a technical mistake, if we just had "the wrong funding system," people would say, "Oh, that's unfair. Let's change it." That would be no problem. The point is that this is the system affluent Americans *want* because it rewards their children. If we had an equitable funding system in America, thousands of poor black and Hispanic kids from New York City, Boston, Chicago, New Haven, Bridgeport, and Hartford would be competing with you and me to get into Harvard and Yale. And a lot of us wouldn't get in. There would be a bigger applicant pool of competent people.

. . . .
At heart, we are willing to place the self-interest of our children ahead of that of other peoples' children and in so doing—though unconsciously—we write off other peoples' children as expendable. And we really do treat them as expendable; you see this in lots of ways. When you put kids in East St. Louis into a school that's flooded with sewage, when these kids are virtually drowning in excrement, it's clear that we regard them as excrement. . . . When we pack thousands of poor black kids in New

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York City into these squalid homeless shelters where they're drowning in trash, it's clear that we regard them as trash. I see it as much more than a dilemma for lawyers or a dilemma for school finance experts. I think it's really a question for theologians as to how we permit ourselves to be so dehumanized.

YLPR: But many Americans believe that as a result of their own success they should be able to provide a better future for their children. Should they not have that expectation?

Kozol: Look, it's a perfectly legitimate expectation; it's only human. And there are certain areas in which that expectation ought to be fulfilled. A man and woman who have been able to work hard and earn a lot of money certainly have a right to give their kids a bigger house, a nicer lawn, a swimming pool, a summer camp, trips to Europe, nicer clothing, and all the rest. They also have a right, if they want, to pay a huge amount of money to send their kids to private school. But they don't have the right to get that privilege under the aegis of the public system.

PRECONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

YLPR: Do you ever see national equalization of school financing? If so, how would you see that coming about?

Kozol: Well, it's politically unimaginable at this point in our history; that's why I didn't even try to discuss it in my book. . . . The other reason why I focused on the state level is that there were several very important cases pending while I was writing the book. [Cases in] Kentucky, Texas, and New Jersey were being decided while I was writing.

There was also a point where the Supreme Court determined [in the *Rodriguez* decision] . . . that unequal funding between districts was not a federal issue—that [education] wasn't a protected right.⁵ In *Milliken*, the Court ruled that segregated white suburbs could not be compelled to participate in a metropolitan busing solution.⁶ . . . Those cases ended the Civil Rights movement as far as the Supreme Court is concerned and as far as federal law is

5. *San Antonio Independent Sch. Dist. v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1, 29-39 (1973).

6. 418 U.S. at 744-45.

concerned. So, when I speak of this issue now, I speak of the states because that is where the victories are being won today.

YLPR: What are the implications of a roughly equal education for school financing? Does that mean spending the same amount on each student, or does it mean an inverted structure from that which we have today, i.e. giving the most money to the schools most in need?

Kozol: When I say equal education, I mean it in the context in which Martin Luther King spoke of equality. He said equal resources for unequal needs is not equality. That goes without saying. So, if there were nationally equalized schooling in America, there would have to be certain adjustments. One logical adjustment would be for differences in cost of living in different parts of the country. . . . Funding would also have to be adjusted for the greater needs that some children face. The kids in the South Bronx have greater needs than the kids in wealthy suburbs.

YLPR: Even if we accept the fact that it's politically unlikely for your vision to be realized within our lifetime, is there something we can do to make it less impossible?

Kozol: Yes, I think so. . . . But they won't be technical answers; they'd be on the one hand political and on the other hand more theological in a way. It's very important that the federal courts, particularly the U.S. Supreme Court, be able to revitalize the ethical tradition of the [Chief Justice Earl] Warren Court, of the years when Justice [Thurgood] Marshall had an influential role in the court.

YLPR: What do you mean by revitalization of the Warren Court?

