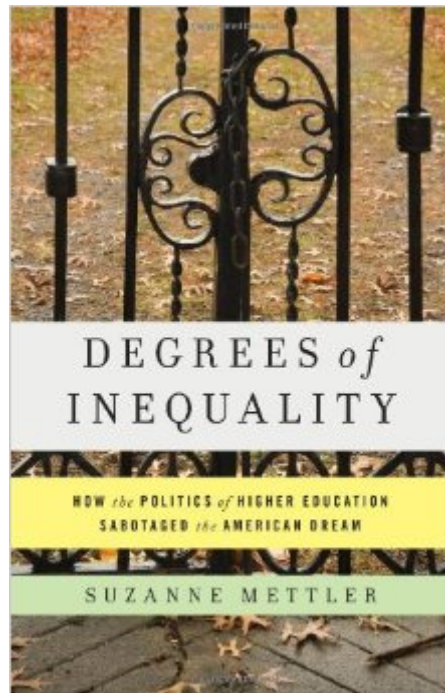


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Degrees Of Inequality: How The Politics Of Higher Education Sabotaged The American Dream



Synopsis

America's higher education system is failing its students. In the space of a generation, we have gone from being the best-educated society in the world to one surpassed by eleven other nations in college graduation rates. Higher education is evolving into a caste system with separate and unequal tiers that take in students from different socio-economic backgrounds and leave them more unequal than when they first enrolled. Until the 1970s, the United States had a proud history of promoting higher education for its citizens. The Morrill Act, the G.I. Bill and Pell Grants enabled Americans from across the income spectrum to attend college and the nation led the world in the percentage of young adults with baccalaureate degrees. Yet since 1980, progress has stalled. Young adults from low to middle income families are not much more likely to graduate from college than four decades ago. When less advantaged students do attend, they are largely sequestered into inferior and often profit-driven institutions, from which many emerge without degrees and shouldering crushing levels of debt. In *Degrees of Inequality*, acclaimed political scientist Suzanne Mettler explains why the system has gone so horribly wrong and why the American Dream is increasingly out of reach for so many. In her eye-opening account, she illuminates how political partisanship has overshadowed America's commitment to equal access to higher education. As politicians capitulate to corporate interests, owners of for-profit colleges benefit, but for far too many students, higher education leaves them with little besides crippling student loan debt. Meanwhile, the nation's public universities have shifted the burden of rising costs onto students. In an era when a college degree is more linked than ever before to individual and societal well-being, these pressures conspire to make it increasingly difficult for students to stay in school long enough to graduate. By abandoning their commitment to students, politicians are imperiling our highest ideals as a nation. *Degrees of Inequality* offers an impassioned call to reform a higher education system that has come to exacerbate, rather than mitigate, socioeconomic inequality in America.

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Customer Reviews

Suzanne Mettler has written an important book, which should be on the nightstand of everyone in government who has anything to do with higher education. Mettler makes a well documented argument explaining how politics in this country has sabotaged what is one of this nation's most valuable institutions. Mettler's historical analysis demonstrates that higher education was perceived- from colonial times through the middle of the twentieth century as fundamental to democracy. After the GI Bill and the creation of Pell Grants, however, things started to go awry. Mettler tells the story in detail in an almost a suspenseful style showing how the banks went from balking at supporting student loans to understanding that there was money to be made and lobbying hard for financial incentives which would favor the banks at the expense of the students. Mettler explains how Republicans stopped criticizing the incentives to banks as excessive government and instead applauded the market based approach to student lending. At about the same time, ironically, it was Clinton who seized on tax credits to support higher education. In fact, tax credits had always been opposed by Democrats- but now the tables turned. And the result was not to expand accessibility to a broader swath of students. In fact these tax based initiatives only resulted in benefiting the more affluent students not the first generation and poorer students trying to break into America's dream. And this, for Mettler, is the most disturbing fact that the educational system which our founders and indeed our leaders right through the middle of the twentieth century saw as fundamental to participatory democracy has now become divisive- not inclusive.

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