



## ***Selected Themes in Jonathan Kozol's Savage Inequalities: A Critical Review Study***

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### ***Abstract***

*This study analyzes Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools by Jonathan Kozol, a foundational text that reveals persistent inequalities in the US education system. Equity theory acts as a conceptual basis for this review, which builds on Kozol's arguments by examining the connections between race, socioeconomic status, and policy. The examination places Kozol's conclusions within both historical and modern frameworks of educational inequality, highlighting their systemic origins and ongoing effects. Major themes encompass inequalities in educational financing, distribution of resources, and the sufficiency of infrastructure, alongside the impacts of environmental racism and implicit segregation in sustaining disparities. Through an analysis of the literature, this research emphasizes the ongoing challenges and discussions related to educational equity, including funding changes, inclusive curricula, and systemic inequities. By comparing Kozol's narrative with contemporary studies, this review evaluates its enduring impact on scholarly and policy debates. The research highlights the necessity for significant educational changes to tackle systemic disparities and advance social justice. By situating Kozol's perspectives within contemporary contexts of educational and social transformation, this study further supports ongoing efforts for equitable education.*

***Keywords:*** Educational Inequality, Kozol, Equity Theory, Educational Disparities, Social Justice

### **Introduction**

While *de jure* segregation was formally abolished, *de facto* segregation persists in US schools, driven by housing patterns, school zoning, and inequitable resource distribution. Noguera (2021) and Reardon et al. (2020) illustrate how school choice policies and economic stratification reinforce these divides, leading to stark contrasts in educational quality. These contemporary dynamics mirror Kozol's observations and highlight the ongoing challenges in achieving true educational equity.

In considering a critical analysis of Kozol's *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (1991), it is imperative that the review goes beyond a content analysis to include additional perspectives from the literature. The present study makes an exploration of the complex aspects of Kozol's discourse, emphasizing its reception in the academic community, the methodological foundations utilized, and its lasting influence on the discourse related to educational disparities. Even after forty years, Kozol's pointed examination of the glaring differences in educational possibilities remains relevant and inspires continuous critical discussion.

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to provide a detailed review of Kozol's arguments and methodologies based on his 1991 seminal work while illustrating their significance within the context of educational understanding. Second, focus on Kozol's critical questions on educational/societal inequities. Kozol's account not only represents the harrowing reality that underprivileged populations face but also calls into question current educational paradigms and policies. He successfully provides a compelling exploration of the enduring inequities within the American educational system. In his dedication to social justice and his skill as both a teacher and writer, Kozol lays bare the underlying divides between underfunded, racially segregated schools and their more affluent counterparts. As an advocate of social justice, he examines the stark contrasts between impoverished, racially differentiated schools and their upper classes.

In the initial sections of his work, Kozol offers a candid glimpse of education in the early days of his teaching career in segregated schools in his home state in a suburban community. He depicts the harsh realities of East St. Louis, Missouri, Chicago, Illinois, and four other cities plagued by poverty and environmental risks; each of his visited locations relied on its school system to manage student learning and its environment, financial access, and deficits, including abuse. Kozol introduces the reader to the concept of "environmental racism," linking toxic surroundings to the educational and health challenges faced by many students.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The present study explores policy implications and broader social effects of educational inequalities, grounded in research on equity theory in education. Kozol is a case study that utilizes real-life and fictional accounts to evaluate the effectiveness of current educational policies in narrowing the equity gap. Using the equity theory makes it possible to distinguish between equity and equality in education, a distinction that Kozol vividly illustrates through his illustrations of diverse school settings. This nuanced approach allows us to critically analyze the long-term consequences of educational practices that are not equitable, particularly in marginalized communities. Through this lens, *Savage Inequalities* emerges not only as a narrative documenting educational disparities but also as a powerful platform advocating for systemic reforms aimed at achieving a more equitable educational spectrum. The identified theoretical framework provides the basis for a comprehensive and insightful discussion on educational equity, as articulated by Kozol, and its implications for policy and social justice in education.

### **Significant of the Study**

This research examines Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*, an influential text that remains impactful in discussions regarding educational inequality. By situating Kozol's insights within modern frameworks, the research highlights the ongoing disparities in funding, resources, and opportunities that influence the educational environment. Its importance is in connecting historical viewpoints with contemporary studies to highlight the structural origins of inequality and its continuing effects.

By examining equity theory, the study not only strengthens Kozol's critique of the US education system but also highlights practical avenues for reform. This work aims to inspire significant change by involving policymakers, educators, and the broader community in discussions about educational justice. In the end, it aids the continuous endeavor to eliminate obstacles and

create an education system that offers fair opportunities for every student, irrespective of their socioeconomic or racial background.

### Methodological Approach

This research utilizes a literature review to investigate educational disparities from a diverse perspective, referencing Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* (1991) as a core text along with modern academic articles, empirical research, and policy papers. Although the research does not duplicate Kozol's approach, it draws and employs his method of direct observations and interviews as a framework for grasping systemic inequalities. Kozol's detailed portrayal of the stark disparities between poorly funded and wealthy schools, enhanced by personal stories from students, teachers, and parents, offers essential qualitative understanding. These insights enhance the analysis by providing a human-centered view of structural difficulties. By merging these qualitative aspects with extensive research on equity theory and policy frameworks, the study attains a thorough investigation of the intricacies related to educational inequalities in the United States.

### Literature Review

Global educational inequality continues to be a significant issue, deeply rooted in historical, economic, and social contexts (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Gillborn, 2020). Recent research (e.g., Reardon et al., 2020; Rothstein, 2017) shows that disparities in resource distribution, instructional quality, and equal access to opportunities frequently worsen due to systemic obstacles and socioeconomic divides. The COVID-19 pandemic accentuated these disparities, disproportionately impacting marginalized groups and widening the divide in access to technology and quality education (Ishimaru, 2019; Berliner, 2019). These persistent inequalities call for transformative reforms to create equitable systems that address the root causes and consequences of educational disparity.