Kozol: I mean a Court that has compassion for the victims of our society. No matter what we hear in law school from constitutional lawyers of the alleged objectivity of the courts, it's clear that an enormous amount of personal conviction enters the decisionmaking process. In *Rodriguez*, Justice [Lewis] Powell made a distinction between two types of denial. He said it is not alleged that poor children are denied all education, only that they are denied the best possible education. And then he said that there's nothing in the Constitution that assures them the best possible education. And he said that as things are, they're certainly getting enough to have a minimal basic

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participation in the democratic process.⁷ That's terribly subjective because what is considered basic or minimal or essential for a poor child unfortunately is generally determined by a rich adult. Wealthy people in the state of Texas probably would think that poor people get just about the kind of essential education they need if they are skilled enough to fill bottom-level jobs. That's the way one would see it from a privileged point of view. And that seems to be the way that Powell saw it. He seemed to say that people have sufficient skill to participate in the democratic process if they can vote, but without any consideration of whether they know enough to vote in their self-interest. It's terribly subjective.

YLPR: You said there were several things that would help lay the foundation for change. What else would have to happen?

Kozol: One other direction is to try to bring some transformation to the education of affluent kids—so that they would not grow up so anesthetized, so that kids who are now in these privileged high schools would not go to court twenty years from now to oppose equity suits, but would surprise the world by joining as co-plaintiffs in suits that would deny their wealthy districts the unfair advantage they enjoy. . . .

There is a third unpredictable force that could speed up the process of change. That would be if urban desperation explodes some day into unmanageable riots. I hope that doesn't happen because it would entail so much lost of life. If that should happen, however, you can bet that it would speed up the solution to the problem because society would then be forced to act not out of ethics, but out of fear. There's nothing like a terrifying riot to compel society to act on an injustice. I hope it doesn't come to that.

THE BUSH PLAN

YLPR: Short of the kind of fundamental societal reform you're talking about, let's look at some of the narrower proposals that are on the table for the next five to ten years? For example, let's take President George Bush's America 2000 Program.⁸ Could you evaluate it?

7. 411 U.S. at 35-37.

8. PROPOSED LEGISLATION—AMERICA 2000 EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION ACT, H.R. DOC. NO. 91, 102d Cong., 1st Sess. (1991).

Kozol: First of all, the Bush plan, America 2000, is far too leisurely. The target deadline is felicitously chosen. President Bush won't be in office in the year 2000, so he won't be held accountable for the inevitable failure. One of the highlights of the plan is that children will all be ready to enter school by the year 2000. That is to say, they will be intellectually prepared to enter school. There's not a chance in the world that that will happen unless the President decides to fund Head Start for all the eligible kids in this country. . . . It would take \$5 billion to give that to every eligible three- and four-year-old low-income child. The President won't do it. He's adding about \$600 million, which will increase the number of kids in Head Start by about 100,000, but that leaves about 1 million still excluded. That, to me, suggests the insincerity of the goal. After all, if he really wants to reach the goal, we needn't wait until the year 2000; we can do it now.

The President has also called for national exams. Kids in public schools in the United States already take about 200 million standardized exams each year. . . . If a nation could be tested into excellence we would be the smartest country in the world. We take plenty of tests. Almost every state now has mandatory state exams also. Adding one more layer of exams would accomplish nothing.

YLPR: On the issue of national exams, some advocates of national education standards and national exams have argued that if you set a high standard that all children would be expected to meet, then you could use that to define the substance of a minimally adequate education.⁹

Kozol: Well, I could see the reasoning in that. Unfortunately, I don't think it will work that way. I think that such exams will not be used as a spur to equity but will simply become another instrument for blaming the victim and for telling children that they're failing. In other words, I don't think a national exam will lead to national equality. I think it will lead to a lot more exhortation in the William Bennett style. Poor children will be excoriated for their failure; their teachers will be condemned; their parents particularly will be condemned for not helping them, as the President constantly says—although he refuses to provide adult literacy funds to teach parents enough so the parents could help them. If the track record of this

9. See RAY MARSHALL & MARC TUCKER, THINKING FOR A LIVING: EDUCATION AND THE WEALTH OF NATIONS (forthcoming 1992).

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administration and its predecessor is a guide to what is likely to happen in the future, I believe that the effect would be primarily punitive.

YLPR: What about President's endorsement of school choice?

Kozol: That's the worst part of it. . . . First of all, so far as public school choice is concerned, there is absolutely no evidence anywhere in America that it is successful. The commonly cited examples are Minnesota and New York City. In Minnesota a choice plan went into effect a couple of years ago; it has had minimal effect. I think that less than one percent of the student population has even taken advantage of the plan. Those who have done so are mostly middle-class students.

