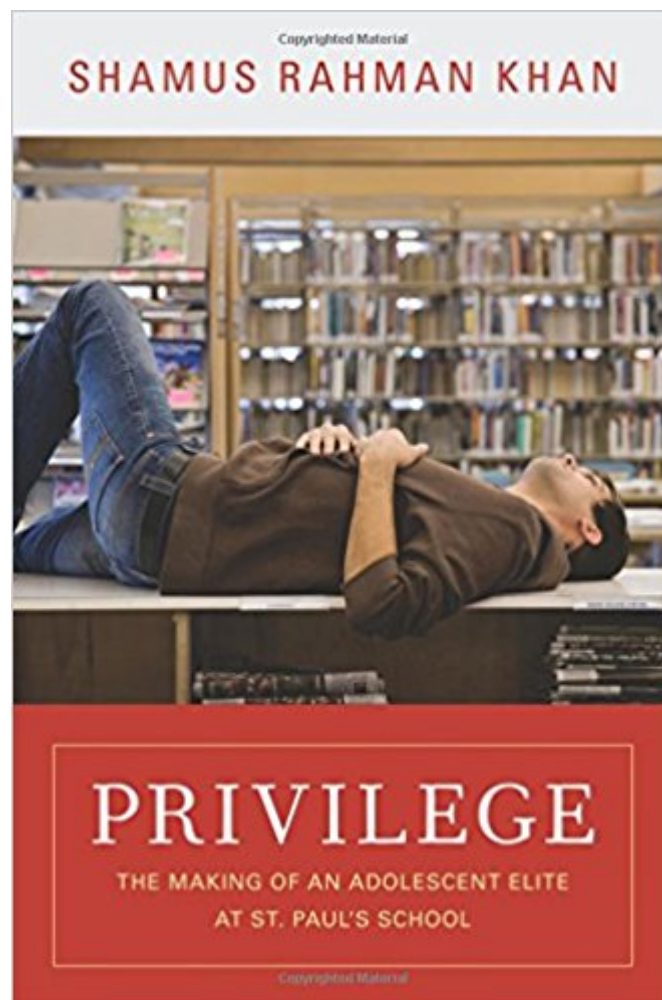




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# Privilege: The Making Of An Adolescent Elite At St. Paul's School (The William G. Bowen Memorial Series In Higher Education)



## Synopsis

As one of the most prestigious high schools in the nation, St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, has long been the exclusive domain of America's wealthiest sons. But times have changed. Today, a new elite of boys and girls is being molded at St. Paul's, one that reflects the hope of openness but also the persistence of inequality. In *Privilege*, Shamus Khan returns to his alma mater to provide an inside look at an institution that has been the private realm of the elite for the past 150 years. He shows that St. Paul's students continue to learn what they always have--how to embody privilege. Yet, while students once leveraged the trappings of upper-class entitlement, family connections, and high culture, current St. Paul's students learn to succeed in a more diverse environment. To be the future leaders of a more democratic world, they must be at ease with everything from highbrow art to everyday life--from *Beowulf* to *Jaws*--and view hierarchies as ladders to scale. Through deft portrayals of the relationships among students, faculty, and staff, Khan shows how members of the new elite face the opening of society while still preserving the advantages that allow them to rule.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Khan's work reminds me, above all, of Arlie Hochschild's pathbreaking studies... both are bold and original thinkers. Khan's book is full of surprises, and when you read it, you will understand why snobbery is out and why "democratic inequality" has become the creed of

