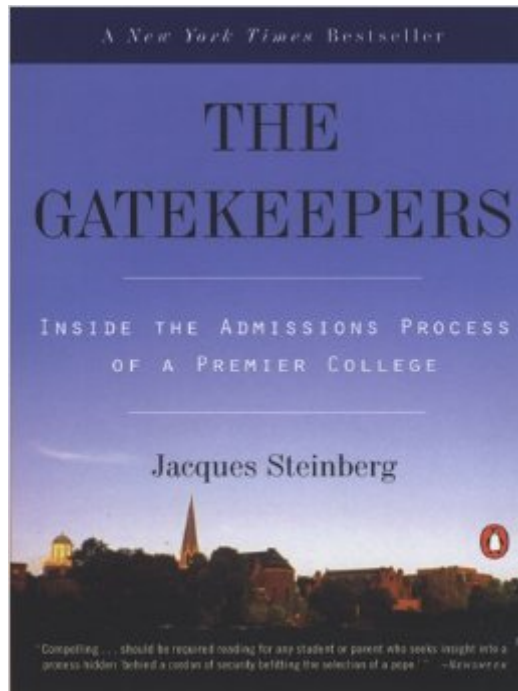


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# The Gatekeepers: Inside The Admissions Process Of A Premier College



## Synopsis

In the fall of 1999, New York Times education reporter Jacques Steinberg was given an unprecedented opportunity to observe the admissions process at prestigious Wesleyan University. Over the course of nearly a year, Steinberg accompanied admissions officer Ralph Figueroa on a tour to assess and recruit the most promising students in the country. The Gatekeepers follows a diverse group of prospective students as they compete for places in the nation's most elite colleges. The first book to reveal the college admission process in such behind-the-scenes detail, The Gatekeepers will be required reading for every parent of a high school-age child and for every student facing the arduous and anxious task of applying to college.

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## Customer Reviews

First, let me say that I thought that this was an excellent book and would recommend it to anyone who is at all interested in the college admissions process. Second, I was surprised at how many of the reviewers seemed shocked--shocked!--that applicants got bonus points for coming from minority backgrounds. Was this some kind of revelation? However one thing that surprised me a little bit is

how--even moving beyond race entirely--the more advantages you have had in life, the more disadvantageous it will be for your admissions process. For example, I was unaware that having successful parents would be, in essence, held against you on the theory that more would be expected of you. While other reviewers have (jokingly?) said that they would advise their white kids not to check the "Caucasian" box, I might advise my (still very young) kids to say that their parents have been unemployed their whole life. I suppose that the main issue which this whole process really boils down to is the following: As a college applicant, is it more important to succeed in life relative to the world around you (i.e. relative to your classmates, to others of your race, to others of your geographical area, to your own parents' life and accomplishments, etc.) or is it more important to succeed absolutely and not on a relative scale. This book clearly informs us that the answer is the former and not the latter. Whether that should be the answer is another question. For example, say that a student's entire life could be distilled into 2 numbers each on a sliding scale from 1-10. The first number is simply your academic performance (grades, SAT's, course load, etc.) The second number is your background (race, economic circumstances, gender, etc.

A must read if anyone close to you is thinking about applying to one of America's elite colleges. (Full disclosure demands that I admit that next fall my son will enter college, and his first choice at that.) A few facts to keep in mind before panic takes over.1) Of the 3000 colleges in USA, one can find at least 100 good colleges, many nearby and easy to get into, where one can get a fine education.2) There are only about 50 or so elite colleges that play these admission games. I call them the Orwellian colleges based on George Orwell's book, not 1984, but Animal Farm. You remember the famous quote, "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others." Animal Farm should be required reading of all admission officers. Did Orwell see this coming?3) This book illustrates in a gripping story all the ups and downs of the admission process at one of the Orwellian schools. The racial and ethnic preferences can be disturbing if you were expecting merit to matter. Jonathan Kozol questions on the back cover, "Whether it is actually a 'meritocracy' at all." That is a euphemism for "It sure ain't."4) Are all the elite colleges like that? I am afraid so. Only a few elite have avoided this fate. CalTech is still strictly merit. The CalTech admission officer said recently, "Race, ethnicity, gender, religion, etc. do not count at all." And Cornell gives a fairer shake than the other Ivies. My alma mater, MIT, is about the worst of all. MIT's admission policies are abysmal. If you can believe the president (Don't ever believe admission people!), over 75% of those accepted at MIT are based on preferences. I had thought it was only about 60%.

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