

EXHIBIT 88

The Myth of American Meritocracy

How corrupt are Ivy League admissions?

by RON UNZ

Just before the Labor Day weekend, a front page *New York Times* story broke the news of the largest cheating scandal in Harvard University history, in which nearly half the students taking a Government course on the role of Congress had plagiarized or otherwise illegally collaborated on their final exam.¹ Each year, Harvard admits just 1600 freshmen while almost 125 Harvard students now face possible suspension over this single incident. A Harvard dean described the situation as “unprecedented.”

But should we really be so surprised at this behavior among the students at America’s most prestigious academic institution? In the last generation or two, the funnel of opportunity in American society has drastically narrowed, with a greater and greater proportion of our financial, media, business, and political elites being drawn from a relatively small number of our leading universities, together with their professional schools. The rise of a Henry Ford, from farm boy mechanic to world business tycoon, seems virtually impossible today, as even America’s most successful college dropouts such as Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg often turn out to be extremely well-connected former Harvard students. Indeed, the early success of Facebook was largely due to the powerful imprimatur it enjoyed from its exclusive availability first only at Harvard and later restricted to just the Ivy League.

During this period, we have witnessed a huge national decline in well-paid middle class jobs in the manufacturing sector and other sources of employment for those lacking college degrees, with median American wages having been stagnant or declining for the last forty years. Meanwhile, there has been an astonishing concentration of wealth at the top, with

America’s richest 1 percent now possessing nearly as much net wealth as the bottom 95 percent.² This situation, sometimes described as a “winner take all society,” leaves families desperate to maximize the chances that their children will reach the winners’ circle, rather than risk failure and poverty or even merely a spot in the rapidly deteriorating middle class. And the best single means of becoming such an economic winner is to gain admission to a top university, which provides an easy ticket to the wealth of Wall Street or similar venues, whose leading firms increasingly restrict their hiring to graduates of the Ivy League or a tiny handful of other top colleges.³ On the other side, finance remains the favored employment choice for Harvard, Yale or Princeton students after the diplomas are handed out.⁴

The Battle for Elite College Admissions

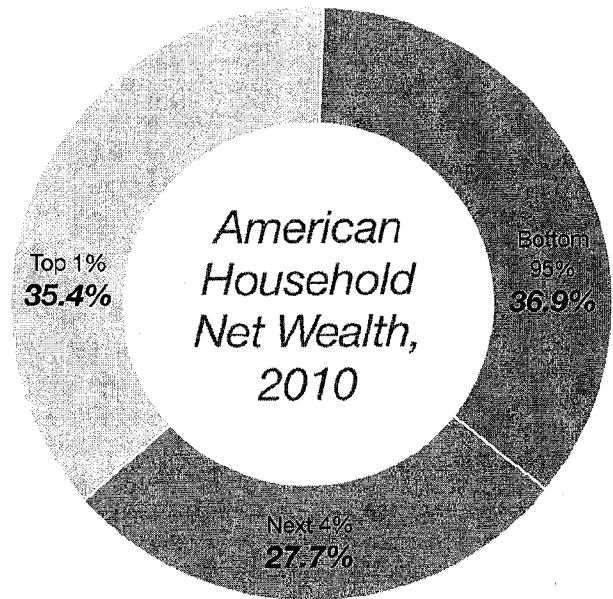
As a direct consequence, the war over college admissions has become astonishingly fierce, with many middle- or upper-middle class families investing quantities of time and money that would have seemed unimaginable a generation or more ago, leading to an all-against-all arms race that immiserates the student and exhausts the parents. The absurd parental efforts of an Amy Chua, as recounted in her 2010 bestseller *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, were simply a much more extreme version of widespread behavior among her peer-group, which is why her story resonated so deeply among our educated elites. Over the last thirty years, America’s test-prep companies have

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grown from almost nothing into a \$5 billion annual industry, allowing the affluent to provide an admissions edge to their less able children. Similarly, the enormous annual tuition of \$35,000 charged by elite private schools such as Dalton or Exeter is less for a superior high school education than for the hope of a greatly increased chance to enter the Ivy League.⁵ Many New York City parents even go to enormous efforts to enroll their children in the best possible pre-Kindergarten program, seeking early placement on the educational conveyor belt which eventually leads to Harvard.⁶ Others cut corners in a more direct fashion, as revealed in the huge SAT cheating rings recently uncovered in affluent New York suburbs, in which students were paid thousands of dollars to take SAT exams for their wealthier but dimmer classmates.⁷

But given such massive social and economic value now concentrated in a Harvard or Yale degree, the tiny handful of elite admissions gatekeepers enjoy enormous, almost unprecedented power to shape the leadership of our society by allocating their supply of thick envelopes. Even billionaires, media barons, and U.S. Senators may weigh their words and actions more carefully as their children approach college age. And if such power is used to select our future elites in a corrupt manner, perhaps the inevitable result is the selection of corrupt elites, with terrible consequences for America. Thus, the huge Harvard cheating scandal, and perhaps also the endless series of financial, business, and political scandals which have rocked our country over the last decade or more, even while our national economy has stagnated.

