In the middle of the 20th century, the United States led the world in college graduation rates as landmark laws enabled growing numbers of Americans from across the income spectrum to become the first in their families to earn degrees. Today, by contrast, the nation lags behind several others, and although more students than ever enroll in college, their uneven graduation rates and experiences in the schools they attend combine to reinforce inequality. What’s gone wrong? Suzanne Mettler explains that transformations in the U.S. political system have left public policies—in higher education and other policy areas—largely unmonitored, such that they become derailed, diverting taxpayer dollars to private interests, or fall into decay. She shows the impact for federal student aid, support for public universities, and the for-profit college sector. Drawing on American historical experience, she discusses how the nation can restore its legacy of expanding opportunity and democracy through education.