This literature review explores the complex aspects of educational inequality by combining historical viewpoints with modern research. Recent studies (e.g., LaFortune et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2016) emphasize the essential importance of equitable funding systems and creative teaching methods (Sleeter, 2018; Kendi, 2023) to provide fair educational chances for every student. By confronting systemic injustices and adopting inclusive practices, these studies offer practical guidance on addressing ongoing gaps in education. Revolutionary reforms should focus on fair funding structures, as shown by LaFortune et al. (2018), who illustrate the real advantages of enhanced investment in schools with limited resources. In the same vein, Jackson et al. (2016) highlight the enduring benefits of resource distribution strategies aimed at underserved communities. These reforms aim to improve teacher quality, as highlighted by Darling-Hammond (2018), to guarantee that every student receives excellent instruction.

Drawing from these modern viewpoints, the acknowledgment of inequalities tackled by transformative reforms reveals their deep entrenchment in history. Before the publication of *Savage Inequalities* (1991), the American education landscape displayed a distinct history of segregation (Caliver, 1956; Orfield et al., 2005), financial instability, and socioeconomic difficulties (Coleman et al., 1966; Caliver, 1956; Clark and Clark, 1950). Following 1991, Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* and later research (e.g., Morris, 2023; Hanushek, 2020; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Blum & Burkholder, 2021; Baker, 2018) demonstrated that these inequalities remain widespread,

influenced by changing demographics, evolving policies, and the growing understanding of intricate systemic factors contributing to educational disparity.

### Historical Disparities in Education

Educational disparity in the United States is deeply ingrained in the nation's history, arising from the convergence of race, economic status, and political influence. This legacy, spanning from the post-Civil War period to today, has resulted in lasting educational inequalities, with remnants of racial segregation affecting contemporary policy and practice. Anderson (1988) provides a crucial examination of the establishment of segregation, demonstrating how structural obstacles in education have traditionally hindered the prospects of underrepresented students. The ongoing nature of these inequities highlights the necessity of exploring their historical background to comprehend the persistence of educational disparities.

Despite these entrenched disparities, many marginalized communities demonstrate remarkable resilience. Public schools remain pivotal spaces for fostering educational opportunities and academic achievement for underprivileged students. Berliner (2019) debunks myths about public education, emphasizing how socioeconomic factors, policy decisions, and resource allocation practices continue to perpetuate inequalities, even in the post-desegregation era. Recent studies have further explored how contemporary disparities are shaped by ongoing segregation, inadequate funding, and unequal access to quality resources. Orfield and Lee (2015) focus on the enduring issue of school segregation, illuminating its role in perpetuating educational disparities. Darling-Hammond (1998) offers a comprehensive analysis of how race intersects with educational access, providing a vital framework for understanding systemic inequities.

Building on these foundational studies, Tatum (2017) and Burkholder (2011) explore the psychological and sociological dimensions of racial identity and segregation, highlighting their profound effects on students' academic outcomes. Noguera (2021) extends these discussions by examining how systemic inequalities shape educational results, emphasizing the stark contrasts in resources and opportunities between underfunded and well-supported schools. Echoing the narrative-driven approach of Kozol in *Savage Inequalities*, Noguera underscores the persistent inequities within educational systems, illustrating the systemic forces that profoundly impact students' experiences in segregated and under-resourced institutions.

### Recent Developments

In recent years, research persisted in expanding on the efforts of Kozol and others, introducing additional aspects to the dialogue on educational disparities. *The Color of Law* (Rothstein, 2017) examines how government policies have traditionally promoted residential segregation, thereby deepening the inequalities that Kozol pointed out in his assessment. Rothstein's research builds upon Kozol's critique by demonstrating how housing and urban planning policies have influenced the educational system and restricted opportunities for marginalized groups.

Likewise, recent studies such as one by Reardon et al. (2020) emphasize the expanding economic gaps in education, illustrating how differences in wealth are progressively affecting educational results. Reardon's research highlights the widening disparities, particularly in cities where wealthy schools still obtain uneven amounts of funding and resources. Moreover, Berliner (2019) examines the connections among poverty, systemic racism, and educational results,

strengthening Kozol's claims by demonstrating how students in inadequately funded schools encounter multiple disadvantages that impact their academic performance and general wellness.

Other works, including Morgan (2022), present evidence of ongoing funding and resource shortages, thus echoing Kozol's earlier observations. In addition to their previous research on diversity in American schools, Lash (2018) highlights new educational opportunities and challenges. Rather than continuing with Kozol's earlier study, Jackson, Johnson, and Persico (2016) extend the discussion to general socioeconomic factors that affect educational disparities. Kraft and Papay (2019) provide a more nuanced perspective on teacher quality, emphasizing the importance of student outcomes in contrast to Kozol's focus on assessing only teachers' qualifications. Similarly, Darling-Hammond's (2018) analysis highlights the evolution of approaches to address educational inequalities. Darling-Hammond critiques recent policy changes (such as the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (US Congress, 2015)), which entail stricter enforcement requirements than in earlier years.

Collectively, recent research regarding the equitable allocation of learning resources sheds light on the intricacies of educational inequality, demonstrating that while specific policies and reforms have advanced in tackling segregation concerns, systemic obstacles like funding inequalities and the lasting impacts of racially influenced poverty persist. Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* remains a crucial piece in this ongoing discussion, offering a powerful call to action for confronting the enduring inequalities rooted in the American education system.

### **Economic Analysis of Educational Funding**

Expanding on the foundational research of Kozol and further examined by Baker (2018), the financial examination of educational funding uncovers intricate connections between resource distribution, policy choices, and student performance. Baker's research thoroughly investigates the necessity of school finance reform for attaining educational equity, highlighting the vital influence that both state and federal policies have on resource allocation. This examination emphasizes that fair and sufficient funding is not only advantageous but essential for enhancing student performance while highlighting the capacity of strategic financial investments to diminish educational inequalities.

