

Kozol Book Issues Call For Educational Rebellion

The first goal and primary function of the U.S. public school is not to educate good people, but good citizens. It is the function which we call — in enemy nations — “state indoctrination.” In speaking of the U.S.S.R., for example, we feel little hesitation to apply this term. In the U.S., in the double-talk of Schools of Education, we employ more elegant expressions like “the socializing function.” The words are different. The function is the same

—Jonathan Kozol

Children do not go to school for their own good, Jonathan Kozol tells us, they go to school for something called “their nation’s welfare.”

“They go to school,” he insists, “to learn how not to interrupt the evil patterns that they see before them, how not to question and how not to doubt . . .”

They go to school to be anesthetized to the presence of Absolute Evil.

In a word, they go to school to be brainwashed — to be turned into “ethical incompetents.”

This gets accomplished by a number of Ways and Means. Among them, Kozol lists these:

• **Telling the child that he or she has no right to criticize that which he or she cannot immediately replace.** “A child must be taught to question, to doubt, to say no,” says Kozol, or the child will suffer “the loss of his own soul.”

• **Splitting the school day into “periods” and “subjects.”** Kozol says these compartmentalize students so that as adults we deal with certain things in close presence only, severing the bond of love or chain of obligation, the instant we have moved away in time and situation.



Books of the Times

by George Vukelich

The Night Is Dark And I Am

Far From Home

by Jonathan Kozol
Houghton Mifflin
208 pp. \$7.95

• **Psychic and emotional anesthetization.** “Most great fiction, almost all important verse,” Kozol says, “is written about one of these essential truths: love, death or pain. None of the three is ever consciously conveyed within the public schools.”

• **Revising history and “cleaning up” the Old Image.** Radicals, Shakers and Movers the likes of Helen Keller, Henry David Thoreau, and even Martin Luther King Jr. emerge from the history books all “sanitized” and Sterile. It recalls the definition of the DAR as “a collection of living conservatives who worship dead radicals.”

• **Giving pupils “free” options.** “Options offered,” Kozol writes, “are between hard objects: never between human needs or moral obligations.” What it all boils down to is that what is sanctioned by the school board, the Establishment can be taught — what is not sanctioned cannot be taught. Free options, in Kozol’s judgment, are “a pre-tense.”

• **The systematic and bureaucratic control of ethical protest.** “The child who has a private vision, secret dream or personal yearning for a life of justice,” Kozol says, “is going to have to fight for sheer survival in the face of teacher, counselor, physician.”

In a concluding appeal to teachers, Kozol tells you precisely where he’s at — and where he expects them to be.

“This book,” he says, “is not a call for ten more years of pedagogic games, of sandals, smiles and amusing teachers without passions, principles or lesson-plans. It is a call, instead, for tactics, plans, scenarios of clear and conscious and intentional subversion of the public schools. The object of this book is not amelioration, but sophisticated and prepared rebellion . . .”

Jonathan Kozol does lay out a beautiful rationale for destroying the American educational system. But then again, one of the best reasons for not blowing it all up tomorrow is that it does produce people like Jonathan Kozol.

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Jonathan Kozol, who spoke recently in Madison, is a graduate of Harvard and a Rhodes scholar who taught in the Boston public schools in the early 1960s — only to be fired for his civil rights beliefs. He described this experience in “Death at an Early Age,” which won the National Book Award in 1968. One year later Kozol joined the parents of his former students to create one of the first successful Free Schools in the nation. “Free Schools” (1972), his chronicle of that period of struggle, has become a basic handbook for the urban schools.