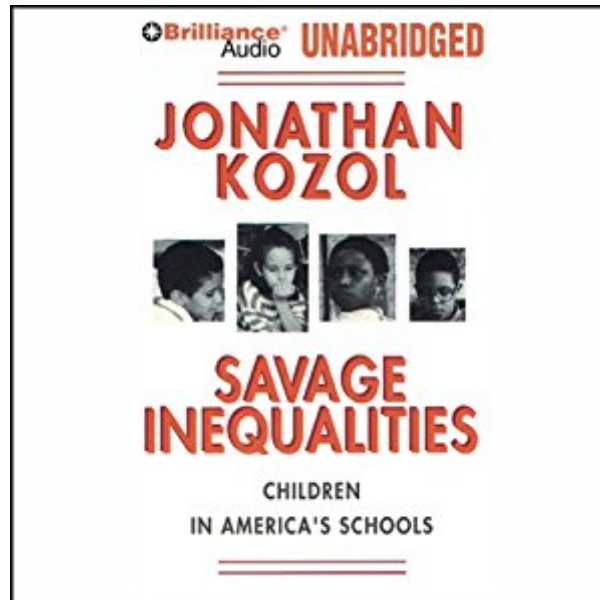


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# Savage Inequalities: Children In America's Schools



## Synopsis

Jonathan Kozol traveled from the most blighted neighborhoods of Chicago to the urban wreckage of Camden, New Jersey; from the ghetto suburbs of Detroit to inner-city San Antonio; East St. Louis, and Washington, D.C. Everywhere, he discovered separate systems of public schools, with the children of America's poor condemned to schools that are underfunded, understaffed, physically crumbling, and imbued with despair. The richest Americans congratulate themselves on the large sums they invest in their children's schools, while the poor actually devote proportionally larger shares of their incomes to education. *Savage Inequalities* carries a sense of urgency and immediacy, and will certainly revive debate on the most vital, fundamental, and controversial issue facing America today!

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Anyone believing that America is the land of opportunity for our young people should read this book. Anyone convinced that America is not the land of opportunity for our young people, but wants statistics to back this belief, should read this book too. In chapter after chapter Kozol dispels the myth that all children in this country are provided with an equal opportunity for education. The stark contrast he provides between neighboring schools in some of our country's major cities is haunting and unbelievable. The conditions that some of our children face day after day, and year after year would break the spirits of even the strongest adults. For example: The children of Martin Luther King

Junior High in East St. Louis have experienced repeated school closing due to sewage back-ups. Students in DuSable High School's auto mechanics class have waited 16 weeks before learning something so basic as changing a tire because of no instruction. "On an average morning in Chicago, 5,700 children in 190 classrooms come to school to find they have no teacher."(p. 52) At Goudy Elementary, in Chicago, there are two working bathrooms for 700 children and toilet paper and paper towels are rationed. In New York City's Morris High the black boards are so badly cracked that teachers are afraid to let students write on them, there are holes in the floors of classrooms, plaster falls from the walls, and when it rains waterfalls make their way down six flights of stairs. In Public School 261 in District 10 in New York 1300 elementary students attend school in a converted roller skating rink. The school's capacity is 900 and there are no windows, which Kozol describes as creating feelings of asphyxiation.

Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* is heavy on details of the tragic conditions existing in our cities' public schools these days, but it is light in terms of tangible solutions to the crisis. For this and other reasons, Kozol's effort, while it packs a breathtaking punch, nonetheless fails to live up to its potential as a force that can be expected to make an impact in society. A decade after the book's publication, things have gotten no better, and while we can in no way attribute the blame for that to Kozol himself, we nevertheless can try to find ways in which the book may have been able to make a larger impact. The most obvious problem with the book is its lack of solutions to the crisis. Kozol's main offering is simply to say, "give these schools more money." But since he can fall back on money and the lack of it as the root cause of the entire problem, Kozol largely ignores attempting to provide any type of suggestions for how individuals can make the system better. Instead of offering suggestions for what school administrators can do in terms of, say, curriculum reform, Kozol's biggest word of caution relating to school administrators is that some black school administrators should be ashamed of themselves for allowing people to put a black face in the public eye to deflect criticism. Instead of offering legitimate criticisms of how teachers in urban public schools should try to better relate to their poor young children, Kozol simply decries the fact that many of these teachers are ill-suited for their roles. And, Kozol continues, those teachers that are able to succeed in this environment, like Chicago's Corla Hawkins, are essentially nothing more than an inexplicable phenomenon: "But what is unique in Mrs. Hawkins's classroom is not what she does but who she is.

Jonathan Kozol started teaching at a segregated school in Boston in 1964. The students in his fourth grade class had to share a classroom with another class, a choir, and a drama group

rehearsing for a play that was never performed. He was the 13th teacher they had in the year. After being fired for having his students read a poem that was not on a pre-approved list, he moved on to a wealthier school and found a much more accommodating system of education with smaller classes, better materials, and more innovation. In his study of underfunded schools in poor neighborhoods in East St. Louis, Chicago, New York, New Jersey, Washington D.C., and San Antonio, he found that little has changed. This book is an eye opener as to the educational system in this country. Segregation is alive & well decades after Brown v. Board of Education. Most of the schools he visited are close to other wealthier (and predominately white) schools so he can really show the inequality between them. The poorer schools have limited to nonexistent materials and equipment. One school in New York (known simply as public school 261) conducts classes in an abandoned roller rink with no identification and not even a single encyclopedia set. One of the few exceptional teachers he found had to buy materials out of her pocket (pg. 47). The enormously high drop out rates at these schools are almost welcomed as they free up seats in the over-crowded classrooms (pp. 54 and 111). Most heartbreaking is that so many teachers and administrators he talked to seem to have given up on improving conditions and saving these kids. More than once, adults are quoted as dismissing the matter with "They're not going anywhere" (pp. 52 and 160).

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