LaFortune, Rothstein, and Schanzenbach (2018) provide empirical support that bolsters the argument for fair funding. Their study emphasizes the tangible advantages of boosting investment in education, specifically examining how money designated for employing skilled teachers and dramatically minimizing class sizes enhances student learning results. This empirical data strengthens the connection between resource access and academic achievement, providing a solid case for the influence of financial contributions on educational fairness.

Adding to this discussion, Jackson, Johnson, and Persico (2016) offer essential perspectives on the lasting impact of enhanced resources for underprivileged students. Their long-term research shows that sustained increases in per-student funding result in significant enhancements in educational success, elevated graduation rates, and improved adult outcomes, including higher income and reduced poverty levels. These results reinforce the idea that investing in education, especially for marginalized groups, is both a matter of fairness and a financially sound approach to enhancing society.

Additionally, modern studies highlight the significance of fair and adequate funding reforms. Darling-Hammond (2010), for example, posits that the allocation and tactical application of resources are equally significant as the total funding. Resources should be distributed carefully,

prioritizing areas that will significantly improve student success, like effective teaching, higher-level courses, and enhanced educational settings. The use of funds should correspond to the particular requirements of students and schools to improve their effectiveness.

Consequently, the economic assessment of educational financing, as examined in recent studies (Morgan, 2022; LaFortune, Rothstein, and Schanzenbach, 2018), underscores the essential requirement for fair and sufficient investment in education. This collection of research collectively supports a reassessment of existing funding policies and practices, urging reforms that guarantee resources are distributed in a manner that tackles inequalities impacting student performance and chances.

## Contemporary Challenges and Debates

To tackle the persistent issues of equity in education—especially the differences in resource distribution, curriculum appropriateness, systemic injustices, and involvement of communities and families—it is crucial to reference recent literature to enrich the dialogue.

Recent research (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sleeter, 2018) highlights the ongoing disparities in resource allocation that keep influencing educational results. Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2019) illustrate how unequal funding formulas worsen disparities, especially for students in low-income areas. Altering funding models and guaranteeing a fairer allocation of resources are essential measures for offering every student access to high-quality education. Moreover, the significance of creating curricula that represent student diversity and include various viewpoints has received considerable focus in recent years. Sleeter (2017) promotes the need for curriculum transformation via multicultural and anti-racist education frameworks, asserting that these methods are essential for equipping students for a diverse, interconnected globe.

Systemic disparities in the education system continue to pose a significant challenge. Kendi (2023) highlights the importance of anti-bias policies that actively challenge and deconstruct obstacles to equity. By tackling the underlying issues behind these disparities, educators and policymakers can create more inclusive and equitable educational settings. Additionally, the importance of community and family involvement in promoting educational equality has received heightened attention. Ishimaru (2019) highlights the significance of genuine collaborations between schools and historically marginalized communities, promoting inclusive practices that acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of every community member.

Recent research has further enriched these discussions. For example, Gillborn (2020) offers an expanded critique of educational policies, highlighting how institutional racism continues to affect educational access and outcomes for Black and Indigenous students. His work underscores the ongoing need for transformative policies that challenge existing power structures within education.

By incorporating these recent studies (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sleeter, 2017; Kendi, 2023; Ishimaru, 2019; Gillborn, 2020), we gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of addressing educational equity. These contributions provide valuable strategies for developing and implementing policies that ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed.

## **Exposition of Observations and Findings**

### **Critical Aspect I: Condition of School Facilities**

Kozol's research into the disparities in educational realities allowed him to create a framework to understand the profound difference that exists between underfunded schools and their affluent counterparts. His framework provided a revealing analysis of the more significant social repercussions of educational inequality. His storytelling provides a striking depiction of the widespread disparities in America's public education system. His thorough accounts of the lived conditions in underprivileged and isolated schools not only emphasize the physical and material shortcomings but also offer a greater insight into the systemic obstacles and injustices encountered every day by both teachers and students. Within this framework, Kozol examines several critical aspects of these schools:

#### ***Physical Conditions***

Kozol's narrative begins with a stark depiction of the physical state of these schools. As he illustrates, many buildings are dilapidated, lacking basic amenities or conveniences, signaling how poorly supported the educational needs of students are in these communities. He writes: "Far from the worst schools in Chicago, Goudy's building is nonetheless depressing. There is no playground. There are no swings. There is no jungle gym." (p. 63).

#### ***Deprivation***

Beyond the physical decay, Kozol uncovers the profound lack of resources in these schools. The scarcity of essential learning materials, outdated textbooks, and inadequate technological equipment significantly hinder the learning process, limiting students' academic progress and opportunities for engagement.

#### ***Community Support***

Kozol highlights the significance of community assistance and parental engagement in influencing students' educational journeys. Affluent communities frequently dedicate significant resources to education, including financial support for parent-teacher organizations, after-school activities, and tutoring programs. Conversely, disadvantaged communities often do not have these support systems, worsening the disparity in educational results between wealthy and less fortunate schools.

#### ***Staffing and Professional Development***

Kozol examines the disparities in staffing numbers and teacher qualifications among affluent and underprivileged schools. Wealthy schools draw and keep exceptional educators by offering attractive salaries, avenues for professional growth, and a nurturing workplace atmosphere.

Conversely, schools with insufficient funding face difficulties in hiring and retaining skilled teachers, leading to elevated turnover rates and inconsistency in educational delivery.

Kozol highlights how these unfavorable conditions compound the educational challenges faced by students and teachers alike. With limited resources and support, educators struggle to provide adequate attention, while students, especially those who need extra help, often do not receive the guidance and education they deserve. These systemic issues deepen the educational disparities that Kozol seeks to expose.

In his work, Kozol presents a detailed examination of the entrenched educational disparities within the public education system across the United States. Kozol highlights the stark differences between impoverished, frequently racially divided schools and wealthy, predominantly white academic institutions. His research reveals these inequalities, influenced by economic, racial, and political elements, showcasing two separate educational experiences within the same framework. The main objective is to provide readers with insight into the demanding situations encountered by students in schools with inadequate funding.

