



Jonathan Kozol

On November 19, 2005 Jonathan Kozol spoke with *Voices in Urban Education* editor Robert Rothman about the conditions of children in urban schools and the role of education reformers in perpetuating inequalities.

Your book came out about the same time as Hurricane Katrina. Both revealed for many people what had been hidden from much of the public's view: the vast inequities in American society and the conditions under which many African Americans live. Why do you think these gaps have been hidden or so long and why did it take such dramatic events to expose them?

The most stunning lesson from Katrina was not so much the inequalities as the literal physical segregation of African American people. It's remarkable. Those who visited the shelters that were created in Houston and elsewhere tell me they walked into huge rooms in which there were no white people. In other words, the shelters are colonies of segregation because the neighborhoods that were least served were also so profoundly segregated. I think racial separation, as much as inequality, is what stunned the nation.

However, the question you asked is why has this not been noted before?

Yes.

I think the media in general, the mainstream media, has been embarrassed to confront directly the degree to which their own cities and school systems have become so profoundly segregated. The major newspapers in the nation tend to favor integration as a national ideal, but in their own front yards, their own communities, they tend to support neighborhood schools, charter schools, niche academies, and what I call boutique public schools that have a profoundly segregative effect. In fact, most newspapers refuse to use the adjective "segregated" in a narrative description of a segregated school; instead they use euphemisms such as a school with a "diverse" population. The word diverse has come to mean the opposite of diverse. It usually means a school that is totally black and Hispanic, with a handful of perhaps Pakistani immigrants or Southeast Asians. So that's one reason: the shameful silence of the press.

The second reason is that many of my closest friends and colleagues in the school-reform movement have virtually shut their eyes to this issue for the past decade. They tend to speak of ways to run more innovative segregated and unequal schools, or smaller and

more intimate segregated and unequal schools, or in the case of those who are more politically conservative, or pedagogically conservative, segregated and unequal schools with black kids wearing uniforms and chanting self-help slogans. Or segregated and unequal schools with private and corporate partners. But by a convenient defect of vision, they have refused to name the moral travesty at the center of the issue: that is to say the fact that these basically are apartheid institutions.

So to some degree I blame my colleagues, my more liberal and progressive colleagues who have not addressed this issue, in part because one does not receive corporate grants so easily for school reform if one states that one of our primary goals is to confront residential and educational segregation in a fearless way. That's the last thing most business—even the more enlightened foundations and business corporations are likely to support.

It is remarkable that I had to write this book in order to compel educators to address this fact, because one doesn't really need statistics, one only needs to have visited inner-city schools throughout the past five years to see what's taking place. My book is drawn, in a sense, on forty years of work, beginning when I was a fourth-grade teacher in inner-city Boston and then a fifth-grade teacher in the Metco integration program in Newton. But it draws more directly on the sixty schools I visited during the past five years. In the inner-city schools I visited, it's not that simply I don't see many white children, I never see *any* white children. If you took a photograph of a typical classroom I visited it would be indistinguishable from a photograph of a school in Mississippi in 1935 or '40. Segregation has returned to public education with a vengeance. The percentage of black kids who now go to integrated schools has dropped to its lowest level since the death of Dr. King in 1968.

As a sort of footnote to that point, the press tends recklessly to tell the public that integration was a failure. In fact, this is a gross distortion of history. Integration, during the period of its enforcement, roughly from 1965 to 1990—because it took about a decade before *Brown* was seriously enforced—integration during that twenty-five year period was a spectacular success. Tens of thousands of schools all over the country integrated with remarkably healthy and optimistic results. During that period, the so-called achievement gap between black and brown children on the one hand and white children on the other narrowed dramatically. Black children in particular made the greatest gains in achievement during that period than in an entire century.

Since the early 1990s, as the Rehnquist Court progressively ripped apart the enforcement mechanisms of *Brown*, and even came to the point recently in St. Louis of denying school systems funding for *voluntary* integration, during this period schools have been dramatically resegregated and the achievement gap between black and brown kids on the one hand and white kids on the other has widened progressively or else remained flat. Even in these most recent years as Mr. Bush has enforced his obsessive testing and accountability regime on public schools, there have been absolutely no sustained gains for minority children.

