



# **Hold Fast to Dreams: A College Guidance Counselor, His Students, and the Vision of a Life Beyond Poverty**

*Beth Zasloff, Joshua Steckel*

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Since Joshua Steckel began work at a Brooklyn public high school as its first-ever college guidance counselor, every one of the hundreds of graduates he has counseled has been accepted to college, many to top-flight schools with all expenses paid. But getting in is only one small part of the drama of his students' stories. In a riveting work of narrative nonfiction—winner of a Studs and Ida Terkel award—*Hold Fast to Dreams* follows the lives of ten of Josh's students as they navigate the vast and obstacle-ridden landscape of college in America, where students for whom the stakes of education are highest find unequal access and inadequate support.

Among the ten unforgettable students we meet are: Mike, who writes his personal essays from a homeless shelter and is torn between his longing to get away to an idyllic college campus and his fear of leaving his mother and brothers in desperate circumstances; Santiago, a talented, motivated, and undocumented student, battles bureaucracy and low expectations as he seeks a life outside the low-wage world of hard manual labor to which his immigration status threatens to consign him; and Ashley, who pursues her ambition to become a doctor with almost superhuman drive but then forges a path that challenges received wisdom about the value of an elite, liberal arts education.

At a time when the idea of "college for all" is alternately embraced and challenged, this important book uncovers, in heartrending detail, the many ways the American education system fails in its promise as a ladder to opportunity. But it also provides hope in its portrayal of the extraordinary intelligence, resilience, and everyday heroics of the young people whose futures are too often lamented or ignored and whose voices, insights, and vision our colleges—and our country—desperately need. *Hold Fast to Dreams* will grab you on the first page and will stay with you for a long time. It should be required reading for anyone who cares about the right to education in America.

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