Kozol offers a startling view of underprivileged and racially divided schools, revealing the dire circumstances resulting from neglect and systemic breakdowns. His direct experiences in different schools—from dilapidated classrooms in disadvantaged areas to well-equipped institutions in affluent regions—underscore three critical aspects of these gaps:

*Sustained Neglect:* Kozol highlights prevalent neglect, such as leaking roofs and shattered windows, indicating insufficient care and funding for students' learning settings. The deterioration of schools in underprivileged areas underscores the low priority placed on education for these learners.

*Resource Shortage:* Kozol exposes the critical deficiency of educational materials, including obsolete textbooks, inadequate science tools, and restricted access to technology, all of which significantly impede the learning experience and further worsen educational disparities (US PIRG Education Fund, 2021; National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

*Overcrowding:* Kozol highlights overcrowding in schools as a critical problem, where elevated teacher-to-student ratios hinder teachers from giving personal attention or effectively meeting varied student requirements. An eyewitness report from a newcomer teacher in the Bronx highlights the seriousness of this issue: "I've got five classes—42 in each! We have no textbooks yet. I'm using my old textbook from the seventh grade. The noise from construction is overwhelming. I have more kids than desks in all five classes" (p.100).

Kozol skillfully weaves these interconnected factors to illustrate the compounded disadvantages faced by students in these underfunded, segregated schools. His narrative approach underscores the urgency of addressing these entrenched disparities and the need for systemic reform.

In *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol starkly contrasts the educational experiences of privileged versus underprivileged schools, exposing a significant disparity in opportunities and resources. The affluent schools represent privilege and opportunity, offering a learning environment filled with resources and facilities that foster academic success. In contrast, the underfunded, racially segregated schools Kozol examines are plagued by neglect, scarcity, and inequities, highlighting the profound gap between different social classes in the American education system.



Kozol's exploration takes him through a broad spectrum of public schools in America, from well-funded institutions serving the economically privileged to the neglected schools in impoverished communities. This stark contrast reveals two educational worlds within the same nation, marked by profound disparities. Kozol's observations expose several anomalies:

### ***Extensive Facilities and Resources***

Kozol visits affluent schools equipped with state-of-the-art amenities and advanced technology. These schools represent educational opulence, providing students with an environment designed to stimulate and support their learning. The classrooms are well-equipped with various materials, including technological advancements, offering a vastly unique experience compared to the dilapidated, underfunded schools in poorer neighborhoods. For example, during his visit to Southside Chicago, Kozol writes: "In a classroom for the gifted on the first floor of the school, I asked a child what the class was doing. 'Logic and syllogisms,' she replies. The room is fitted with a planetarium" (p. 94).

In stark contrast, Kozol describes a school in New York:

At the end of school, Jack Forman takes me down to see the ground-floor auditorium. The room resembles an Elizabethan theater. Above the proscenium arch, there is a mural from circa 1910 that must have been impressive long ago. The ceiling is crossed by wooden ribs; there are stained-glass windows in the back. But it is all in ruins...chunks of plaster also hang from underneath the balcony above my head...there is a bank of organ pipes, gold-colored within a frame of dark-stained wood, but there is no organ. (p. 106).

### ***Diverse and Advanced Curricular Offerings***

The curricular offerings in affluent schools stand in stark contrast to those in underfunded institutions. Kozol highlights the diversity and academic rigor of programs in well-resourced schools, which include advanced STEM courses, arts, and foreign language education. These programs cater to a range of student interests and provide opportunities for deeper academic engagement. In contrast, underprivileged schools often lack essential resources, hindering students' ability to engage in advanced coursework. For instance, Kozol describes the situation at Humphreys County High School in the Mississippi Delta:

The Science Lab has no equipment except a tattered periodic table. "The only air conditioning," says a recent visitor, "is a hole in the roof." In June and September, when the temperature outside can reach 100 degrees, the school is "double hot," according to the principal. (p. 131).

These observations underscore the dramatic differences in educational experiences across schools in the United States, revealing the systemic inequities that continue to perpetuate educational disparities.

### *Contrasts in Geographical Locations, Resources, and Conditions*

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*Staffing and Professional Development:* Kozol examines the disparities in staffing numbers and teacher qualifications among affluent and underprivileged schools. Wealthy schools draw and keep exceptional educators by offering attractive salaries, avenues for professional growth, and a nurturing workplace atmosphere. Conversely, schools with insufficient funding face difficulties in hiring and retaining skilled teachers, leading to elevated turnover rates and inconsistency in educational delivery.

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Transitioning from the harsh conditions of impoverished and racially segregated schools, Kozol shifts focus to the vastly different world of affluent, predominantly white schools. This section of *Savage Inequalities* exposes a realm where educational facilities and opportunities are abundant, sharply contrasting with the underfunded schools previously described. These distinctions go beyond mere resources and amenities, underscoring the significant role of socioeconomic and racial segregation in shaping American education.

In affluent schools, Kozol observes an atmosphere that fosters positivity and intellectual stimulation. Kozol observed that those schools create a welcoming environment that enhances the quality of education, not just academically but holistically, supporting students' overall well-being and encouraging a desire to learn. The physical spaces in these schools are designed with care, promoting a sense of comfort and support that is conducive to growth. This nurturing environment stands in sharp contrast to the grim and often unwelcoming conditions found in underprivileged schools, underscoring the disparity in educational experiences and quality.

Kozol describes the condition of Public School 261 in District 10, located in the North Bronx, as follows:

In order to find Public School 261 in District 10, a visitor is told to look for a mortician's office. The funeral home, which faces Jerome Avenue in the North Bronx, is easy to identify by its green awning. The school is next door, in a former roller-skating rink. No sign identifies the building as a school. A metal awning frame without an awning supports a flagpole, but there is no flag (p. 85).

