



The Conditions for Admission: Access, Equity, and the Social Contract of Public Universities

John Douglass

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The social contract of public universities—the progressive idea that any citizen who meets specified academic conditions can gain entry to their state university—has profoundly shaped American society. This book offers the first comprehensive examination of admission policies and practices at public universities. Using the University of California, the nation's largest public research university and among its most selective, as an illuminating case study, it explores historical and contemporary debates over affirmative action, gender, class, standardized testing, and the growing influences of privatization and globalization, and indeed the very purpose and future of these important public institutions.

The United States has been the world leader in developing mass higher education, using its pioneering network of public universities to promote socioeconomic mobility and national economic competitiveness. But the author warns that access and graduation rates have stagnated and may even be declining, particularly among younger students. Other countries, including key members of the European Union, along with China, India, and other developing nations, are aggressively reshaping and expanding their higher education systems. The “American advantage” of a high-quality and high-access higher education system is waning. The closing chapters explore why this is the case and the consequences within an increasingly competitive global economy.

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