

The lives of children and the conscience of a nation

Sociology



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When questioned by the media, a deputy mayor stated that " these reductions in municipal expenditures will be 'a victory for everybody' (100). Sadly, overworked social workers and doctors in the ghetto would not be eager to agree. The cuts likely resulted in the deaths of children in house fires and broken elevator shafts. The mayor's solution to the ever-increasing problems facing these children, like AIDS and drug addiction, was to tell " a group of children from a segregated high school that they'll have to learn to manage without public help" (101).

Kozol feels that everyone living comfortably at the expense of the ghetto must be aware of how their silence and inaction affects the lives of the ghetto's children. Kozol told Christian Century in an interview, " With privilege goes the opportunity to earn enough money so that you can live in a wealthy suburb and perpetuate this inequality by passing it on to your children." He continues, " So long as these kinds of inequalities persist, all of us who are given expensive educations have to live with the knowledge that our victories are contaminated because the game has been rigged to our advantage."

The people of the ghetto find hope in religion. Gerald Ryan, a priest in the South Bronx for over fifty years, said that poverty " makes people who are religious more religious, more dependent, closer to God. The need for reassurance that God gives is greater. If everything is going along O. K. and there's no trouble, the need is not so great." When children are faced with the overwhelming reality of being orphaned due to AIDS, prayer is one of the only things that offer them comfort.

A lack of social conscience allows the rest of the nation to live comfortably

while she and countless others suffer. When a homeless man confronts a person in the subway, the fleeting reality of poverty is often forgotten as soon as the person reaches their comfortable suburban home. Kozol notes this when he returns to his own community at Christmastime after being in the South Bronx, writing, " who often feel quite bad about those many people who do not have lives liker ours and frequently write checks particularly during this season of mercy" (91). However, as long as the system exists in its current state, feeling bad for the poor.