Some school systems will celebrate a momentary uptick, for example, in the fourth grade reading scores, and newspapers, being civic boosters, will front-page these stories: “Fourth-grade scores for minority children up 3 percentage points.” But I’ve been watching this for decades, and within a couple of years the same newspapers say, “the gains we thought we saw turned out to be ephemeral or misleading.” The *New York Times* earlier this summer headlined “Remarkable Gains in Fourth-Grade Reading Scores,” but by the end of the summer, the *Times* returned to the story and said actually these were not significant gains; the main reason for an apparent gain was that a new kind of test was being used.

More to the point, even when there is a slight uptick in the fourth grade scores, even when it’s authentic, these are testing gains; these are not learning gains. These are a direct result of obsessive teaching to the test. The reason I know this is the following: I follow all these kids—I follow hundreds of kids that I’ve known in several cities, especially in the Bronx in New York—and the same fourth graders who allegedly have suddenly made a 5 percent gain their reading scores don’t retain these skills. I meet the same kids four years later when they are in eighth grade and they can’t write a cogent sentence or read a textbook that’s basically written at the fourth grade level. In fact, by the time minority kids are in twelfth grade, the average black and Latino twelfth grader in America now reads and computes at approximately the same level as white seventh graders. That figure happens to come from the Education Trust, which is politically very moderate and in fact which has unfortunately supported NCLB. But those are certainly reliable figures.

But I don’t need statistics because I see it. I see these kids who have been put through drill-and-kill routines in schools that allegedly have found the secret formula to “turn it all around.” I followed them through their schooling—after all, this teach-to-the test agenda did not start with NCLB, it started in many of our major cities about ten years ago, in New York for example. And the same kids who have received the alleged benefits of strict accountability, whose teachers have been bludgeoned into reading from a script, whose schools have abolished recess in order to have more time to drill children for tests, these kids, after all these years, have ended up worse off than their peers of twenty-five years ago.

So we’re not simply dealing with segregation having returned with a vengeance. We’re also speaking of the absolutely predictable results of segregation, which is unequal schooling with calamitous results for those we cordoned off in schools our own children—white children—don’t attend.

The most segregated states in America right now for public education are New York City, which is the epicenter of segregation of the nation, then Illinois, Michigan, California, though if you count the District of Columbia as a state that would be one of the top five also. For me, one of the heartbreaking ironies is that, if I want to see a really segregated school in any city I visit, black folks always say to me just go to a school that’s named for Thurgood Marshall, Martin Luther King, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Langston Hughes. I always wonder why we name these kinds of schools for

people black folks love. I think we ought to save the name of Martin Luther King or Fannie Lou Hamer or Rosa Parks for a school that lives up to their dream.

You use the term apartheid. That implies a deliberate policy of segregation.

No, it just means apartness, to me. But it is deliberate, in a sense.

There are those, especially in the academic world, who prefer that I understate everything, but look: the neighborhood of the South Bronx, in which I've spent most of the past fifteen years with children, has a segregation rate of 99.8 percent. Virtually every child is black or Latino. So if you want to be technically accurate you could say two-tenths of 1 percentage point marks the difference between legally enforced apartheid of the South of fifty years ago or in South Africa in an earlier generation and socially and economically enforced apartheid in most of our major cities today.

I take my mandate from the great Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Merton, who said, there comes a certain time when we have the obligation to call things by their right names. I don't like sweetening the pill in order to make it more easily digestible.

It's interesting to me that the reaction to the book has been so strong and favorable. I'm not talking about the neoconservative culture warriors of New York City. I'm talking about masses of decent people in this country. During this book tour, the typical auditorium in which I have spoken has held maybe 800 people, and again and again, we've had as many as 1,500 people packed into these rooms. And they are not simply elderly liberals or veterans of the civil-rights era. Nor are they simply idealistic undergraduates. The majority of people in these crowds, which are the largest crowds I've seen since 1968, when *Death at an Early Age* was published, the majority of these folks are simply decent, thoughtful American people. Perhaps a quarter of them are teachers. The rest are people who are simply solid, decent Americans, many driven by Judeo-Christian values who are ashamed that our nation has essentially turned its back on everything that Thurgood Marshall fought for and Dr. King died for.