Students in wealthier schools with small class sizes are ensured that each child receives personalized attention. In turn, their teachers are not constrained by overcrowding or lack of resources, thus allowing them to focus on individualized instruction and the holistic development of their students. Kozol draws a stark contrast between these experiences and those in underfunded schools, highlighting how such disparities reflect more profound social stratification along the lines of race and socioeconomic status.

Rather than simply describing how schools operate, Kozol uses his observations to critique the societal values and priorities that sustain educational disparities in the United States. Kyriakides, Creemers, and Charalambous (2018) state, "Education serves as a significant instrument for enhancing every facet of an individual's life and plays a role in alleviating poverty" (p. 3). Based on prior research by Micklewright and Schnepf (2007), it is noted that insufficient education can lead to enduring negative impacts on a child's future, restricting employment options and resulting in a diminished quality of life. This, in turn, limits their capacity to participate fully in civic and social activities, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Kozol's work reflects these issues, rigorously analyzing the significant educational gaps in US schools and the lasting effects of these inequalities on future generations.

## **Critical Aspect 2: Resources in the Learning / Teaching Environment**

### **The Learning Environment**

The disparity between affluent schools and their underfunded peers is evident in the state of their facilities and the availability of educational resources. Kozol depicts a setting of advantage where learners benefit from numerous educational resources and opportunities for personal growth. Kozol notes a more supportive community featuring engaged parental participation that enhances students' sense of belonging and academic achievement. These carefully maintained schools feature modern facilities and amenities, providing students with a broad and enriching educational experience. Kozol visits one such school and narrates:

New Trier's students have superior labs and up-to-date technology. One wing of the school, a physical education center that includes three separate gyms, also contains a fencing room, a wrestling room, and studios for dance instruction. In all, the school has seven gyms as well as an Olympic pool. The youngsters...make good use of the huge, well-equipped building, which is immaculately maintained by a custodial staff of 48. (p. 65).

Kozol's sojourns to these wealthy schools showcase a wide variety of advanced academic programs and extracurricular activities. These prospects sharply contrast with the few choices present in underprivileged schools, further emphasizing the educational disparity that separates students based on socioeconomic factors. Additionally, Kozol emphasizes the benefits of reduced class sizes, individualized support, and a more comprehensive method of education in these wealthy schools. These benefits represent a significant edge over the crowded, underfunded conditions prevalent in numerous struggling schools, highlighting the profound disparities within the education system.

Kozol's work continues to have a considerable influence on academic and policy discussions regarding educational inequities. His in-depth examination of the stark contrasts in educational access and resources has sparked widespread scholarly debate and research, positioning Kozol as a critical figure in the conversation about education, social stratification, and policy. His work has been instrumental in fostering essential dialogues on the structural inequalities present in the education system. Kozol writes:

Textbooks are scarce, and children must share their social studies books. The principal says there is one full-time pupil counselor and another who is here two days a week, a ratio of 930 children to one counselor. The carpets are patched and sometimes taped together to conceal an open space. "I could use some new rugs," she observed. (p. 86).

### **The Teaching Environment**

Kozol keenly observed that overcrowded classrooms had become the norm in impoverished schools, where individualized attention is a luxury. Students who require extra assistance do not receive the support and guidance they deserve, and teachers frequently struggle to manage large class sizes while covering the curriculum. Kozol (1991) writes:

On the school's top floor, a sixth grade of 30 children shares a room with 29 bilingual second graders. Because of the high class size, there is an assistant for each teacher. This means that 59 children and four grown-ups—63 in all—must share a room that, in a suburban school, would hold no more than 20 children and one teacher. (p. 87).

At another school, he observes:

Overcrowding in New Jersey, as in Harlem and the Bronx, is a constant feature of the schools that serve the poorest children. In low-income Irvington, for instance, where 94 percent of students are non-white, 11 classes in one school don't even have the luxury of classrooms. They share an auditorium... (p. 158-159).

Kozol's contributions go beyond the academic realm, impacting educational policies and practices. His depiction of systemic disparities has led policymakers to reevaluate the tenets that influence school funding and resource allocation. A key discussion arising from *Savage Inequalities* centers on the dependence on property taxes for school funding—a vital topic that Kozol highlights consistently in his book. This funding system has maintained gaps between affluent and under-resourced schools, especially regarding racial and socioeconomic factors. Kozol's findings have ignited policy debates concerning fairer approaches to resource distribution, aiming to diminish these entrenched inequalities.

Thus, *Savage Inequalities* has played a crucial role in influencing education reform. It has drawn considerable attention to the problems of educational inequality and has acted as a prompt for policy debates focused on enhancing equity in education. Kozol's engaging storytelling persistently shapes the conversation on how to tackle and remedy the imbalances in educational access throughout the United States.

In *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol offers an insightful examination of the fundamental reasons behind educational inequality in the United States, emphasizing especially the historical elements that have influenced the existing system. A key aspect of his critique is the rejection of the property tax-funded model, which he contends is a core problem in the American education system. Kozol argues that when the funding system in place is integrated into the decentralized framework of US education, it leads to significant inequalities between schools in affluent and disadvantaged areas.

Kozol's analysis identifies property tax-based funding as a systemic issue that perpetuates inequality within and among the education system. This funding model creates a dual system in which the socioeconomic status of communities fundamentally determines students' educational opportunities. As Rothstein (2017) highlights in *The Color of Law*, the relationship between property taxes and educational funding reinforces racial and economic segregation. Recent research further supports this analysis, with authors such as Ladd and Fiske (2015) emphasizing the global trends of educational inequity driven by similar funding models.

The disproportionate allocation of resources underscores the systemic nature of educational disparities, emphasizing the urgent need for reform. Recent studies such as those by Baker (2018) and Reardon et al. (2020) further underscore the significant impact of funding disparities on academic outcomes. These works reflect a growing consensus on the need for a more equitable distribution of educational resources to address these deep-rooted inequalities. By condemning the property tax-based funding model, Kozol offers a powerful call to action for policymakers and educators to address this fundamental injustice, which obstructs the educational progress of many students, particularly in poorer communities.

