


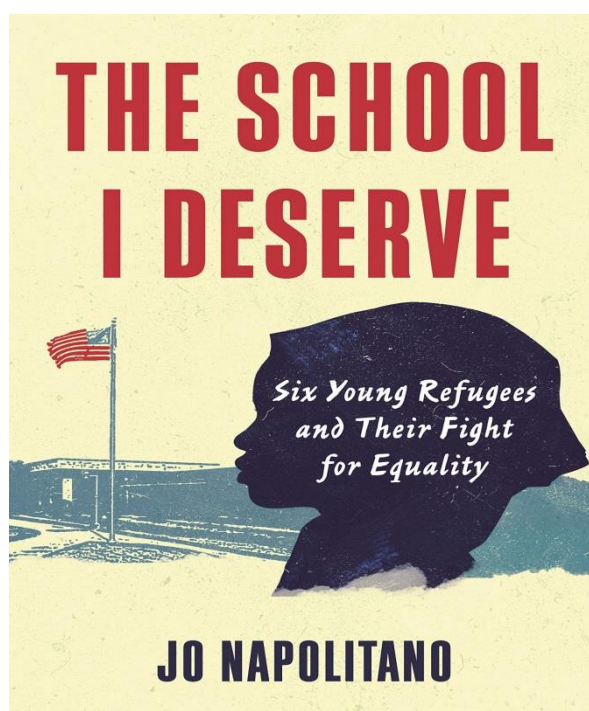
The School I Deserve: Six Young Refugees and Their Fight for Equality in America

Reviewed by

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TITLE: The School I Deserve: Six Young Refugees and Their Fight for Equality in America

Author: Jo Napolitano

PUBLISHER: Beacon Press

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REVIEWER: Anjum Khan

Summary

The School I Deserve: Six Young Refugees and Their Fight for Equality in America (ISBN-10: 0807024988) was written by Jo Napolitano who dedicated it to all the children from foreign lands who call America home. The publication was published in 2021 by Beacon Press. It is about a sensitive issue, supported by evidence, instances and names. It centres on the struggles of six refugee students in District Lankestire, trying to receive regular education who indisputably represent the rest of the refugee aspirants across the country. *The School I Deserve* is a sharp critique of the American refugee policies in general and education measures in particular regarding two schools McCaskey and alternate school, Phoenix. It explains the vital connection between education and migration. Though the book largely whirls around the lives of Khadidja and Mahamed, other refugee aspirants seek justice and play a significant role in the proceedings of the lawsuit.

The publication comes in 224 pages, divided into nineteen chapters that trace the motivation for the study, the context, the refugees' experience, the alternative school, and the lawsuit. The introduction chapter, entitled "From Colombia to Columbia," is the author's life experience in a capsule which also informs the readers of the motivation behind the book. It sets the note for the book by providing the relevant historical and contemporary background. The author begins with Khadidja Issa, who fled the horrific violence in war-torn Sudan, hoping for a safer life in the United States. She aspires to enroll in school and, in due course, become a nurse. However, she is turned away by the School District of Lancaster before she is enrolled in one of its alternative schools, a campus run by a for-profit company. The early chapters – "A New World," "Beyond the Horses and Buggies," "The Uninvited," and "Handle with Care" present forth Khadidja's sense of exclusion on account of high school education. The chapters also include more refugee young adults like Mahamed Hassan, a Somalian refugee who is also in pursuit of education. Those six refugee students are just a sample representing the rest of the refugee aspirants across the USA. Such a procedure gives weight to the study. Besides the refugees, the book also concentrates on other individuals who represent the system, for instance, the sixth chapter discusses Walczak, the legal director and advocate for the refugees at length. The latter half of the book containing chapters– "Opening Arguments," "In Their Own Words," "Caps and Gowns," and "Tough Crowd" deal with the legal proceedings which are quoted and are insightful.

