

The following is an extract from a review of Jonathan Kozol's "Illiterate America", generously submitted by Luis Cardoso, a fourth year English and Philosophy student.

Jonathan Kozol's ILLITERATE AMERICAN is the type of book that is difficult to review because of its extraordinary range and depth. It is a gross understatement to say that it was not easy to contain the powerful scope of this book in an average sized book review. I could quote endlessly for pages and pages; this however, is impossible for obvious reasons. Though many sociological studies are conducted in a dispassionate, disinterested, purely academic manner, this book is a clear exception. It is a highly relevant, highly literate study of an urgent problem.

Kozol begins with statistics. These numbers are staggering. One-third of Americans cannot read. The figures Kozol quotes are all fully documented. This is not a book of exaggerated claims. No figure for the "functional" and "marginal" illiterate together is less than 60 million. The adult population (1984) is 174 million. Thirty-seven percent of adults don't read books at all. "The presence of so many millions of unrecognized illiterates in the work force guarantees that hundreds of mistakes, with consequences we may never know, must take place daily."

What exactly is the cost to the American people? \$6 billion a year go to child welfare costs and unemployment compensation caused directly by illiteracy. \$6.6 billion is the annual cost of prison maintenance for inmates whose imprisonment has been directly linked to functional illiteracy. Several billion a year go to worker's compensation, damage to industrial equipment, and industrial insurance costs directly caused by accidents directly related to the inability of workers to read safety warnings, chemical content explanations, and instructions for the operation of



dangerous, sophisticated equipment. It is a safe estimate that it costs businessmen and taxpayers \$20 billion yearly.

The human cost, however, is much more important. Kozol quotes James Madison: "A people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives. A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy, or perhaps both." The number of illiterate adults outnumbers by 16 million the entire vote cast for the winner in the 1980 presidential election.

Illiterates are half-citizens. Their rights exist only in print, not in fact. They cannot read notices from their children's schoolteachers. They cannot read warnings by medical associations about cancer-risk foods, heart disease, and many other serious diseases. They cannot fill our government census forms and literacy questionnaires. They rarely move outside their immediate environment. They cannot read traffic signs. "Geographical paralysis becomes a bitter metaphor for their entire existence. They are immobilized in almost every sense we can imagine." "Do we possess the character and courage," Kozol asks, "to address a problem which so many nations, poorer than our own, have found it natural to correct?"

"If even one third of all illiterates could vote," claims Kozol, "and read enough and do sufficient math to vote in their self-interest, Ronald Reagan would not likely have been chosen president." The "Jeffersonian ideal" and other political leverage and freedom that most take for granted is denied the man who cannot take part in print society. Illiterate voters are cut off from the right to learn from recent history because they cannot access the written record of the candidate. They are "locked into the present and enslaved by the encapsulated moment which is symbolized by the sixty-second newsclip on TV or the thirty-second paid advertisement that candidates employ in order to exploit the well-organized amnesia of America." Illiterate America is a Third World living within the borders of the First World.

Life

Life,
What is it?
Is it waking up in the morning
With nothing to look forward to?

Life,
What is it for?
Is it a punishment for something
Man did long ago?

Life,
What good does it do us?
Going through it day after day
And still not getting out of it alive.

Life,
Maybe we're each here for a mission
To teach the hateful world
A lesson.

Life,
Whatever it is,
It can sometimes be great
And other times not so great.

But even if we don't understand,
Someone must have a good reason
For putting us through life,
Life.

Wendy Knowlton
age 14
Plaster Rock, NB

In love

When you're in love
You're sometimes sad,
Sometimes happy,
Sometimes mad.

Love can control you
So why be fooled
It can make you red hot
It can make you ice cool.

When you're in love
You will know by the touch
You will know by the looks
You will feel so much.

The power of love
Is very strong
One minute you're holding her
Next minute she's gone.

Greg Tapley
age 16
Plaster Rock, NB