



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Journal of Catholic Education

Volume 12 | Issue 4

Article 2

6-1-2009

The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America, by Jonathan Kozol

Patrick Fennessy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce>

Recommended Citation

Fennessy, P. (2009). The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America, by Jonathan Kozol. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 12 (4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1204092013>

This Book Review is brought to you for free with open access by the School of Education at Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for publication in *Journal of Catholic Education* by the journal's editorial board and has been published on the web by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information about Digital Commons, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu. To contact the editorial board of *Journal of Catholic Education*, please email CatholicEdJournal@lmu.edu.

ask why parents opt for Catholic schools when their own practice is not always informed by participation in Church, and likewise, without the support of government subsidies to fund their children's education, with all of the attendant issues that school finances impose upon our ability to serve children well. Similarly, we Catholic educators in the United States could explore how effectively we meet the needs of students who face physical, emotional, or intellectual challenges. Have we been dismissive of them because of lack of funding? Within school communities, how do we make a place of welcome and encouragement for children who are "different?" Do we extend the graced moment to ourselves and all of our students to become a Eucharistic people by embracing students who may demand more from us? These are just a few of the questions that Cosentino and Bezzina's pamphlet invite us to ponder.

References

- Congregation for Catholic Education. (1977). *The Catholic school*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2003). *Building pathways to success, grades 7-12: The report of the program pathways for students at risk work group*. Ontario, Canada: Queen's Printer.
- John M. Crawford, F.S.C. is a instructor of religion at La Salle University, Philadelphia.*

The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling In America

Jonathan Kozol
 Three Rivers Press, 2005
 \$14.95, 432 pages

Reviewed by Patrick Fennessy

Many United States history courses spend a great deal of time trumpeting the advances of American education during the Civil Rights movement. *Brown v. Board of Education* is celebrated as a landmark decision that desegregated schools and brought in an era of racial harmony. As a part of their study of this era, some may even watch melodramatic movies that tell the tough, but inspiring stories of specific schools and their integration. Unfortunately, most of the nation's inner-city public schools have slowly returned to the segregated institutions that *Brown* sought to terminate.

The nation's ailing public schools have once again fallen under the critical eye of Jonathan Kozol. The popular author's latest book, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, chronicles the re-segregation of America's public schools. Quoting Thomas Merton, "we are obliged, at certain times, to say what things are and to give them their right name" (p. 10), Kozol sets out to do just that.

Kozol details countless studies that show a steady re-segregation of the nation's schools, especially in the inner cities. Kozol has made a career out of visiting these schools and befriending teachers and students alike. Using accessible, narrative form, Kozol lets the children tell stories of schools where no more than three White children go to school. Kozol takes the reader to the countless Martin Luther King, Thurgood Marshall, and Rosa Parks schools, built in affluent areas in the hopes of attracting diverse student bodies. Sadly, these schools are now almost entirely populated with African Americans and Hispanics. Kozol reports that students at these schools are relatively sure that they do not attend segregated schools because there are a few White students in the classes. These narratives demonstrate the fact that many of the nation's public schools have become "'apartheid schools' in which 99 to 100 percent of students are nonwhite" (p. 19).

Reports of huge differences in teacher salaries and per-pupil costs paint a grim picture of the current state of education. Kozol portrays vast inequalities by comparing New York City schools where the per-pupil cost is \$11,000 to schools in nearby suburbs where the per-pupil cost is nearly double that. The inequality does not, according to Kozol, stop with the students. Teachers also suffer. A teacher in those same inner-city schools makes an average salary of \$53,000, while those in the local suburbs make over \$93,000. Many of these stark differences in per-pupil cost and teacher pay stem from some schools' prowess for private fundraising. It is not uncommon, Kozol says, for parents in middle and upper-middle class areas to take it upon themselves to raise funds to pay for the salaries of music teachers, writing instructors, or band directors. "Boutique schools," as Kozol calls these places, "enable parents of the middle class and upper-middle class to claim allegiance to the general idea of public schools while making sure their children do not suffer gravely from the stripped-down budgets" (p. 49) that plague schools in other, poorer locales. Parents in these lower income areas simply do not have the time to raise money for these extra teachers. Meanwhile, their children, as Kozol points out in narrative form, suffer the effects of a sub-par education.

In addition to the stark narratives, Kozol provides realistic commentary on standardized tests and their efficacy. According to Thomas Sobol, the former New York state commissioner of education, these tests actually give students

less and call it more. Consequently, students spend more time memorizing small bits of information and spend little to no time making connections, positing implications, or thinking creatively. Many teachers from all parts of the country report that standardized tests are being relied upon too heavily to determine students' passage to the next grade. As has been widely reported, this disproportionately affects minority students. Consequently, many minority students are forced to repeat grades. Despite their ineffectiveness, these tests remain because when they do work, the public relations victories garner financial awards.

The Shame of the Nation is of particular interest to those in the field of Catholic education. The schools that Kozol visits and portrays in this book are often in the very same neighborhoods where Catholic schools are closing. Secondly, the populations that these inner-city schools serve include the students with which Catholic schools have the most success. If Catholic schools remain open and affordable, a burden may be lifted from the ailing public system Kozol describes.

The Shame of the Nation is typical Kozol. Problems are presented along with their causes, but no real solutions are offered. Still, it is important that these drastic inequalities in the nation's public schools find their way into the minds of the public so that those who can might mount a crusade to improve these failing schools. For the Catholic educator, this book adds further support to the important role Catholic schools play in the inner cities, relieving them of a portion of the already enormous yoke they are forced to bear. If more citizens read this and other similar books, perhaps Kozol will be able to make the nation's successful schools the subject of subsequent works.

Patrick Fennessy is the Director of Admissions and Communications at Bishop Blanchet High School in Seattle, WA.

Social Studies for Social Justice: Teaching Strategies for the Elementary Classroom

Rahima C. Wade
 Teachers College Press, 2007
 \$22.95, 124 pages

Reviewed by Rodney Pierre-Antoine