There has been some partial but mixed success in one small model in New York City, but it has never been replicated on a city-wide basis. It serves about 14,000 of the nearly 1 million children in the New York City public schools. The reason it hasn't been replicated is because it's terribly expensive. If it could have been replicated, it would have happened by now because the program has been in existence for more than fifteen years. And even in that one model—it's in District 4 in New York City in East Harlem—it is not at all clear that choice has anything to do with the success of the program. It's far more likely that the success there is attributable to a handful of very charismatic teachers and principals who are involved in that district, and also due to the fact that the district, being very close to some liberal white neighborhoods, has been able to attract large populations of white children in the schools. It's a model that can't be repeated elsewhere in New York City.

Most of the models of choice we've seen have been disastrous. The classic example of choice is here in Massachusetts where we have a full-fledged interdistrict choice plan where parents can opt to take their kids out of one school and put them into another school in a different district if they want. How has it worked? Well, here, as virtually in every other state, there's no transportation money. . . . What happens? Look at a poor city called Brockton, where per-pupil spending is very low, where half the kids are poor and minority, and where there are 1,000 non-English speaking children in bi-lingual classes. What happened when the choice plan started? Of the first 110 children whose parents shifted them out of Brockton to the nearest wealthy suburb, 95% were affluent,

middle-class people, though the city is half poor. Although there are 1,000 Hispanic and other bi-lingual kids in the district, only 1 bi-lingual student transferred. Meanwhile, of course, the district lost all the money that went with those departing children. Per-pupil funding followed the children into the rich district. What choice has done in Massachusetts is to unleash the flight of white from black and rich from poor. That's pretty much what's happening in several other districts, and that's certainly what happened in the early years of choice.

YLPR: How do you feel about the possibility of using vouchers which permit people to use public money to go to private schools?

Kozol: That's the newest proposal and it's manifestly dishonest. [Secretary of Education Lamar] Alexander says that rich people already have the choice of going to prep schools (like the one his own son goes to). So, he says, why shouldn't the poor have the same choice? And in this way, this spokesman for one of the most conservative and racist administrations in recent American history poses as the ally of poor children. I find that reprehensible.

But let's take his statement on its merits. Why, he asks, shouldn't the poor have the same choice that he had, for example, to send his kids to private school? Listening to Mr. Alexander, someone might get the curious idea that he's proposing to give poor kids in Washington, D.C. \$12,000 vouchers so they can go to the prep school his son attends. But that, of course, is not at all what he's proposing. The vouchers proposed are always very modest sums: \$2,000 or \$3,000. What could you buy for a \$2,000 voucher? Can you buy tuition to Andover so your child could go to school with people of the social class of George Bush or Dan Quayle? Of course not; Andover costs more than \$15,000. What could you do with it? Well, if you're as rich as Secretary Alexander, you could use that money to subsidize tuition at Andover; simply add the rest yourself. A middle-income family that's earning \$50,000 a year might supplement that \$2,000 voucher with maybe another \$6,000 and send their child to a middle rate private school If you're a very poor black person in Harlem with a little bit of extra money, you might take that voucher and add a bit more to send your kid to the local Catholic school. But if you're at the rock bottom—a mother on welfare with three kids who is out of food every month, waiting for the next food stamp installment—you can't buy anything with the voucher. It's worthless. . . .

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So in fact, what the administration is proposing under the guise of choice is simply a more cleverly devised dual system. It would be more divided than it is today because at least some of the poor would be able to buy their way out—not many, but the most fortunate of the poor—those that could add on a little extra money, or those who have cars so they could transport their kids, or those who have the savvy and connections to manipulate the system. Those people would be able to abandon their poor neighbors and perhaps get their kids into at least marginal private schools. But the poorest of the poor would be more isolated than they ever were before. Their schools would have lost money; they would have lost many of their most ambitious and successful classmates; and the community would have lost the activism of its most effective parents.

Now what if President Bush were to say to us, "Look, I have a *real* choice plan, and here's how it's going to work. Every child in America will have a \$15,000 voucher, full transportation costs, and a massive adult education program for every parent so that every parent will know what the options are." Good Lord, if he did that, I'd become a Republican. That's not going to happen. So, we're back to the equity issue again. A choice plan without equity is no choice at all.