### **Critical Aspect 3: Funding Advantage/Disadvantage**

The funding model based on property taxes, which directly connects school financing to the wealth of local communities, inevitably results in an unequal allocation of resources. Affluent neighborhoods, thanks to their elevated property values, can finance well-resourced schools that offer a diverse array of facilities. In contrast, economically challenged areas where real estate values are reduced have underfunded schools that lack adequate resources. This gap stems not just from economic variances but also perpetuates the cycle where a community's wealth dictates the quality of education available to its students.

## Variance in Funding Allocations

Kozol's examination underscores how this system maintains inequality, ensuring that children from affluent families receive superior educational opportunities. In contrast, those from less advantaged backgrounds are systematically deprived of the same resources and chances for achievement.

The disproportionate allocation of resources underscores the systemic nature of educational disparities, emphasizing the urgent need for reform. Recent studies such as those by Baker (2018) and Reardon et al. (2020) further underscore the significant impact of funding disparities on academic outcomes. These works reflect a growing consensus on the need for a more equitable distribution of educational resources to address these deep-rooted inequalities. By condemning the property tax-based funding model, Kozol offers a powerful call to action for policymakers and educators to address this fundamental injustice, which obstructs the educational progress of many students, particularly in poorer communities.

Kozol begins his critical analysis by emphasizing the core issue in the property tax-dependent funding model: the fiscal stability of a school district is inherently connected to the property values in its area. His analysis identifies property tax-based funding as a systemic issue that perpetuates inequality within and among the education system. This funding model creates a dual system in which the socioeconomic status of communities fundamentally determines students' educational opportunities. As Rothstein (2017) highlights in *The Color of Law*, the relationship between property taxes and educational funding reinforces racial and economic segregation. Recent research further supports this analysis, with authors such as Fiske and Ladd (2017) emphasizing the global trends of educational inequity driven by similar funding models.

Schools located in affluent areas, characterized by elevated property values, consistently obtain significant revenue from property taxes. This surge of capital allows educational institutions to provide abundant resources, high-quality educators, and contemporary facilities (Baker, 2018; Jackson, Johnson, and Persico, 2016). Students enrolled in these institutions gain from an educational setting that prioritizes scholarly success and individual growth. Conversely, the identical funding approach significantly harms schools in low-income regions, leading to a financial shortfall that jeopardizes the quality of education offered. Kozol highlights the diverse ways this financial deficit is expressed:

## Variance in Instructional Infrastructure

Disadvantaged schools experience a notable deficiency in educational materials. Obsolete textbooks, inadequate classroom resources, and restricted availability of technology impede the learning experience, putting students at a disadvantage right from the beginning of their education. Kozol expresses,

The principal, Herbert Factor, an even-tempered white man in a soft tweed jacket who has been here for three years, takes me into a chemistry lab that has no lab equipment, a fish tank, and a single lab desk at the front used by the teacher. The room is sweltering. "Something is wrong with the heating system," says the principal. "We're right above the boiler room...I'm surprised the fish don't die." (p. 149).

Kozol expresses significant worry regarding the physical state of these schools. He vividly depicts structures in decline, featuring leaking roofs, shattered windows, and insufficient heating systems, all of which adversely impact the educational atmosphere. These circumstances communicate a concerning message of indifference and neglect toward the students. Additionally, overcrowded classrooms result directly from a lack of funding, which significantly affects teacher-student ratios. For example, Kozol narrates a trip to P.S. 79, a school located in New York, where the principal, James Carter, talks about the overcrowding:

On the following morning (in New York), I visit P.S. 79, another elementary school in the same district. "We work under difficult circumstances," said principal James Carter, who is black. "The school was built to hold one thousand students. We have 1,550. We are badly overcrowded. We need smaller classes but. To do this, we would have no place to put them." (p. 88).

These descriptions powerfully illustrate the systemic inequities in school infrastructure and resources, highlighting how the property tax-based funding system perpetuates a cycle of disadvantage for students in underfunded, impoverished schools.

Kozol records his experiences in disadvantaged school districts, offering a frank depiction of the harsh realities encountered by both students and teachers, such as overcrowded classrooms, unsanitary conditions, and insufficient essential teaching materials. For example, he writes:

At a high school in Crown Heights, a neighborhood of Brooklyn, "Bathrooms, gymnasiums, hallways, and closets have been converted into classrooms," says the *New York Times*. "We have no closets—they're classrooms now," says the principal of another school. "We went to a school," says Robert Wagner, former president of the city's Board of Education, "where there were five Haitian youngsters literally [having classes] in a urinal." (p. 114).

This vivid account underscores the systemic neglect faced by schools in impoverished communities, reinforcing Kozol's argument that such conditions are a direct result of the structural inequalities built into the American educational system.

### **Variance in Staffing**

Often understaffed, underfunded, and struggling to provide the quality education that every child deserves, schools in impoverished areas face considerable challenges (Noguera, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Orfield & Lee, 2015). As noted by scholars following Kozol, such as Tatum (2017), Duncan and Murnane (2011), and Kendi (2016), these schools often experience a disturbing inconsistency in educational funding. Kozol observed that the schools he visited, which primarily served minority students, operated with the lowest annual expenditures per pupil. This disparity was particularly striking when compared to the higher tax rates imposed on impoverished individuals in these communities. Kozol highlighted this contrast:

The average expenditure per pupil in the city of New York in 1987 was some \$5,500. In the highest-spending suburbs of New York (Great Neck or Manhasset, for example, on Long Island), funding levels rose above \$11,000, with the highest districts in the state at

\$15,000. “Why...” Asks the city's Board of Education, “Should our students receive less?” than do “similar students” who live elsewhere? This inequity is clear. (pp. 83-84).