Just a few years ago Pulitzer Prize-winning former *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Golden published *The Price of Admission*, a devastating account of the corrupt admissions practices at so many of our leading universities, in which every sort of non-academic or financial factor plays a role in privileging the privileged and thereby squeezing out those high-ability, hard-working students who lack any special hook. In one particularly egregious case, a wealthy New Jersey real estate developer, later sent to Federal prison on political corruption charges, paid Harvard \$2.5 million to help ensure admission of his completely under-qualified son.⁸ When we consider that Harvard's existing endowment was then at \$15 billion and earning almost \$7 million each day in investment earnings, we see that a culture of financial corruption has developed an absurd illogic of its own, in which senior Harvard administrators sell their university's honor for just a few hours worth of its regular annual income, the equivalent of a Harvard instructor raising a grade for a hundred dollars in cash.



An admissions system based on non-academic factors often amounting to institutionalized venality would seem strange or even unthinkable among the top universities of most other advanced nations in Europe or Asia, though such practices are widespread in much of the corrupt Third World. The notion of a wealthy family buying their son his entrance into the *Grandes Ecoles* of France or the top Japanese universities would be an absurdity, and the academic rectitude of Europe's Nordic or Germanic nations is even more severe, with those far more egalitarian societies anyway tending to deemphasize university rankings.

Or consider the case of China. There, legions of angry microbloggers endlessly denounce the official corruption and abuse which permeate so much of the economic system. But we almost never hear accusations of favoritism in university admissions, and this impression of strict meritocracy determined by the results of the national *Gaokao* college entrance examination has been confirmed to me by individuals familiar with that country. Since all the world's written exams may ultimately derive from China's old imperial examination system, which was kept remarkably clean for 1300 years, such practices are hardly surprising.⁹ Attending a prestigious college is regarded by ordinary Chinese as their children's greatest hope of rapid upward mobility and is therefore often a focus of enormous family effort; China's ruling elites may rightly fear that a policy of admitting their own dim and lazy heirs to leading schools ahead of the higher-scoring children of the masses might ignite a widespread popular uprising. This perhaps explains why so many sons and daughters of top Chinese leaders attend college in the West:

Education

enrolling them at a third-rate Chinese university would be a tremendous humiliation, while our own corrupt admissions practices get them an easy spot at Harvard or Stanford, sitting side by side with the children of Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and George W. Bush.

Although the evidence of college admissions corruption presented in Golden's book is quite telling, the focus is almost entirely on current practices, and largely anecdotal rather than statistical. For a broader historical perspective, we should consider *The Chosen* by Berkeley sociologist Jerome Karabel, an exhaustive and award-winning 2005 narrative history of the last

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century of admissions policy at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton (I will henceforth sometimes abbreviate these "top three" most elite schools as "IYP").

Karabel's massive documentation—over 700 pages and 3000 endnotes—establishes the remarkable fact that America's uniquely complex and subjective system of academic admissions actually arose as a means of covert ethnic tribal warfare. During the 1920s, the established Northeastern Anglo-Saxon elites who then dominated the Ivy League wished to sharply curtail the rapidly growing numbers of Jewish students, but their initial attempts to impose simple numerical quotas provoked enormous controversy and faculty opposition.¹⁰ Therefore, the approach subsequently taken by Harvard President A. Lawrence Lowell and his peers was to transform the admissions process from a simple objective test of academic merit into a complex and holistic consideration of all aspects of each individual applicant; the resulting opacity permitted the admission or rejection of any given applicant, allowing the ethnicity of the student body to be shaped as desired. As a consequence, university leaders could honestly deny the existence of any racial or religious quotas, while still managing to reduce Jewish enrollment to a much lower level, and thereafter hold it almost constant during the decades which followed.¹¹ For example, the Jewish portion of Harvard's entering class dropped from nearly 30 percent in 1925 to 15 percent the following year and remained roughly static until the period of the Second World War.¹²

As Karabel repeatedly demonstrates, the major changes in admissions policy which later followed were usually determined by factors of raw political power

and the balance of contending forces rather than any idealistic considerations. For example, in the aftermath of World War II, Jewish organizations and their allies mobilized their political and media resources to pressure the universities into increasing their ethnic enrollment by modifying the weight assigned to various academic and non-academic factors, raising the importance of the former over the latter. Then a decade or two later, this exact process was repeated in the opposite direction, as the early 1960s saw black activists and their liberal political allies pressure universities to bring their racial minority enrollments into closer alignment with America's national population by partially shifting away from their recently enshrined focus on purely academic considerations. Indeed, Karabel notes that the most sudden and extreme increase in minority enrollment took place at Yale in the years 1968–69, and was largely due to fears of race riots in heavily black New Haven, which surrounded the

campus.¹³

Philosophical consistency appears notably absent in many of the prominent figures involved in these admissions battles, with both liberals and conservatives sometimes favoring academic merit and sometimes non-academic factors, whichever would produce the particular ethnic student mix they desired for personal or ideological reasons. Different political blocs waged long battles for control of particular universities, and sudden large shifts in admissions rates occurred as these groups gained or lost influence within the university apparatus: Yale replaced its admissions staff in 1965 and the following year Jewish numbers nearly doubled.¹⁴