YLPR: Do you think there's a difference in outcomes between the Bush plan for choice and the choice plan that John Chubb and Terry Moe endorse?¹⁰

Kozol: Not much. I think Chubb in particular is insufferably arrogant in the prescriptions that he draws and in the assumptions that he makes. For example, when some of the black organizations or some local activists protest that poor people will find it tough to make sophisticated choices, Chubb replies rather pompously that he can't believe that black people are so stupid that they can't make good choices. And he even implies that it's presumptuous for anybody to attribute the inability to choose to poor people. . . . What he's doing there is not blaming the victim, but flattering the victim for the victim's own inevitably constricted choices—choices which, in a way, are convenient for people like Mr. Chubb because those poor people will not choose to go to the kinds of schools his own

10. See JOHN CHUBB & TERRY MOE, *POLITICS, MARKETS AND AMERICA'S SCHOOLS* (1990).

kids will attend. And if they do, they will not be able to get in. So, it's a devious kind of flattery.

THE KOZOL PLAN

YLPR: You seem to focus on equity at the high school and grade school levels. However, at this point in time, a high school education in and of itself often may condemn the students to menial jobs. What about colleges, universities, and graduate schools? What are the issues that confront those institutions and what should we be doing to address them?

Kozol: Well, in most of the states that I know, the state colleges, universities, and community colleges are bitterly strapped for funds right now, and most of the state governments are cutting back. This means not only less course offerings but also less scholarship money. Already I'm seeing an awful lot of poor kids and poor black kids who would have gone on to college five years ago but are now simply putting it off, possibly forever. That's one issue.

But a more important issue is the fact that it really doesn't matter what happens at the college level—what kind of policies or what kind of admissions or what kind of affirmative action exists—if the [grade and high] schools are consistently destroying the vast majority of poor black children. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton could offer half the spots of each incoming class to inner city kids, but the question is where will they get those kids so long as the inner city schools remain in the condition I described. Well, those three colleges can always get them because they can steal them from the applicant pools of less famous colleges. But if we're speaking of a net increase across the board in the United States, where are these kids going to come from? . . .

Unless we increase the pool of competent children coming out of public schools, one college is simply going to be stealing kids from another college. And that's the sadness of it all. Really, the issue doesn't start at the admissions office at Yale or Harvard; it starts at Head Start. And that brings me back to politics again. It starts at the White House.

YLPR: If you were the head of New York City schools and had \$1 billion in new money to spend over the next five years, how would you spend it? What priorities would you set?

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Kozol: The first thing I would do would be to start a massive school reconstruction program because kids simply shouldn't have to spend their childhood in the kind of squalid buildings that I've seen. The second thing I'd do would be to universalize Head Start, starting with three-year-olds—full-day Head Start. I would combine Head Start with a parent literacy program so that the mothers and fathers of these kids, when they bring them to Head Start, could themselves receive the education they were denied when they were children—so that they could be better parents, more effective parents, who could read to their kids and help them. . . .

Next, I would create a whole new kind of school. I would call it a family learning center. I'd combine it with the Head Start program and the parent literacy program. I would accept, temporarily, the reality of racial segregation in those early years and simply try to make these the most spectacular little schools in the world—make them as small as possible and pay the teachers who work in these schools at least as much money as they would get if they were teaching at Yale or Wesleyan or Amherst so that it would be regarded as a prestigious career. Pay them \$75,000 a year so they'd stay there for a lifetime.

At that point, after the third grade, I would combine the New York City schools with the 100 wealthiest adjacent suburbs. That's what I would do if I had power. But I probably wouldn't start in New York City. I'd start with a small city like Hartford where the desegregation process would be simpler and the logistics would be easier.

YLPR: How do you feel about tracking? Specifically, without tracking, do you sacrifice a certain degree of the cream-of-the-crop excellence that is conceivably possible with it?