Kozol's research provides essential perspectives on the complex interactions of funding, resource distribution, and socioeconomic elements that affect the educational quality received by students in various communities. This glaring gap emphasizes a systemic problem in the distribution of educational resources and reveals the profound inequalities that afflict the American education system. Kozol's insights make these problems tangible with striking illustrations from his experiences in inadequately funded schools. He writes:

In a class in basic mathematics skills, an eighth-grade student that I meet cannot add five and two. In a sixth-grade classroom, brownish clumps of plaster dot the ceiling where there once were sound-absorbing tiles. An eighth-grade science class is using workbooks in a laboratory without lab equipment. (p. 139).

At another school, Kozol observes:

In a twelfth-grade English class, the teacher presented a good overview of nineteenth-century history in England. On the blackboard are these words: “Idealism...Industrialization...Exploitation...Laissez-faire...” The teacher seems competent, but in this room, as almost everywhere in Camden, lack of funds creates a shortage of material. Half the children in the classroom have no texts.” (p. 141).

Recent works (Baker, 2018; LaFortune, Rothstein, and Schanzenbach, 2018; Allegretto, García & Weiss, 2022; Baker, 2018; Morgan, 2022) continue to emphasize these disparities. For instance, Baker (2018) provides an updated analysis of how school funding inequities perpetuate educational divides, showing that resource allocation remains fundamentally unequal. Similarly, LaFortune, Rothstein, and Schanzenbach (2018) offer empirical evidence supporting the idea that increased funding can lead to improved educational outcomes, particularly in disadvantaged communities. These recent works' contributions build upon Kozol's foundational critique, reinforcing the need for equitable resource distribution in the pursuit of educational justice.

#### **Critical Aspect 4: Equitable School Funding**

Equitable school funding is a fundamental element in tackling the systemic inequities that Kozol critiques so eloquently. The differences in funding and resource distribution among schools clearly demonstrate how deeply rooted inequities persist in influencing the educational environment. The subsequent discussion examines how these disparities appear and the immediate changes required to establish a fairer and more inclusive educational framework.

#### **Fund Allocation and Equity**

Kozol's reports and firsthand experiences highlight the urgent need to confront the troubling realities of the educational system that continues to foster inequality, putting students in unfair situations while disregarding others. His adamant promotion of educational equity calls on lawmakers, teachers, and the broader community, which includes parents and guardians, to strive



for an education system where every child, irrespective of socioeconomic status, has the opportunity to succeed. Kozol's observations reveal the considerable inequalities present among P-12 schools in the US, especially in low-income regions. The primary challenges encountered by these schools involve overcrowded classrooms, poor sanitary conditions, and significant resource shortages, which are worsened by their placement in areas with large minority groups, prevalent poverty, and heavy property tax loads. Even with the increased taxes collected, these schools continue to be perpetually underfunded.

Kozol criticizes the dependence on property taxes as the primary means of financing schools, asserting that this approach is fundamentally at odds with the objective of ensuring fair education for all. Property taxes sustain racial and socioeconomic inequalities, with wealthy regions producing more significant revenue than poorer ones, resulting in unequal access to resources. Kozol clearly says, "Funding that is equal for unequal needs is not truly equal" (Kozol, 1991, p. 54). This analysis highlights the necessity of fair funding systems to tackle the uneven allocation of resources and fight against systemic inequalities in the education sector.

Kozol's drive for promoting educational equity stems from his awareness of persistent inequalities that have defined much of American education. This viewpoint corresponds with previous studies by Caliver (1956) and Clark and Clark (1950), which identified entrenched racial and socioeconomic inequalities. Kozol extends this discussion, expanding upon Myrdal's (1944) examination of educational inequality. Motivated by a dedication to social justice, Kozol's conviction in advancing education as an inherent right highlights the welfare and well-being of every child, irrespective of their social or economic circumstances. His belief that every child can thrive both in life and in school (Bergmann & Sams, 2023; Noguera, 2008; Dweck, 2007) drives his support for a fair educational system.

Recent studies extend Kozol's advocacy efforts. For example, Darling-Hammond (2024) highlights the significance of fair access to education for every child, stating that systemic disparities in funding and resources are significant obstacles to educational achievement. In the same vein, Baker (2018) examines how differences in funding persistently affect educational quality, particularly in underprivileged communities, reinforcing Kozol's plea for change. In more contemporary research, Stewart (2023) examines how educational disparities are intensified by policies that disproportionately impact low-income and minority students, reflecting Kozol's emphasis on the intersection of race and socioeconomic status in education.

### **Fund Allocation as Systematic**

Kozol contends that the existing educational inequalities are not merely unfortunate; they represent core injustices that sustain social disparities. His account, based on personal observation and experiences in different academic settings, provides a compelling critique of the system. While visiting a school in Chicago, Kozol contemplates the understated yet significant instances that emphasize these inequalities:

When the children lie down on the floor to have their naps, I sit and watch their movements and their breathing. A few of them fall asleep at once, but others are restless, and three little boys keep poking one another when the teacher looks away. Many tiny coughs and whispers interrupt the scene for a while. (p. 43).

This moment embodies the core of Kozol's critique—how the educational system, marked by its systemic inequalities, impacts even the fundamental elements of student life. By means of his vibrant portrayals and meticulous observations, Kozol heightens the call for reform and champions an education system that benefits every child equally.

For example, Kozol demonstrates a deep compassion for the families and students attending disadvantaged, segregated schools. This empathy fuels efforts as he illuminates their everyday challenges and barriers, allowing their narratives to connect with readers profoundly. A significant moment in this chapter takes place when Kozol visits an elementary school in Anacostia, sharing the viewpoint of a fifth-grade student:

...a little girl in the fifth grade tells me that the first thing she would do if somebody gave money to her school would be to plant a row of flowers by the street. "Blue flowers," she says, "And I'd buy some curtains for my teacher." And she specifies again: "Blue curtains."

