

T.M. Landry College Prep, a small private school in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, boasted a 100 percent college acceptance rate, placing students at nearly every Ivy League university in the country. The spectacle of Landry students opening their acceptance letters to Harvard and Yale was broadcast on television and even celebrated by Michelle Obama. It became a national ritual to watch the miraculous success of these youngsters—miraculous because Breaux Bridge is one of the poorest counties in the country, ranked close to the bottom for test scores and high school graduation rates. T.M. Landry was said to be “minting prodigies,” and the prodigies were often black.

How did the school do it? It didn't: It was a scam, pulled off with fake transcripts and personal essays telling fake stories of triumph over adversity. Worse, Landry's success concealed a nightmare of alleged abuse and coercion. In a yearslong investigation, Katie Benner and Erica L. Green explored the lives of the students, the school, the town, and Ivy League admissions to understand why black teens were pressured to trade in racial stereotypes of hardship for opportunity.

Gripping and illuminating, *Miracle Children* argues that the lesson of T.M. Landry is not that the school gamed the system but that it played by the rules—that its deceptions and abuses were the outcome of segregated schools, inequitable education, and the belief that elite colleges are the nation's last path to life-changing economic opportunity.

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READ BY CHRISTOPHER IAN GRANT



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