Kozol: That's certainly a belief held by most privileged parents in this country; that's why they try to get their kids in gifted classes. But I don't really think it's true. I think that in a good mixed-ability class with a good teacher, the slower kids do not pull the faster kids down; it works the other way around. Unfortunately, it's very hard to do that in an inner city school with forty children because, in that situation, the teacher faces so much chaos that she or he inevitably is going to short-change some kids in order to help others. But if the inner city schools have a class size of eighteen, as in a wealthy suburb, and if those teachers were well paid and very competent, then it would be very easy for a good teacher to teach

slow readers, average readers, and terrific readers all in the same classroom in the same day. Nobody would suffer; everyone would gain. The more advantaged kids, the more privileged kids, would also get something that they would never get in a tracked class and that is the opportunity to learn something about decency by helping other children. That's one thing you'll never get in a gifted class. But learning to help other people isn't one of the virtues that have been much prized in the age of [millionaires] Donald Trump and Michael Milken.

OTHER OPTIONS

YLPR: Education law scholar James Liebman believes that school-based management, shared decisionmaking, and more parent involvement in the public school system will make a difference.¹¹ Will it, even when resources are scarce?

Kozol: I agree with him in general and I certainly find his proposition more persuasive than that of Chubb and Moe. But I don't think we should be naive about it. There are many incremental changes we can make that are worth doing. It's good to have parent involvement; it's good to have shared decisionmaking; it's good to have school-based management; it's good to have decentralized schools. All those things are good—all of which fall under the umbrella of restructuring. But the truth of the matter is that restructured destitution is still destitution. I wouldn't want to invest much of my life in trying to make a more functional ghetto school system. We should be working on strategies that would end the existence of the ghetto and the ghetto school.

YLPR: Is there something the public sector can learn from what the Teach for America program has done to attract people to the teaching profession?¹²

Kozol: They're very good, but in the end, it is inevitably ephemeral. I have all the admiration in the world for Wendy Kopp, who started it. I've met a number of the teachers who've been in that program and they seem to be damn good, but it is more a matter of charity

11. James S. Liebman, *Voice, Not Choice*, 101 YALE L.J. 259 (1991). See also Stanley S. Litow, *Restructuring New York City's Schools*, 10 YALE L. & POL'Y REV. 30 (1992).

12. See Wendy Kopp, *Reforming Schools of Education Will Not Be Enough*, 10 YALE L. & POL'Y REV. 58 (1992).

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than it is of sustained government commitment. A national service corps based on the Teach for America model would be exciting—a program which financed not a couple of hundred, but perhaps a couple of hundred thousand graduates of the best private colleges and public universities in America to teach for three or four years after college. That would be a big step in the right direction. I don't think that's going to happen.

YLPR: Can private initiatives serve as a model for reform? For instance, let's take the I Have a Dream program started by Eugene Lang.¹³

Kozol: I admire him. He's a wonderful person. And if there were about 500,000 other wealthy philanthropists who were willing to do the same thing, I wouldn't be talking about the need for government funding. But there aren't a half million people like Lang. There may be a few hundred people like him, and they do a lot of good for an infinitesimal number of children. I suspect Eugene Lang in his wisdom would probably agree that charity would never be a substitute for justice.

YLPR: Child psychologist Dr. James Comer has advocated providing extensive social services for children in schools,¹⁴ and one of the implications of your inverted school financing equity is that schools should take on at least some of the broader social problems that present themselves in the community in which the school is located.

Kozol: Yes, I think Dr. Comer is absolutely right; he's one of the most interesting educators in the country. There are people in government and even, unfortunately, in some school systems who tell us that such matters are beyond the precincts of the school. . . . But it isn't a question as to whether we should or shouldn't deal with them. The point is if we don't deal with them, we *can't* teach these children. That's the reality. Kids simply can't learn if they're hungry, and they can't learn if they're ill or homeless. Schools have to address these matters if they want to educate these kids.

I don't care whether it's done in the school building or in a community center across the street from the school. I don't care if it's done under the school administration or under separate administration. The point is that these are things enlightened societies do

13. See Christopher A. Coons & Elizabeth A. Petrick, *A Decade of Making Dreams into Reality: Lessons from the I Have A Dream Program*, 10 YALE L. & POL'Y REV. 82 (1992).

14. See JAMES P. COMER, *SCHOOL POWER* (1980).

for all their children. These are things that are done for the children of Germany and the children of Sweden and the children of Japan. It's intolerable that we refuse to do it in America.