I asked her, "Why blue curtains?"

"It's like this," she says, "this school is dirty. There isn't any playground. There's a hole in the wall behind the principal's desk. What we need to do is first rebuild the school—another color. Build a playground. Plant a lot of flowers. Paint the classrooms. Blue and white. Fix the hole in the principal's office. Fix the doors for the toilet stalls in the girl's bathroom. Fix the ceiling in this room. It looks like somebody went up and peed over our heads. Make it a beautiful, clean building. Make it pretty. Way it is, I feel ashamed." (p. 181).

This moving narrative highlights the profound disregard and emotional impact that these educational settings impose on learners. It also emphasizes the glaring difference between the needs and hopes of children in these schools and the harsh reality of their everyday lives. Kozol's efforts highlight these voices, urging an immediate challenge to the injustices ingrained in the American education system.

Kozol highlights the connection between socioeconomic inequalities and racial differences instead of concentrating only on racial segregation. His research results emphasize that schools located in disadvantaged areas, primarily catering to minority groups, encounter various social and socioeconomic difficulties. These factors encompass a shortage of extracurricular activities, insufficient financial resources, overcrowded classrooms, and a high proportion of underprivileged students, all of which obstruct the delivery of equitable quality education. Kozol's account highlights the link between race and economic status, showing how they jointly exacerbate and perpetuate educational disparities.

*Savage Inequalities* profoundly exposes the deep divisions within the American educational system, revealing how disparities extend beyond race to encompass social and economic stratification—issues that were previously identified in the works of Coleman (1966). Kozol emphasizes the stark contrast between affluent schools, predominantly serving majority populations, and schools in impoverished areas, where minority students are often the majority. While the former benefit from superior resources, skilled educators, and state-of-the-art facilities, the latter struggle with chronic underfunding, dilapidated infrastructure, and a lack of basic educational materials. This inequity, Kozol asserts, is a reality that many students face, and it is an extreme situation compounded by the broader social conditions.

Kozol emphasizes *de facto* segregation, noting that the quality of education students obtain is significantly affected by their socioeconomic background, race, and even their residential zip

code. This truth is supported by researchers such as Filardo et al. (2006), Kornhaber, Griffith, and Tyler (2014), as well as Fryer and Katz (2013), who highlight how these socioeconomic and racial influences shape educational results.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In the past few years, recent works have developed these themes further. For example, Baker (2018) and Fiske & Ladd (2017) delve deeper into the link between funding inequalities and the quality of education, supporting Kozol's claim that sufficient resources are essential for the success of urban schools. Researchers like Stewart (2023) have built upon Kozol's criticism of school choice policies, highlighting how these policies can worsen segregation and deepen inequalities, rather than addressing their root causes.

Kozol's striking portrayal of differing educational settings has been essential in highlighting racial and socioeconomic disparities in American education. His experiential approach—which depends on direct observations and thorough interviews—reflects the human effects of educational inequality in a manner that solely statistical or theoretical studies frequently fail to do. This engaging method offers school communities and policymakers a richer insight into these inequalities, surpassing what figures alone can express. Kozol's research highlights the importance of implementing policies that confront deep-seated inequalities (see also Lansing-Billings, 1995; Noguera, 2009; Ravitch & Stoeck, 2017).

Kozol's criticism of charter schools has generated considerable discussion regarding their contribution to increased segregation. He contends that charter schools, which frequently focus on particular niches, may exacerbate class and racial divides, opposing their original goal of closing educational disparities (Monarrez, Kisida, & Chingos, 2019).

*Savage Inequalities* contributions are seen as crucial in the discourse on educational inequality (Stevens & Dworki, 2014; Aiston & Walraven, 2024). Nevertheless, it has encountered criticism, particularly from education historian Diane Ravitch and her associate (2017), who contended that Kozol's dependence on anecdotal evidence undermines the comprehensive analysis. Regardless of these concerns, we must recognize the necessity for additional research and thorough examinations of educational policies. Likewise, Powers & Cookson (1999) and, most recently (Houston et al. 2022) advocated for a more data-oriented method in comprehending and tackling educational inequalities, proposing that empirical studies should enhance narrative-focused critiques such as Kozol's. The thorough critique of *Savage Inequalities* also recognizes the range of perspectives, emphasizing the reliance on anecdotal evidence and the necessity for detailed policy examination. The book provides a thought-provoking analysis of the various inequalities present in the educational system.

Ultimately, Kozol's contributions persist in sparking significant dialogue regarding educational resources, policies, and the organization of school systems. His research highlights the considerable differences between wealthy and poorly funded schools, urging action to focus on fair funding, eliminate overcrowding, and tackle structural obstacles that sustain segregation and inequality. Although his method can sometimes stir controversy, it is still crucial in current discussions on how to establish a fairer and more equitable educational system. In the past few years, recent works have developed these themes further. For example, Baker (2018) and Fiske & Ladd (2017) explore the link between funding inequalities and the quality of education, supporting Kozol's claim that sufficient resources are essential for the success of urban schools. Researchers like Stewart (2023) have built upon Kozol's criticism of school choice policies, showing how these

policies can worsen segregation and strengthen inequalities instead of tackling the fundamental causes of educational inequities.

Kozol's critique of charter schools has sparked substantial debate about their role in promoting greater segregation. He argues that charter schools, often tailored to specific niches, might worsen class and racial divides, contradicting their initial aim of bridging educational gaps (Monarrez, Kisida, & Chingos, 2019). These critiques, supported by recent studies, underscore that systemic inequalities in education persist and demand deliberate, equity-centered reforms. While de jure segregation has long been abolished, de facto segregation remains entrenched, perpetuated by inequitable resource distribution and systemic neglect. As Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* illustrated decades ago, and as this review reaffirms, the enduring disparities in resource allocation and educational opportunities highlight a persistent divide. Addressing these inequities requires a steadfast commitment to transformative changes that not only confront these systemic barriers but also advance social justice and equitable education for all.

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