Comments

The author of this book deserves all respect and gratitude for the perfect job she has done. She is an outstanding journalist and an expert in public education and the immigrant situation in the USA. So, she is well-suited to handle such a theme the book endures. The author is an award-winning journalist with over 20 years of work experience at the New York Times, Chicago Tribune, and Newsday. She has written on many subjects;

however, her primary focus is public education. In 2014, when she was a senior reporter for *Newsday*, she observed the tendency of American public schools to turn away immigrant and refugee children. This led to intense research, which also won Napolitano a Spencer Education Fellowship at Columbia University, and this book is its outcome.

The book in focus is a good example of the author's expertise in investigative journalism. The title suggests three issues: the human attitude of the author, the ordeal of the refugees in the USA and the inequality in the American educational system. The "WHO," "WHERE," and "WHAT" of this investigative study is so evident: WHO? Six refugee students. WHERE? District Lankestire, USA. WHAT? Struggle to receive regular education.. Such a procedure gives weight to the study. The narrative element, statistics, names of victims "Khadija", "Mohammed," and others support the study's credibility and add to its interest. The author sends a clear message to all refugee seekers worldwide that America is not a heaven on earth!

The testimonies and the detailed proceedings demonstrate the author's meticulous method of documentation and research. She comments on the American education system for immigrants and refugees with pieces of evidence. Especially the rendition of the alternate school is interesting and shows the discriminatory treatment. Its 'Handle with care policy' is a behavioral irony where the refugee students feel insecure and intimidated instead of safe and comfortable. As Mahamed admits, "It makes me feel like I'm a bad person," (p. 113). Another important issue of the language barrier for refugees is also explored in the context of schooling. How the refugees who do not know English struggle and fail. As Khadija expresses, "If you don't know English, it's very hard" (p. 45).

The book is a good example of academic activism and advocacy for social justice. There are interesting facts, including records of how individuals who do not complete high school education tend to have a relatively short life span and criminal prospects. Many axioms and slogans reflect the determination of the refugee immigrants and antagonism. She also incorporates chants like, 'we do not want you and go back, displaying the far-right wing mindset. One of the lines the author recollects from the trial is, "It is like kicking people when they are down," which invokes pathos and sympathy (p. 65).

The style combines narratives, facts, statistics, policies, and legal proceedings. The book can be prescribed as the primary text for courses on refugee studies and secondary texts for disciplines like Political Science, Social Science, as it renders socio-political nuances of the United States and other countries from where the refugees are; Education, as the entire discourse is built around the American public education system, Human Rights, as the education system of America divulges the disparities; English Language Teaching, as lack of English knowledge proves to be a prominent hurdle in schools, etc. However, the book would have appealed more if the author had included anecdotes from the lives of the refugee students represented. Having seen a clear and alarming picture of the refugee situation in the USA, all policymakers, educational experts, social reformers and human rights activists now have a thorny issue to deal with and find a real solution. The book can be used as an essential and authentic document by human rights organizations and the UN refugee authorities.

Disclosure Statement:

I (the writer of this book review) hereby declare that research ethics and citing principles have been considered in all the stages of this paper. I take full responsibility for the content of the paper in case of dispute.

conflict of interest:

I have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Dr. M. Anjum Khan is working as an Assistant Professor of English at Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore. She has ten years of teaching experience and 12 years of research experience. Her research experience includes guiding M. Phil and Ph.D. candidates and working on research projects. Her research areas have been British Literature, Canadian Immigrant Literature, Disability Studies, and Cultural Studies. However, she is interested in teaching subjects like history, literature, disability studies, and literary theories. She is the author of 2 books - *Ethnic Silhouettes*, *M.G. Vassanji in the Light of New Historicism* and *Narrating Bodies, Reading Anosh Irani*. She has also coedited a volume of essays published by Lexington Press America. She has published several research articles in reputed national and international journals, chapters in books and presented papers at national and international conferences. She has conducted workshops on journalism and assistive technology. She has also delivered academic and motivational lectures in colleges and corporate institutes.