



The Power of Privilege: Yale and America's Elite Colleges

Joseph Soares

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It is widely assumed that admission to elite U.S. universities is based solely on academic merit—the best and brightest are admitted to Harvard, Yale, and their peer institutions as determined by test scores and GPA, and not by lineage or family income. But does reality support those expectations? Or are admissions governed by a logic that rewards socioeconomic status while disguising it as personal merit?

The Power of Privilege examines the nexus between social class and admissions at America's top colleges from the vantage point of Yale University, a key actor in the history of higher education. It is a documented history of the institutional gatekeepers, confident of the validity of socially biased measures of merit, seeking to select tomorrow's leadership class from among their economically privileged clientele. Acceptance in prestigious colleges still remains beyond the reach of most students except those from high-income professional families. Ultimately, the author suggests reforms that would move America's top schools toward becoming genuine academic meritocracies.

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