



# Producing Success: The Culture of Personal Advancement in an American High School

*Peter Demerath*

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Middle- and upper-middle-class students continue to outpace those from less privileged backgrounds. Most attempts to redress this inequality focus on the issue of access to financial resources, but as *Producing Success* makes clear, the problem goes beyond mere economics. In this eye-opening study, Peter Demerath examines a typical suburban American high school to explain how some students get ahead.

Demerath undertook four years of research at a Midwestern high school to examine the mercilessly competitive culture that drives students to advance. *Producing Success* reveals the many ways the community's ideology of achievement plays out: students hone their work ethics and employ various strategies to succeed, from negotiating with teachers to cheating; parents relentlessly push their children while manipulating school policies to help them get ahead; and administrators aid high performers in myriad ways, even naming over forty students "valedictorians." Yet, as Demerath shows, this unswerving commitment to individual advancement takes its toll, leading to student stress and fatigue, incivility and vandalism, and the alienation of the less successful. Insightful and candid, *Producing Success* is an often troubling account of the educationally and morally questionable results of the American culture of success.

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