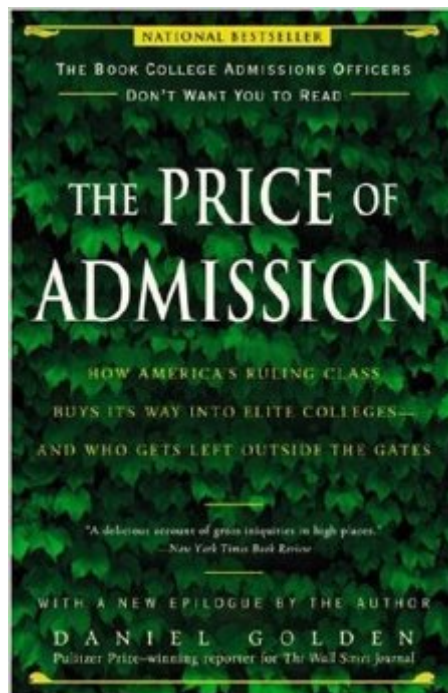


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# The Price Of Admission: How America's Ruling Class Buys Its Way Into Elite Colleges--and Who Gets Left Outside The Gates



## Synopsis

Every spring thousands of middle-class and lower-income high-school seniors learn that they have been rejected by America's most exclusive colleges. What they may never learn is how many candidates like themselves have been passed over in favor of wealthy white students with lesser credentials—children of alumni, big donors, or celebrities. In this explosive book, the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Daniel Golden argues that America, the so-called land of opportunity, is rapidly becoming an aristocracy in which America's richest families receive special access to elite higher education—enabling them to give their children even more of a head start. Based on two years of investigative reporting and hundreds of interviews with students, parents, school administrators, and admissions personnel—some of whom risked their jobs to speak to the author—*The Price of Admission* exposes the corrupt admissions practices that favor the wealthy, the powerful, and the famous. In *The Price of Admission*, Golden names names, along with grades and test scores. He reveals how the sons of former vice president Al Gore, one-time Hollywood power broker Michael Ovitz, and Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist leapt ahead of more deserving applicants at Harvard, Brown, and Princeton. He explores favoritism at the Ivy Leagues, Duke, the University of Virginia, and Notre Dame, among other institutions. He reveals that colleges hold Asian American students to a higher standard than whites; comply with Title IX by giving scholarships to rich women in equestrian sports—like horseback riding, squash, and crew; and repay congressmen for favors by admitting their children. He also reveals that Harvard maintains a "Z-list" for well-connected but underqualified students, who are quietly admitted on the condition that they wait a year to enroll. *The Price of Admission* explodes the myth of an American meritocracy—the belief that no matter what your background, if you are smart and diligent enough, you will have access to the nation's most elite universities. It is must reading not only for parents and students with a personal stake in college admissions, but also for those disturbed by the growing divide between ordinary and privileged Americans. From the Hardcover edition.

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## Customer Reviews

While it's widely believed that the rich and powerful can buy their way into top colleges, this book replaces rumor with hard evidence: dozens of specific, juicy examples, captured with a Pulitzer Prize winner's journalistic precision. This is a difficult job, since it can rarely be said with certainty that someone would not have been accepted without their big financial donation or famous parent. Golden understands this, and doesn't stretch facts or pound points. He just presents dozens of cases of apparent corruption, letting the facts speak for themselves. The author repeatedly contrasts the academic records of wealthy students who were accepted with the records of better but poorer students who did not get in at the same college in the same year. Sometimes, these stories are even supplemented by internal evaluations made by the admissions offices themselves -- as when Golden notes that Senator Bill Frist's son got the lowest possible rating from Princeton's admissions office for academic achievement, and was admitted anyway. While it is standard for college admissions staff to point out the "complexity" and "context" of each case to defend seemingly incongruous outcomes, the author makes these acrobatics difficult with his relentless stream of examples and hard facts. Golden manages to weave this rigor and precision into a sharp, interesting narrative, moving easily from Princeton and Harvard's affinity for the undistinguished and undisciplined sons of Bill Frist and Al Gore to Brown University's pandering to the children of movie stars to Duke's wooing of the children of the rich. It is a juicy read. Undoubtedly, at least part of what drives this book is the author's muckraking anger.

Daniel Golden's *The Price of Admission* is a ten star read on 's five star scale-- a triumph of hard-hitting investigative reporting combined with thoughtful suggestions on potential reform of college admissions policies. The thesis of *The Price of Admission* is simple: a talented "unhooked" student is at a disadvantage in gaining admission to a prestige college, versus less talented alumni legacies, the scions of wealth ("development admits"-- while colleges may contend that admissions are "need blind" with respect to students, the colleges' own financial needs are keenly considered

during the admissions process), faculty and staff children, and players of sports of wealth favored under the federal Title IX program, such as crew, polo or lacrosse. The only edge favoring "unhooked" students is the preference for federally-designated minorities, including blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans-- a group that excludes Asian Americans and poorer immigrants. Golden proves his thesis handily, using both broad-based admissions statistics and individual case studies. To my mind, Golden's willingness to name names and cite individual cases is a plus-- it is hard to brush off repeated instances of highly-credentialed "unhooked" candidates denied admission for less-talented but better connected children of donors, celebrities and alumni. As a result, this volume is a must-read for college admissions counselors, parents and college applicants. The sting of a college rejection of a talented "unhooked" student will hurt less if the context of that rejection is understood more fully. And perhaps the lure of the Ivy League plus Stanford and Duke will abate a bit if the public realizes that admissions to these institutions are hardly decided on a level playing field.

Golden's researching ability and ability to write is clearly superior to any journalist working in mainstream American journalism that I know. This book exposes the secret that the powerful do not want exposed, the lie of meritocracy in our education system. Using substantial evidence to support his arguments, Golden shows that the already privileged are privileged again in the college admission process by de facto affirmative action for whites such as legacy, wealthy donor, and certain athletic preferences. Golden's recommendation of abolishing such preferences for the privileged but maintaining affirmative action for under privileged minorities and some socioeconomic groups is sensible. He shows that such models do work quite well rebutting the common excuse given for such preferences based on the ability to raise sufficient funding. Golden gives three well-known examples of excellent institutions of higher education such as Caltech, Berea College and Cooper Union that actually disadvantages the already privileged but manages to raise enough funding for world class quality of education and student services. His argument here as elsewhere is very convincing. Many of the negative reviews claimed that Golden only used individual example cases suggesting limited evidence or even bias in this work. Did these reviewers even read the same book I did? I got the 2009 edition and it includes a diverse amount of convincing evidence such as studies by independent organizations and scholars, internal records and investigations from the universities in question and many surprisingly candid testimonial evidence from current or former admission staff that such preferences exist all to the detriment of certain groups.

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