

Class Warfare: Class, Race, and College Admissions in Top-Tier Secondary Schools

Lois Weis, Kristin Cipollone, Heather Jenkins

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Stories abound about the lengths to which middle- and upper-middle-class parents will go to ensure a spot for their child at a prestigious university. From the Suzuki method to calculus-based physics, from AP tests all the way back to early-learning Kumon courses, students are increasingly pushed to excel with that Harvard or Yale acceptance letter held tantalizingly in front of them. And nowhere is this drive more apparent than in our elite secondary schools. In *Class Warfare*, Lois Weis, Kristin Cipollone, and Heather Jenkins go inside the ivy-yearning halls of three such schools to offer a day-to-day, week-by-week look at this remarkable drive toward college admissions and one of its most salient purposes: to determine class.

Drawing on deep and sustained contact with students, parents, teachers, and administrators at three iconic secondary schools in the United States, the authors unveil a formidable process of class positioning at the heart of the college admissions process. They detail the ways students and parents exploit every opportunity and employ every bit of cultural, social, and economic capital they can in order to gain admission into a "Most Competitive" or "Highly Competitive Plus" university. Moreover, they show how admissions into these schools—with their attendant rankings—are used to lock in or improve class standing for the next generation. It's a story of class warfare *within* a given class, the substrata of which—whether economically, racially, or socially determined—are fiercely negotiated through the college admissions process.

In a historic moment marked by deep economic uncertainty, anxieties over socioeconomic standing are at their highest. Class, as this book shows, must be won, and the collateral damage of this aggressive pursuit may just be education itself, flattened into a mere victory banner.



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