It's interesting. At the end of these events, I always leave a sign-up pad for people who want to be actively engaged in confronting this issue. Not in creating slightly more innovative schools, where kids do more interesting things, which of course is something I fought for my whole career, but in confronting the basic fact that separate schools have never been equal in American history and never will be. On these sign-up pads, people write little essays to me. When I spoke at the University of Chicago two weeks ago there were 1,500 people and it seemed like there were about 800 people who signed this list, and they wrote little essays to me, saying, "I do my best within my school, and thank you for encouraging those of us who are in the front lines in these schools," because I do that constantly. I do anything I can to help teachers and principals in the immediate situation that they face. But they say, typically, "I don't like being part of an injustice that's so vast. I feel as a teacher I'm a witness, and I need to speak out." I'm paraphrasing, but these are types of statements I've seen.

In your book and this talk you describe an intellectually deadening atmosphere.

Yes, the curriculum that's been introduced as a consequence of the testing pressures.

But the schools you've been writing about for forty years are intellectually arid places. I thought that's why you wrote your first book. Are things worse now?

They're far worse. First of all, the segregated school in which I taught fourth grade in Boston was, in pedagogic terms, almost libertarian compared to what I'm seeing now in these anxiety-loaded, test-driven inner-city schools. Yes, we were stuck with the old Dick and Jane readers. But there was sufficient flexibility so that lots of teachers could do interesting and you weren't monitored every minute of the day to make sure you were "on task." (I hate that term, so I always use it in quotes.)

And if it hadn't been for a real dumb mistake that I made in the last week of the year, which was bringing in a poem by Langston Hughes. I wouldn't call it a dumb mistake. I take that back. If it weren't for a fluke, a bizarre fluke that my principal reacted with such panic to something as simple as reading some poetry by the best-known black poet in America, if it weren't for that I could have continued doing the innovative things I was doing all year long.

For example, the curriculum in fourth grade that year in geography was largely an abysmally racist study of Western Europe and Africa. I simply scrapped it completely and did a unit on life in the city of Paris, since I'd just lived there for four years. And nobody came in and said, this isn't on the state standards.

You couldn't do that today?

Not in the schools I'm talking about, no. Look: you're correct that the books I've been writing throughout these years have been grim and upsetting books. But there was a period, from, I would say, beginning in the early 1970s, for at least a decade, until people like William Bennett began to organize what I call a counter-revolution, there was a period there in which, even in the most segregated and unequal schools, teachers were doing a lot of creative and innovative things, with the approval of their principals and often with the support of their school administrators.

But since around 1995, as states like New York, and shortly after, California, and Massachusetts began to enforce these very rigid lists of state standards, associated directly with high-stakes examinations, and then began penalizing or humiliating school principals who couldn't deliver magical gains in a matter of two years, a state of siege has taken over in hundreds of these schools, or probably thousands, not just the ones I've visited or where I know teachers.

There hasn't been anything like this in American education since the early part of the century, when Elwood Cubberly and Edward Thorndike and their colleagues were in their prime, when they were enforcing the efficiency agenda modeled on business

practices. It's that agenda that has been recreated in the past ten years. Although all these entrepreneurial and technocratic school reform experts claim that they're doing something new and radical, in fact this is simply a tiresome reconstruction of the same agenda that was put in place during the 1920s. A little earlier, maybe; that movement began around 1910. This is the same era in which the eugenics movement became popular, and IQ testing was developed.

One thing that seems new now, is that, rhetorically at least, there is some attention to the achievement gap, and it's now national policy to close the gap. Isn't that some sign of progress?

No. Because I think it's insincere. I think, certainly at the federal level, at the level of the Bush Administration, it's either insincere or it's being pursued in a way that's so destructive and counterproductive that it represents the worst kind of sincerity—what Erik Erikson called “destructive conscientiousness.”

Look, if you want to address the achievement gap, you do it in the ways that worked in the past. I don't want to repeat the first long answer that I gave to you, but the greatest gains in achievement for minority children were seen during the twenty-five years in which school integration was pursued persistently, and in many cases with great sensitivity and tremendous success. All that data is in Orfield's work. Now we have somebody no less than the head of the Education Trust, Kati Haycock, saying on the record, and I quote her in my book, and I cite the source, “the achievement gap has widened...on our watch.”