the chosen. - Contemporary Sociology[E]thnographic research into the very heart of privilege... [Khan] steps down from his pedestal and lets himself get closer to these future masters of the universe. -- Robin D. Schatz, Bloomberg News [T]his book is beautifully written and filled with important insights into processes of socialization among the elite. I recommend this book for all scholars interested in the reproduction of inequality in U.S. society. -- Wendy Leo Moore, American Journal of Sociology [T]he elites in Britain and in America have changed. They now appear more open. More worldly. More meritocratic. For a description of how that process works, look at [Privilege]. -- Aditya Chakraborty, Guardian Khan's many perspectives--as a minority student in a rich WASP school, as a teacher interacting with his students, and as a researcher observing his subjects--gave him unique access to understanding the American elite... Khan's objectivity turns to pessimism as he describes the result of greater diversity, which he finds 'does not mean mobility and it certainly does not mean equality.' -- Barbara Fisher, Boston Globe Privilege sets out to understand 'the new elite' and its place in the larger story of American education. -- Josh Rothman, Boston Globe, Brainiac Shamus Rahman Khan has his part in loosening the knot of privilege, by analyzing America's dreams and telling us why some of them remain thwarted... Privilege is an exceptional cultural study of inequality that concentrates on elites. It is a brave piece of work, guaranteed to raise the hackles of more than a few private school trustees, administrators, faculty and parents. -- Michael D. Langan, Buffalo News [Privilege] fills in the crucial missing piece. It's a well grounded description of the people who are the 'input' into the elite higher education system. It's a view of elite life from the 'training camp,' right before they are unleashed into American society. Highly recommended to anyone interested in stratification and education. -- Fabio Rojas, OrgTheory.net If you want a peek inside an elite New England prep school, here it is... But while nosiness about St. Paul's is a perfectly good reason to read the book, Khan's purpose is higher. This is a book about the promise of America and how well the nation is fulfilling it. It is a book that suggests how money still trumps ideals and how a myth fostered at St. Paul's and other such schools serves a new elite class. Most usefully, the book explores why racial and ethnic diversity--a challenge that St. Paul's is meeting admirably--is not synonymous with mobility and equality... Full of valuable insights. -- Mike Pride, Concord Monitor While the empirical meat of Privilege is from the United States, Canadian scholars of inequality and education will find this book useful. The ethnographic material is worth reading for its empirical contribution alone; but more importantly it also illustrates how the relative steepness of the U.S. postsecondary system contributes to enduring social inequalities. -- Janice Aurini, Canadian Journal of Sociology Returning to his alma mater as faculty member and ethnographer, Khan offers an incisive study of the formation of a new,

meritocratic elite... Of utility and wide appeal to a range of academics, Khan's study is consistently engaging and of potentially enduring value. -- "Choice Essential reading for understanding today's elite. Not since Christopher Lasch's *Revolt of the Elites* has the meritocracy been so effectively skewered. -- Austin Bramwell, *American Conservative* There are few ethnographic accounts of life in exclusive American boarding schools and Khan's book is far and away the most sophisticated among them. But the contribution of *Privilege* goes beyond this narrow field. Those interested in the sociology of culture, stratification, everyday life, education, race, and gender will find much to appreciate. . . . Khan is a versatile and earnest ethnographer with a sharp eye for gesture and a keen ear for dialogue. -- Victoria Bonnell, *Contemporary Sociology*

"Privilege is superb. Khan skillfully narrates from the perspective of both teacher and researcher, and the personal portraits are very well-rounded. This important book is a masterly look at a disturbing current in the formation of elite American society."--Richard Sennett, author of *The Corrosion of Character* "This is a terrific book. Khan's strong authorial voice and wonderful personality shine through and it is a pleasure to follow his life and travails at St. Paul's."--Michelle Lamont, Harvard University

Shamus Rahman Khan studies the issue of privilege by studying students at a boarding school, St. Paul, from the point of view of a sociologist. His explanation of privilege helps to clear its meaning as the word is used way too often incorrectly. As a popular phrase of student activist and of activist in general, the phrase is given a negative connotation by implying that others have unfair advantages over others that should be redressed. Of course those under attack are none too thrilled by mobs of protestors chanting against them and they view the words tossed around as slander. Khan avoids the confusion around what privilege means by giving an objective view of what privilege is and provides reasons for why it remains invisible. He also provides reasons for how privilege has aided in ushering in a new era of "democratic inequality." That being said a majority of conclusions in his book are based off his interaction with students and faculty. During some parts of his book his observations appear to be stretching quite a bit. Generalizations based off the observations of a selected number of students at one school can stray to the limit of stereotyping. However, important trends in the new elite youth are addressed such as "exceptional indifference" and "reading shortcuts." Overall a decent read that follows a narrative of a teacher trying to observe how St. Paul is structured for success.

An interesting study by a former student, turned teacher and researcher, at St. Paul's prep school. Kahn's multiple perspectives convey a somewhat mild indictment of the "exceptional" self-image instilled in St. Paul students, that objective judgement might not support. Students are, by their very presence at St. Paul's, deemed exceptional at whatever skill or talent they display. This reinforced self-image is a major contributor to the students' sense of "ease" in interactions between themselves, other members of privilege, and those who serve them. Their self-confidence, despite a lack of substance, prepares them for their future roles in pre-ordained prominent positions.

Simply brilliant ethnography. As one who has been reading, thinking and teaching about inequality for years, I can say that this book adds enormously to our understanding of a complex, difficult-to-comprehend reality in the twenty-first century. If you want to learn about the making of contemporary American elites, you can read nothing better.

This is a great read.

This is a book written by my current professor serve it was a joy to read. The text is informative without being heavy. It highlights a pressing issue of America's education system and inequality among the social classes.

This was a text for my gender studies course. This story blew me away.

I'm a professor and assigned it for my classes and I loved it Great way talk about persistent inequality in society!

This is a great ethnography! Rigorously scholarly but also accessible and enjoyable to read - a rare accomplishment!

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