Racial Segregation: Still Making an Appearance

Is racial segregation in schools still present and stronger than ever? Almost all children in America go to school, and the school which they will attend is dependent upon where each child lives. Some neighborhoods are much wealthier than others, meaning in turn that those schools will be more luxurious, whereas a more poverty-centered neighborhood will have schools that aren’t as nice and upscale. This is where the question about racial segregation is raised. Racial segregation is deepening within school districts due to the location and environment each child is a part of. Although it is not fair, children are not being treated equally throughout the United States and it has become a widespread problem.

In Jonathan Kozol’s essay “Still Separate, Still Unequal: America’s Educational Apartheid,” he focuses on the problem of racial segregation increasing within schools. According to Kozol, “Schools that were already deeply segregated twenty-five or thirty years ago are no less segregated now, while thousands of other schools around the country have been integrated either voluntarily or by the force of law have since been rapidly resegregating” (405). He uses a very impatient but determined tone. Kozol utilizes his personal examples throughout the essay to show readers the difference within school districts. He also uses multiple statistics that support his overall point and give readers a general idea of racial data and money differences for schools. Kozol argues that children should receive fair and equal treatment no matter where they are from
or what they look like. Kozol exemplifies this by using solid evidence to support his point and push readers to work toward equality in schools. Kozol successfully uses ethos, pathos, and logos throughout his essay to make an effective argument about the racial segregation present in schools.

Kozol’s ethos help support his essay and draw the audience into the main argument about the inequality present in schools. The first ethical appeal is shown by not attacking the people he sees playing a major role in the inequality and injustice within the school systems. Instead, he refers to these people in general terms such as: parents, schools, administrators, or educators. He states, “Many educators make the argument today that given the demographics of large cities like New York and their suburban areas, our only realistic goal should be the nurturing of strong, empowered, and well-funded schools in segregated neighborhoods” (408). Although he does not agree with this statement, he does not use derogatory or disrespectful words. This increases his likability among the audience because they see him as being calm and level-headed. This also shows readers he respects others ideas even if he does not agree with them himself. These two admirable traits appeal to audience members and make him seem more trustworthy. It also helps make his argument seem relevant and worth reading. It shows he is both composed and determined.

The second way Kozol increases his credibility among readers is by writing an essay specifically focused on the racial segregation present in schools. The main objective of his essay is to raise awareness about the injustice and unfair treatment kids are getting. He wants equality throughout schools no matter what race each student is. He says, “Whether the issue of equity alone or deepening resegregation or the labyrinthine intertwining of the two, it is well past the time for us to start the work that it will take to change this” (417). This impacts the audience
because they see he is writing this essay to work to solve a major problem. Kozol comes across as concerned about the injustice in schools. This shows readers he has goodwill. This example helps his argument because it increases his ethos along with the essay’s ethos. People will pay more attention to the essay’s point and the information given because Kozol pushes them to try and make a change.

Along with using ethical appeals to increase his credibility, Kozol also uses emotional appeals to pull the reader into the problem of resegregation within schools. One of the main ways Kozol appeals to readers is by testimonies via his personal experiences. Some of the artifacts he received from a personal experience of visiting an inner city school were letters from students. One of the letters read, “Dear Mr. Kozol, we do not have the things you have. You have Clean things. We do not have. You have a clean bathroom. We do not have that. You have Parks and we do not have Parks. You have all the thing and we do not have all the thing. Can you help us?” (409). This letter impacts the audience in multiple ways. The first important thing to note is that a young child has written this. Most people have a soft spot for children, so readers are already interested in what will be said. The letter also contains many spelling and grammar errors which make the audience think the student is not receiving the proper education. It could even bring certain emotional readers to tears because the content is both shocking and upsetting. Kozol purposely included the letter because he knew people would respond to it in a way that is both sympathetic and determined to make a change, which is exactly how it helps his argument. The letter just reiterates the fact that kids are not receiving the same treatment everywhere and motivates readers to make a change.