If you want to confront the achievement gap, we didn't need all of these incredibly repetitive, arid, and jargon-loaded national conversations and symposiums, and conferences on “ways to turn it all around,” without speaking of separate and unequal schooling. We simply didn't need that. We would look at the numbers. Even to this day, the most dramatic success rates for minority kids are in integrated public schools which they attend either under some of the few remaining court orders or in voluntary programs, such as the inter-district program that surrounds Boston, a similar program that surrounds Milwaukee, a similar program that surrounds St. Louis—although that one is now under attack by the government—and in the ultimate inter-district program, which takes place in the Louisville area, where it's no longer necessary to cross district borders, since Jefferson County has become one large multi-racial district. I have these statistics in my book, but you don't really need statistics if you spend any time in these schools.

Anything that advances racial integration in America can always be picked apart by those who don't have much appetite for that ideal any longer and they can always find something to complain about. For example, there's lots of handwringing among white academics about those famous separate tables in the integrated schools, or about the fact that sometimes black and Latino kids do not receive the culturally appropriate support systems they need in these schools. All these things are true. But, first of all, when I was at Harvard College, all the Jewish kids sat at separate tables, even in Eliot House. Even the Jewish kids from the Bronx, like my friend Joe Lelyveld. We tended to be shy at first.

But as I say in the book, in the long run, these kids not only end up making lifelong friendships with each other, which becomes apparent when they go back for their tenth reunions, for example—they come into the room, they hug each other. A lot of them now work together. Many chose colleges together. Black kids are choosing colleges they never would have heard of if they weren't in these programs. I taught in Metco, in the first two years of Metco, so I'm an eyewitness to what happened to black children who were being bludgeoned by the mediocre education in their segregated schools in Boston and to see what happened to them when they come into a beautifully funded school with enormously supportive school principals who had been given a great deal of preparation in order to receive these kids with sensitivity and wisdom. And I'm telling you that virtually kid I know who went into that program, and I've known hundreds since, because I'm still very close to the black parents in Boston who have been the spearhead of that program, virtually all those kids graduated high school in four years and virtually all of them went on to higher education. I'd say at least 95 percent went on to higher education, most to very good four-year colleges, like Brown, and Amherst, and Spelman, and Yale, and Harvard.

The fact that school reformers will not look at this reality is a gifted evasion of the central point. The central point is that the Warren Court was right: separate schools—I'm paraphrasing the decision—even when physical and other measurable factors may appear to be equal, are inherently unequal. With the exception of a handful of boutique schools, segregated schooling has never been equal to the schooling that's given to the mainstream of this nation, and it's sheer folly to pretend that they will suddenly become equal in the century ahead. It ain't gonna happen.

Do you think that part of the problem is that people really don't want equality, and that they're more concerned with their own kids, and if they're own kids are doing well, why care about somebody else's kids?

No! Many angry people might feel that, either that or just through bigotry. I don't. I talk with an enormous mainstream of people in the United States, and if you get away from the areas of truly virulent resistance that I describe, for example, on Long Island in New York, when I'm talking about Roosevelt, if you get away from that and from the frenzied attempts to create boutique schools for white children in New York on the part of all too many of my Harvard classmates for their white children, if you get away from these areas of talionic contestation, and you get into the mainstream of America, I find that the overwhelming majority—white Americans, I mean—do not wish ill to poor children of color, do not view them as intellectually inferior to their own children (all parents think their kid is tops; that's just human), do not act upon racist beliefs and, frankly, tell me again and again they wish there were a way to give the same good things they are giving to their own kids to all the children in the same metropolitan community.

I write at length about a little girl named Pineapple, who's become a favorite in my life. If any white people that I meet almost anywhere in America, with the exception of a small core of really hardened souls, if any of these folks ever got to know Pineapple,

they'd want to do anything in the world they could do for her. I can tell you there are dozens of people in America who have asked me is there any way we could get Pineapple or some of the other kids in her neighborhood a chance to go to our public school system. It's usually unrealistic, because these are people who live far from New York, but the structural divisions we have created in our society by uncontested racial residential segregation, and now by the new phenomenon, encouraged by far too many school systems, of creating small niche academies to appeal to people of very different social classes and very different ethnic groups, along with the injurious effects of Supreme Court decisions of the past fifteen years, have created a situation where very few of these decent white people will ever meet Pineapple, will ever know of her existence. Oh, they'll read about her in academic studies, but they'll never know she's real.