At times, external judicial or political forces would be summoned to override university admissions policy, often succeeding in this aim. Karabel's own ideological leanings are hardly invisible, as he hails efforts by state legislatures to force Ivy League schools to lift their *de facto* Jewish quotas, but seems to regard later legislative attacks on "affirmative action" as unreasonable assaults on academic freedom.¹⁵ The massively footnoted text of *The Chosen* might lead one to paraphrase Clausewitz and conclude that our elite college admissions policy often consists of ethnic warfare waged by other means, or even that it could be summarized as a simple Lenin-esque question of "Who, Whom?"

Although nearly all of Karabel's study is focused on the earlier history of admissions policy at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, with the developments of the last three decades being covered in just a few dozen pages, he finds complete continuity down to the present day, with the notorious opacity of the admissions pro-

cess still allowing most private universities to admit whomever they want for whatever reasons they want, even if the reasons and the admissions decisions may eventually change over the years. Despite these plain facts, Harvard and the other top Ivy League schools today publicly deny any hint of discrimination along racial or ethnic lines, except insofar as they acknowledge providing an admissions boost to under-represented racial minorities, such as blacks or Hispanics. But given the enormous control these institutions exert on our larger society, we should test these claims against the evidence of the actual enrollment statistics.

Asian-Americans as the “New Jews”

The overwhelming focus of Karabel's book is on changes in Jewish undergraduate percentages at each university, and this is probably less due to his own ethnic heritage than because the data provides an extremely simple means of charting the ebb and flow of admissions policy: Jews were a high-performing group, whose numbers could only be restricted by major deviations from an objective meritocratic standard.

Obviously, anti-Jewish discrimination in admissions no longer exists at any of these institutions, but a roughly analogous situation may be found with a group whom Golden and others have sometimes labeled “The New Jews,” namely Asian-Americans. Since their strong academic performance is coupled with relatively little political power, they would be obvious candidates for discrimination in the harsh realpolitik of university admissions as documented by Karabel, and indeed he briefly raises the possibility of an anti-Asian admissions bias, before concluding that the elite universities are apparently correct in denying that it exists.¹⁶

There certainly does seem considerable anecdotal evidence that many Asians perceive their chances of elite admission as being drastically reduced by their racial origins.¹⁷ For example, our national newspapers have revealed that students of part-Asian background have regularly attempted to conceal the non-white side of their ancestry when applying to Harvard and other elite universities out of concern it would greatly reduce their chances of admission.¹⁸ Indeed, widespread perceptions of racial discrimination are almost certainly the primary factor behind the huge growth in the number of students refusing to reveal their racial background at top universities, with the percentage of Harvard students classified as “race unknown” having risen from almost nothing to a regular 5–15 percent of all undergraduates over the last twenty

years, with similar levels reached at other elite schools.

Such fears that checking the “Asian” box on an admissions application may lead to rejection are hardly unreasonable, given that studies have documented a large gap between the average test scores of whites and Asians successfully admitted to elite universities. Princeton sociologist Thomas J. Espenshade and his colleagues have demonstrated that among undergraduates at highly selective schools such as the Ivy League, white students have mean scores 310 points higher on the 1600 SAT scale than their black classmates, but Asian students average 140 points above whites.¹⁹ The former gap is an automatic consequence of officially acknowledged affirmative action policies, while the latter appears somewhat mysterious.

These broad statistical differences in the admission requirements for Asians are given a human face in Golden's discussions of this subject, in which he recounts numerous examples of Asian-American students who overcame dire family poverty, immigrant adversity, and other enormous personal hardships to achieve stellar academic performance and extracurricular triumphs, only to be rejected by all their top university choices. His chapter is actually entitled “The New Jews,” and he notes the considerable irony that a university such as Vanderbilt will announce a public goal of greatly increasing its Jewish enrollment and nearly triple those numbers in just four years, while showing very little interest in admitting high-performing Asian students.²⁰

All these elite universities strongly deny the existence of any sort of racial discrimination against Asians in the admissions process, let alone an “Asian quota,” with senior administrators instead claiming that the potential of each student is individually evaluated via a holistic process far superior to any mechanical reliance on grades or test scores; but such public postures are identical to those taken by their academic predecessors in the 1920s and 1930s as documented by Karabel. Fortunately, we can investigate the plausibility of these claims by examining the decades of officially reported enrollment data available from the website of the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES).

The ethnic composition of Harvard undergraduates certainly follows a highly intriguing pattern. Harvard had always had a significant Asian-American enrollment, generally running around 5 percent when I had attended in the early 1980s. But during the following decade, the size of America's Asian middle class grew rapidly, leading to a sharp rise in applications and admissions, with Asians exceeding 10 percent of