

one another. Where lonely, powerless, marauding individuals prevail, as in the corridors of the nation's junior and senior high schools, only determined, self-willed communities of citizens (students)—not guards with detention slips, arrest warrants, or clubs—can bring order with dignity.

We have to stop preying on one another and begin to wrest our humanity back from those who prey on us all.

Miriam Wasserman is a teacher and author. Her books include The School Fix: NYC, USA (Clarion) and Demystifying Schools: Writings and Experiences (Praeger).



Jonathan Kozol

"History is, as the sarcastic student says, an X-rated film. The trouble is that everyone has first been told: I CANNOT ENTER."

Students in upper-class white suburban high schools speak, day after day, of "urban crisis," "minority unrest," "difficult challenges of racism" in "impacted inner-city regions..." If they are in Evanston, they speak of racism in Chicago. If they are in Scarsdale, they speak about racism in the Deep South. Whatever it is, it is not where they are or while they live. This is the feeling that I often have about the way they speak: It is not so much that they are defending their own school or neighborhood or temporarily endangered

conscience. It is much more as if they are defending their own sense of looking on from outside at all serious matters such as those which take place nightly on TV or such as those which take place in the pages of a book.

* * *

I ask this question to a class of twelfth grade pupils in a school in upper New York State: "What is the purpose of your work in history? What is history in your point of view? Why do you study it? What is it for?"

"History is everything that happened in the past and now is over."

"History is cycles... processes... inevitable patterns..."

"History is what is done by serious and important people."

I ask this question: "Is it in your power to *change* history? Is it in the power of someone within this class?"

The answer: "No... not us... not ordinary people."

I ask them, then: "Who *does* bring change into the world?"

One student says: "I guess... the leaders do."

I ask: "Could *you* be leaders, if you wanted to be leaders?"

He answers: "No... none of us comes from the important families."

Then I ask this: "Is there another time within your life, maybe in 10 years or in 20 years or more, when you might have a different sense of your potential impact on the world, or on this nation?"

One student laughs: "Give us 200 years."

I ask: "How do you get that cold, sarcastic sound within your voice?"

He doesn't grow defensive. He just answers in a calm and lifeless tone: "I know quite well that I'm not going to be part of anything that matters... not anything that matters here and now..."

Then I say this: "How is it that *some* people, somehow, people like Richard Nixon, can be part of history — but others, you, for instance, have to stay on the outside?"

The student who has spoken to me most listens a minute, holds himself in check a minute longer and then answers in a set of slow and measured words. He is a strong, intelligent-looking boy, well over six feet tall, with cold blue eyes and with a sharp-

edged look along his jaw. "History," he says — "it's like those shows and movies that they have on 42nd Street in New York City. For kids at least... THIS SHOW IS RATED X: KEEP OUT."

In one corridor within the social studies section of this modern antiseptic, nearly all-white school, there is a six-foot poster: "Occupations To Which Interest In History May Lead." The list is devastating, perfect and consistent with the words and comprehensions of the children that the school turns out. If the children work hard, and can demonstrate an interest in the field of history or economics or the like, then they can expect one day to be one of these kinds of specialist or expert: 1) archaeologist, 2) historian, 3) curator, 4) writer, 5) critic, 6) anthropologist, 7) research assistant, 8) librarian, 9) teacher of history.

Nowhere in the list do we find two words to suggest the possible goal of being ONE WHO ENTERS HISTORY. Every goal, or job, or dream, or aspiration listed here, is one of narrative description: critic, commentator, teacher, curator, librarian... not union leader, student-organizer, rebel, revolutionary, saint, or senator. "WHY STUDY HISTORY?" asks the wall-sized poster. The answer that we get is plain and uncomplex: in order to *teach* it, *total* it, *tell* it in writing, *cash* it for profit, or *list* it alphabetically in the school library. School teaches history to children in the same way that it teaches syntax, grammar, and word preference: in terms that guarantee their prior exile from its passion and its transformation. It lifts up children from the present, denies them powerful access to the future, and robs them of all ethical repossession of the past. History is, as the sarcastic student says, an X-rated film. The trouble is that everyone we know, love, touch, hold, dream to be, or ever might become, has first been told: I CANNOT ENTER.

Adapted from the Mexican edition, "Work in Progress," to be published in the U.S., autumn, 1975. Copyright © Jonathan Kozol, 1974, Cuernavaca, Mexico.

Jonathan Kozol is author of Free Schools and Death at an Early Age (Houghton Mifflin).

An End to Affluence:

“The United States now experiences the same separation of the people from its land and resources as did Europe when this country was founded 200 years ago. That is, perhaps, the ultimate measure of the end of U.S. affluence. Things have come full circle.”

The elections of 1974, despite the wiping out of Republicanism as an immediately operative force, were in reality not an expression of a new choice but a national evasion of decision. There was no discussion of the possibility that America had become permanently warped into something unfamiliar, nor of the need for the nation to accommodate itself to circumstances utterly different from its past experience. Instead, what was implicitly promised—by liberals and conservatives in concert—was that a pathway would be opened back to yesterday. The past, with its supposed innocence and stable prosperity, would be recaptured. The future would *be* the past, if only the right men were put in office.

There did seem to be basic differences in the ways proposed to escape the present. On the one hand, a period of reduced consumption, to be offset by increased productivity over the long term. On the other hand, increased consumption and increased federal spending to pay for it, with shifts of funds from some areas to more urgent ones to

minimize the total increase in government deficits. Scylla or Charybdis—the obdurate granite of imposed poverty or the sucking whirlpool of heightened monetary inflation—each proposed as a magical doorway backwards in time. And, of course, as a palliative for this queasy return passage into what was, the nostrum of redistribution of the tax burden was offered as an act of “realism” by conservatives, of “morality” by the liberals. The problem, everyone implied, was essentially technical, of finding the fastest route to yesterday.

But there is no way back. The past cannot be recaptured. In the sense of its irretrievability, the American reality of even three years ago is by now as remote from us as the neolithic age. The distance is not marked by time but events. The quality of what was America has changed irreversibly because the world has changed. American politics as practiced are consequently irrelevant to today’s realities, except that their evasions exacerbate the difficulties in which the nation is entangled.

by Terence McCarthy