Polls taken all over the country, and Orfield has documented many of these, indicate the vast majority of white Americans—white parents—still believe their children will receive a better education in an integrated school. And, needless to say, an even larger proportion of black people continue to believe that adamantly, despite the handful of bombastic separatists who are typically quoted in conservative white media. The suburban integration program surrounding Boston, for example, has 3,300 kids in it. But at any given time there's a waiting list of 16,000. That represents a third of all the black and Latino kids in the Boston public schools. And we see those waiting lists everywhere.

You asked about white people. I don't think we live in a hateful nation of people who want to give the best only to their child and who are somehow able emotionally to write off everybody else. But I think the structures we have created have made it very difficult for ordinary American people to act on their own essential decency. And I think many of us in the school-reform field have unwittingly and innocently colluded in the creation of some of those divisive structures. To give a simple example: the newest trend of the day is small and intimate urban schools. That's this year's panacea. And, by the way, in its origins, it's a beautiful idea, and individuals like Debbie Meier have carried it out with great success. I've visited her school frequently here in Roxbury, though now she's retired. But what has happened is, an essentially gentle and pedagogically progressive notion has been now adopted essentially as a systematic way of doing an end run around the central obstacle to healthy and equal education for poor children. School systems now are stamping out small academies, recklessly, usually giving them thematic identifications that have very little connection with what is actually happening at the school. A typical small school aimed at segregated students is named Business and Law Academy. I've run into a lot of those. Or Entrepreneurial Skills Academy. Generally when I go into these schools I find there are a lot of slogans on the walls that support those notions, but in fact the curriculum is mainly remedial—fourth grade reading, sometimes by innovative approaches. And some of these Business and Law Academies don't teach business and don't teach law. And they're usually bad schools. Their success rate is terrible, with a few exceptions. I think the Coalition of Essential Schools has probably been able to encourage some that have better success rates, and I applaud that, and they are also happier places for children and for teachers. But this is not the pattern in most of the nation.

The Gates Foundation has given its imprimatur to this movement and is helping school systems to stamp out small schools (by stamp out I don't mean eradicate, but stamp them out like from a cookie cutter). And in this process has done an enormous amount of damage in many school districts by failing to make even the slightest nod towards making sure that these schools would have multi-racial populations. With their resources, with the immense funds available to the Gates Foundation, they could very easily have created tremendous fiscal incentives for school systems or communities to create marvelous small schools that cut across all lines of race and class. And they simply failed to do so.

In other words, they could have created a generation of real magnet schools, of genuine magnet schools, schools that are so good and have so much more money than other schools, they can afford to bring in the most incandescent teachers, the most experienced teachers, the most enlightened curriculum, in the most attractive physical settings, and make them irresistible to people of all races. But they have not done that. I don't want to get into personal acrimony, but it's a great disappointment to me.

It's an example of how the education reform movement has basically been orchestrated by—with a few exceptions like Mrs. Meier, who's quite remarkable, and Ted Sizer, whom I've known and admired for years—it's basically been orchestrated by people of limited originality, by people who are only moderately well educated themselves, who are bamboozled by jargon, who believe that they have made a major pedagogic advance when they use the word "utilize" instead of the plain old easily comprehensible verb "use"—or "facilitate," or "replicate," or "initiate," or "implement"—and pack on lazy hyphenated phrases such as performance-referenced assessments (even though that happens to be a good idea). It's been loaded with mediocre jargon created by fairly mediocre intellectuals, semi-intellectuals. It has not been advanced, primarily, by some of the great scholars of our time, or primarily by people who know and love and are intimate with the learning patterns of little children. School reform would have been a very different phenomenon in the past fifteen years if it had looked for leadership to people like Howard Gardner or the best educator I've ever known in my life, I mean the best friend I ever had in education, Fred Rogers.

