

Jonathan Kozol **Savage Inequalities** Summary

Understanding the Core Message of **Savage Inequalities**

When Jonathan Kozol published **Savage Inequalities** in 1991, he delivered a searing indictment of the American public education system. This **Jonathan Kozol Savage Inequalities summary** explores how the book exposed the deep, often grotesque disparities between schools serving wealthy white suburbs and those serving poor minority communities. Kozol traveled across the United States, visiting classrooms in East St. Louis, Chicago, New York City, Camden, and other cities. What he found was not merely inadequate funding but a systemic neglect that amounted to a form of apartheid in education. The book remains one of the most powerful

critiques of educational inequality ever written, and its relevance has only grown in subsequent decades.

Kozol argued that the inequalities were not accidental. They were the result of deliberate policy choices, rooted in property tax-based school funding, residential segregation, and political indifference. The **Jonathan Kozol Savage Inequalities summary** must begin with this fundamental premise: that America had, and still has, two separate and unequal school systems. One system offers state-of-the-art facilities, small class sizes, experienced teachers, and a wealth of extracurricular opportunities. The other offers crumbling buildings, outdated textbooks, overcrowded classrooms, and a curriculum stripped of enrichment. Kozol did not merely report statistics; he gave voice to the children, teachers, and parents living inside this crisis.

The Context of the Book

To fully appreciate any **Jonathan Kozol Savage Inequalities summary**, one must understand the historical and political context in which the book was written. The 1980s had been a decade of conservative ascendancy under Presidents Ronald

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Reagan and George H. W. Bush. Federal support for urban schools had been cut, and the War on Poverty had been largely abandoned. The landmark school desegregation efforts of the 1960s and 1970s were stalling or being reversed by the courts. Meanwhile, the gap between rich and poor was widening dramatically.

Kozol, a former teacher in the Boston public schools and a longtime activist, had already written about educational inequality in **Death at an Early Age** (1967). But **Savage Inequalities** was broader in scope and more incendiary in tone. It was written as a moral outcry, a demand that Americans confront the reality of what they were doing to their children. The book was based on direct observation, interviews, and school visits conducted between 1988 and 1991. Kozol did not rely on academic studies or government reports alone; he sat in classrooms, talked to principals, and walked through neighborhoods where the schools were literally falling apart.

A comprehensive **Jonathan Kozol *Savage Inequalities* summary** must highlight that Kozol was not a neutral observer. He was an advocate, and his prose reflects his outrage. This is both the book's strength and, for some critics, its limitation. But for generations of educators, activists, and policymakers, the book was a revelation. It made abstract issues of school funding and tax policy visceral and human.

Key Schools and Communities Examined

Kozol visited several schools in different parts of the country, and each chapter of the book reads like a case study in neglect and resilience. A detailed **Jonathan Kozol Savage Inequalities summary** must examine at least a few of these schools in depth.

East St. Louis, Illinois

Kozol began his journey in East St. Louis, one of the poorest cities in America. The schools there were in catastrophic condition. Toilets were broken, ceilings leaked, windows were missing, and the buildings were infested with rodents and roaches. In some schools, raw sewage backed up into the hallways because the city's sewer system was failing. The science labs had no equipment, the libraries had few books, and many teachers were uncertified or teaching subjects they were not trained for. Kozol described children trying to learn in temperatures below freezing because the heating systems were broken. The **Jonathan Kozol Savage Inequalities summary** of this chapter is almost unbearable to read. Yet Kozol also captured the

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dignity and determination of the students and teachers who refused to give up, even as the system failed them at every turn.

Chicago, Illinois

In Chicago, Kozol visited schools that were segregated and underfunded. He described classrooms where students shared tattered textbooks, where there were not enough desks, and where the curriculum was narrowed to basic reading and math drills because there was no money for art, music, or foreign languages. He contrasted these schools with the wealthy suburban schools of New Trier and Winnetka, which offered everything from Olympic-sized swimming pools to Advanced Placement courses in multiple subjects. The **Jonathan Kozol Savage Inequalities summary** of the Chicago section is particularly powerful because it shows how close these two worlds are geographically, yet how far apart they are in opportunity and outcome. Kozol argued that this proximity made the inequality not just unjust but obscene.

New York City, New York

New York City schools presented a different kind of inequality. In the South Bronx and Harlem, Kozol found schools that were overcrowded, understaffed, and dilapidated. He visited a school where the gymnasium had been converted into classrooms, where the auditorium was unusable, and where children had to eat lunch in shifts because the cafeteria was too small. He contrasted these schools with those in affluent suburbs like Scarsdale and Great Neck, where per-pupil spending was often double or triple that of the city's poorest schools. A proper **Jonathan Kozol Savage Inequalities summary** of this chapter must emphasize Kozol's argument that the funding system was fundamentally unconstitutional and immoral.

Camden, New Jersey

Camden was another city in crisis. The schools there were plagued by violence, poverty, and neglect. Kozol described a high school where the library had been closed for years, where the science labs were empty, and where the building itself was a health hazard. He interviewed students who spoke openly about their despair and their awareness that they were being cheated. The **Jonathan Kozol Savage**

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Inequalities summary of Camden is heartbreaking, but it also includes moments of resistance and hope, as teachers and community members fought to provide some semblance of a decent education.

Central Themes and Arguments

Beyond the specific case studies, a strong **Jonathan Kozol *Savage Inequalities* summary** must identify the book's central themes and the arguments Kozol made about the nature of inequality in American education.

The Property Tax Funding System

Kozol's primary target was the system of funding schools through local property taxes. This system means that schools in wealthy areas, where property values are high, have abundant resources. Schools in poor areas, where property values are low, are starved for funding. Kozol argued that this was not just unfair but deliberately designed to maintain inequality. He showed how states like Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey had been sued multiple times over school funding formulas,

yet the courts had been unable or unwilling to force meaningful change. The **Jonathan Kozol Savage Inequalities summary** must make clear that Kozol saw this as a moral failure, not just a technical or legal one.

Segregation and Apartheid

Kozol used the term "apartheid" deliberately and repeatedly. He argued that American schools were more segregated in 1991 than they had been in 1968. This was not de jure segregation, as in the Jim Crow South, but de facto segregation driven by housing patterns, zoning laws, and political boundaries. Kozol showed that the segregation of schools was inseparable from the segregation of neighborhoods and that both were maintained by policy choices. A **Jonathan Kozol Savage Inequalities summary**