The second way Kozol appeals to the audiences’ emotions is by his own experiences. He states, “I had made repeated visits to a high school where a stream of water flowed down one of
the main stairwells on a rainy afternoon and where fungus molds were growing in the office where the students went for counseling” (410). At this same high school he later quotes, “The air was stifling in many rooms, and the children had no place for recess because there was no outdoor playground and no indoor gym” (410). This example largely plays on readers’ emotions. The audience, again, is already more compassionate in regards to children. The descriptive detail Kozol uses to explain the conditions students go to school in everyday appeals to the audience because readers imagine themselves or their children attending school in those types of harmful conditions. This really pulls at the audiences’ heartstrings. The audience members putting themselves in the students’ shoes is really eye-opening and forces readers to take the segregation and unfair treatment for different races seriously. His argument is strengthened by using this appeal because it is a firsthand account and seems more reliable. He is getting their attention while also making them sympathize with these “poor kids.”

The last way Kozol uses pathos is by touching on the fact that schools named after great civil rights leaders have become segregated again. According to Kozol, it is quite discouraging that the schools named after great leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Thurgood Marshall are now becoming resegregated (406). The audience is attracted to this because these leaders had such a big impact on society and became so popular for trying to bring everyone together, no matter what race. Knowing what each leader stood for and how racial segregation is still happening in schools specifically named after them causes the audience to feel upset and disheartened. The irony within this example is unbelievable, which is why Kozol used it. The audience is able to make the connection and understand the bitter irony in it. For some people, that example is enough to take a stand and make a change which is part of the reason Kozol
wrote this essay. He knew this information would both support his argument and also lead them to read on about the injustice.

In addition to Kozol’s successful use of ethos and pathos, he effectively uses logos to attract readers to his essay. The first statistic he uses focuses on the racial differences in schools, or rather the lack there of. This statistic says, “At John F. Kennedy High School in 2003, 98% of the enrollment of more than 4,000 students were black and Hispanic; only 3.5% of students at the school were white” (406). This information is logically appealing because although Kozol uses many personal examples, the data links the two bits of information together. The fact he uses statistics is also helpful to the audience because it supports his personal examples and shows he truly is well informed about the subject. It also is shocking to the audience because most readers believe schools when they say they are “culturally diverse”. This information shows that even though schools claim they are culturally diverse, they really are not which allows the audience to gain more knowledge and connect better with the essay. This information also makes him seem intelligent because he places it at a very logical location. It is toward the beginning of the essay, which helps to give readers an introduction to why he believes there is a problem. It is also placed right after he talks about how deeply segregated schools are in today’s society. It supports his argument because it is linked directly to the claim made about the segregation still present in schools.

The second statistic Kozol uses is about the money difference between an inner city New York school and the upper class New York school. Kozol’s statistic used say that for a young girl’s third grade education in an inner city, the New York Board of Education would have spent about $8,000 per year. If this same third grader was placed in the wealthiest New York neighborhood and went to school there, the New York Board of Education would spend about
$18,000 annually (411). The readers use their knowledge of how much they are paid and how much an average education costs to make a connection. They are shocked by how much of a difference there is, and their level of awareness will continue to go up. The location of this stat helps to support a claim he makes. He places it right after talking about a letter a young girl had written about how they don’t get the same things kids in other schools get. The location appeals to the readers because they are able to associate the personal experience with the data and use it to further their understanding of problem. This is also very logical because it strengthens his personal experience with the child while also connecting to his overall argument of the segregation and injustice within schools.

As a whole, Kozol’s use of ethos, pathos, and logos help to strengthen his argument and raise awareness about the racial segregation deepening within schools. Kozol increases his credibility by sounding both knowledgeable and trustworthy. He pulls on the audience’s heartstrings, and then links it with statistics that logically appeal to readers. Kozol’s essay is structured very well, therefore making his overall argument strong and effective. Kozol’s topic regarding the lack of equality in America’s schools is an important topic to all citizens. Therefore, it is essential that he effectively employ logos, ethos, and pathos to not only encourage readers to understand the severity of the issue, but to also persuade readers to take action and make a difference in the future of American schools so that all children can receive quality educations.
Works Cited