It's also been loaded with the illusion that progress can come from making longer lists of magic ways to turn it all around. Every group that's looking for a foundation grant has seven ways to run an inner city school that "works." (That verb "works" is a reflection of the mechanistic approach.) Or fourteen ways to "fix" the inner-city schools. I believe even the Coalition of Essential Schools for a while proclaimed that there are twelve essential ways to improve our schools. I happen to like most of the ways they suggested, but this reification of creative ideas into misleadingly seductive lists, there's something almost neurotic about it. It almost reminds me of the desperation of psychotics that I used to see in mental hospitals because my father was a psychiatrist and used to take me on rounds with him at state hospitals, and I would notice how people who were loaded with anxiety and were very insecure would keep making lists of things. As if by putting a number on it—there are seven ways to do it, if you follow our seven suggestions, you can improve your school—there's something utterly....Because there aren't seven ways to do

it. Nor are there twelve basic ways to do it. This is nonsense. What we ought to say, if we want to be honest, is that for the sake of convenience we're breaking down a multitude of approaches into a list that we can number because it makes our work slightly more efficient.

I walk into schools where I see posters on the wall that say "the six forms of effective writing." And the teachers literally have to teach those six forms of effective writing. And I always ask, "What are they? I'm a writer." And they're absolutely random ideas plucked out of the 10,000 forms of effective writing. If anyone told me there are six forms of effective writing when I was a student at Harvard I would have given up writing as my career. I'm a writer, I'm not an accountant.

That need to reify every notion that comes along reflects the basic intellectual mediocrity of those who are orchestrating this movement, whether from the right or the center. There are marvelous people in the progressive camp, in the constructivist camp, whom we almost never hear from because they're not invited to these symposia. Except for Debbie, God bless her. I've never been invited to any of these events, by the way.

That's amazing to me.

I've never been invited to any of these events, whether they were these business partners for excellence conferences, sponsored by Fortune magazine fifteen years ago, or whether they are the newest network of innovative urban schools. Never. I'm not pouting, because I'd rather spend my time in public schools with kids or in the front lines with teachers. My life is awfully busy, anyway. When I do go to events to speak, to keynote, they are generally just from grassroots teachers, and I love that. But they're usually not from the teachers who are doing the super-trendy things and have the appropriate innovative phrases on their tongues. They're generally just good, hard-working teachers.

If you were invited to a national commission on education, what would you say? What would it take to create an equitable system?

Number one, until our residential patterns are no longer so profoundly segregated in this nation, we need to break down district barriers between school districts in order to create the Jefferson County model, or as close to it as we can come, in every metropolitan area of the nation. As Orfield notes in my book, it's hard to imagine this in New York City. He urged me, if I want to be optimistic, not to look at New York.

Hard cases make bad law.

Yeah, and he's right. I wouldn't start with Chicago or New York or Los Angeles but in dozens and dozens of fairly large cities, and more to the point, in middle sized and smaller cities, we should create not only a strong ethical pressure upon those in the suburbs who really do profess good will and I think are serious in their intent on this issue, but we should also put billions of dollars in federal money into providing irresistible incentives to these districts to make it possible for all the children in these

metropolitan areas to sit together at that famous table of brotherhood of which Dr. King spoke.

We have to organize a very strong public political campaign in order to de-stigmatize the idea of students taking transportation to go to a good school. The sloppy rhetoric of even my friends I call my “weary liberal” friends, my tired liberal friends, or my neo-liberal friends, the tired rhetoric I hear from them often is, “Is it fair to these poor inner-city kids to make them ride a bus to escape a school where half the kids never graduate and go to a school where virtually every child graduates?” And I always repeat that question to black parents I know in the city, because I spend a lot of time just sitting up late at night in the kitchens of these mothers and grandmothers, as you know if you’ve read *Amazing Grace* and *Ordinary Resurrections*. I once asked Alice Washington, who’s the mother of the central figure in *Amazing Grace*, “what would you do if your son could escape his neighborhood high school in the Bronx, in his case it happened to be Morris High, which was just a nightmare, where I’d see a freshman class of maybe 800 kids, and I’d see the 160 who’d graduate four years later. And I said to her, what would you do if, instead of sending him there you could give him a fifteen minute bus ride, which is all it would have been, to Bronxville, which is the first suburb, the first very white and wealthy suburb to the north of New York—where, by the way \$19,000 per pupil is spent every year, and where everyone graduates—and she looked at me and said, “Are you kidding? What mother who loves her child wouldn’t jump at that opportunity?” And I said, “And you wouldn’t worry that he might lose some of his African American identity?” And she was a strong Afro-centric person herself. She put me on to a lot of the best black literature that I’ve read. And she looked at me and said, “I’ll take care of his black identity. You make sure that he can get into the same kind of good school that got you into Harvard.”

So if I were the secretary of education—which is not going to happen, but if I were—I wouldn’t simply toy with NCLB and try to make it a little more child-friendly or teacher-friendly or open it up a bit so it would be more respectful of good assessment practices like portfolios, which of course I used to do and which I support. I wouldn’t fiddle around with those small, incremental changes. I would abolish NCLB when it is time to be reauthorized in 2007. I would get rid of it completely, and I would take all that money that’s now going into high-stakes testing, and the more important expense, which is the cost in terms of teacher time diverted from teaching to testing and to preparation for tests, add all that money that’s now going to companies like Kaplan and Princeton Review if schools fail to make their AYP within two years.

I’d take all that money, then I’d triple it, and I’d put all of it into giving massive financial incentives to every metropolitan community in America, where it is at all feasible, to break down district barriers and create wonderful, very expensive, and, as I predict, inevitably very successful schools—ideally small ones; I favor them—schools in both the cities and the suburbs to which children of all races would be more than willing to take a comfortable ride every day. In most cities this could be done with a thirty minute ride at most, leaving out the three or four big cities I mentioned.

In other words, to me the best school reform would be to turn our backs on *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which never worked, which was the most deceptive promise Americans were ever given, to stop repeating that promise, which is what most urban school reformers are doing right now, saying we can have separate but equal schools with innovative methods to make the school day more creative, to have more critical thinking, and so forth. I'd go right in on that and say, no, that isn't what *Brown* was about. That isn't what Thurgood Marshall lived for.

In fact, Thurgood Marshall was prophetic in his recognition that black people might some day be bought off by this fantasy of wonderful segregated schools. He called it Jim Crow Deluxe. At best, that's what cities are using now to try to buy off black folks to stay where they are. So-called African American academies, programs like that. I've visited some of them, and I've always admired the teachers and principals in these schools, but with rare exceptions their success rates are abysmal. Because *Brown* was right. Sometimes they have a few years of great success when corporations are pouring in money in order to create a showpiece of successful segregation, but then the money trickles away.

That's what I would do. Meantime, I would fight for three parallel goals. I would immediately create universal, full-day, richly developmental preschool, starting at the age of 2 ½, for every low-income kid in America. This nation can easily afford to do that. You could probably do that with the money spent in a few months of the Iraqi war. And I would make it such a beautiful program that wealthy people wouldn't feel they needed to go off and spend \$20,000 of their own to send their kids to the Baby Ives. Because only if this program is really superb, only if the pre-K is really superb and attracts the children of the powerful will it be politically sustainable as a really superb program.

Needless to say I am not speaking of the kind of drill-and-kill academies the president is proposing to make out of Head Start. I'm not talking about testing academies for little kids, I'm talking about the same beautiful kind of preschools my friends in Newton and Brookline insist on sending their children to.

By the way, until we have universal pre-K for the poorest children, it's just unspeakably evil to impose high-stakes tests on these kids after they have been in public school for only two or three years. Because the results are going to be easily predictable. Obviously, right? A little kid who's just had three years at the top private pre-K in New York, comes into a public school. Is he or Pineapple more likely to be labeled gifted and talented? We know the answer in advance.

Another practice I would support would be to abolish virtually all high-stakes testing. Except perhaps on a very occasional basis, maybe three times in a child's career, maybe fourth grade, eighth grade, twelfth grade, but not with the punitive sanctions that now attach to high-stakes testing. I would do this solely so that we had some external measurement of how well particular schools are doing.

But that's not the kind of testing I would want; I'm not even sure I would agree to do it even three times in a child's career. I would revise the whole testing apparatus to do only diagnostic testing. An example would be the E-Clas. Do you know that?

No I don't.

That's a very good diagnostic test for first graders, sometimes second graders, but where the kids don't sit there and fill in bubbles on an answer form, but where the teacher sits with the child individually and asks questions, and keeps a running record of the child's answers. It actually has educational value in itself. But more to the point the teacher doesn't have to wait three months to get the answers back, or six months as is often the case to get the answers back from McGraw-Hill, now and then incorrectly graded, as we've seen in many cases. She knows one hour after she gave the test what that child needs and where that child's weaknesses lie. I think Debbie would agree with me that that's the kind of testing that's of real value to children, and which can't be perverted by cheating or test-drilling and so forth.

And when children are demonstrably in bad trouble, I would never institute Skinnerian approaches like Success for All. I would spend a lot of money to use remarkably successful and highly enlightened programs such as Reading Recovery, which I've watched being used many times. Everything I criticize I've seen; I could teach SFA, because I've been in so many classrooms where I've seen it done. And I've watched Reading Recovery, and that's probably the most effective way of catching children up very quickly. It's usually done only for first graders, but some schools use the same ideas for second and third graders who still need to catch up. It's very expensive, but it's the best way.

I'm talking about sparing no funds. I would argue strongly to the public that we are not a Third World nation, and we don't have to choose between giving kids small class size in tenth grade or giving them pre-K when they're two years old. I'm saying we're rich enough to do both.

And finally, if I were education secretary, I would advocate for an amendment to the U.S. constitution that would scrap the present system of school finance entirely. It would guarantee an equally high level of public education to every child in America, so the education of our children will no longer be dependent either on local property wealth or on these so-called equalization formulas in the sundry states, which never equalize, or do so only temporarily until the legislature has a change of mood.

I think there would be very strong national support for such an amendment. Not from the wealthiest districts, perhaps, though I meet countless people in those districts who agree with me that we now have an inherently intolerable system which guarantees that we will never have a genuine meritocracy in America. The system we have in place guarantees a hereditary meritocracy.

If I were education secretary I would stop pointing to the rare and unusual inner-city school that makes a spectacular breakthrough, and then ask how can we replicate this and have more segregated schools that make spectacular breakthroughs? Because I've seen schools like that since 1968—there were a few like that in Boston in the end of the 60s. I've seen them everywhere. And they're not replicable on a massive scale. If they were, we would have done it already. And making new lists of seven more things we should replicate is just academic educators' way of repeating the pattern of the past. They're doing *Plessy*, and you can't do *Plessy*. It doesn't work.

Just coming back to the funding thing, it's inherently irrational to have our children educated, as we say they are being educated, to be Americans, educated, as we say they are being educated, to have a wise role in the American electoral processes, in the jury system, in the economy, and if need be in the military, but then to finance their education on the basis of the wealth or poverty of the district or state in which they live. Congressman Jesse Jackson has introduced such an amendment; I support it. Everywhere I've gone I've mentioned it and frequently audiences interrupt with applause at that point. As Ted Shaw points out in my book, if you ask most Americans is education a fundamental protected right in the U.S. Constitution almost all Americans say they think it is. And when you tell them it's not, they say it should be.

So those are a few modest proposals I would make if I were education secretary. But I don't think I'm headed for that destiny. I haven't made friends with enough corporate leaders and foundation heads.

I am routinely invited to confer with Democratic members of Congress. I know all the Democrats in the Senate fairly well. There are a lot of them who I think share my views, but find it hard to survive politically right now if they said so openly.

Some people say to me, you're 69 years old, why don't you make the rest of your life easy and create an inoffensive institute to establish a network of slightly more innovative schools with more critical thinking, incorporating the views of my own mentors and teachers, such as Paolo Friere, as you know, probably, who's my beloved friend, and Fred Rogers, whom I miss so much, and Howard Gardner, and so forth. But I don't want to go to my grave helping to polish the apple of apartheid. I want to stir teachers and educators and decent academics to be more than technicians of innovative proficiencies, but to be warriors of justice. And that's why I revere Gary Orfield so much, because he one who truly does that.

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