

# The Secret History Of Miss America



Did you know that behind the glitz and glamour of the Miss America pageant lies a secret history? For almost 100 years, the iconic beauty pageant has captivated audiences and provided a platform for talented, intelligent women to showcase their skills. However, there is more to Miss America than meets the eye. In this

article, we delve into the hidden story, scandals, and controversies that have shaped this institution.

## The Birth of Miss America

Miss America is not just a beauty pageant; it is a cultural phenomenon that has evolved over time. The first Miss America pageant took place on September 7, 1921, in Atlantic City. Unlike modern-day pageants, the initial competition focused primarily on physical appearance, with women parading in swimsuits and evening gowns.



### There She Was: The Secret History of Miss America by Amy Argetsinger (Kindle Edition)

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However, as times changed, so did Miss America. The 1960s, in particular, saw a significant shift in the pageant's focus, with a greater emphasis on talent, intelligence, and societal contributions.

## Scandals and Controversies

Behind the glamorous facade, Miss America has experienced its fair share of scandals and controversies. One of the most infamous incidents occurred in 1950

when nude photos of the reigning Miss America, Marilyn Buferd, were leaked to the public. The scandal caused an uproar and led to calls for tighter regulations and more stringent background checks for contestants.

Throughout the years, allegations of racial discrimination and sexism have plagued the organization. Critics argue that the pageant perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards and objectifies women. These controversies have prompted Miss America to adapt and modernize, attempting to address concerns and make the competition more inclusive.

## **Transformation and Empowerment**

Despite its troubled past, Miss America has also played a crucial role in empowering women and promoting social change. Over the years, winners have used their platform to advocate for various causes, such as education, health care, and equal rights.

One of the most inspiring stories in Miss America history centers around Vanessa Williams, who became the first African-American to win the competition in 1984. Her victory marked a significant milestone and shattered racial barriers within the pageant world.

## **The Miss America Scholarship Program**

Contrary to popular belief, the Miss America pageant is not solely focused on external beauty. The organization places a strong emphasis on education and offers substantial scholarships to its participants. These scholarships have helped countless young women pursue their academic dreams and achieve success outside of the pageant world.

The scholarship program has been instrumental in transforming Miss America into an institution that celebrates talent and intelligence alongside physical beauty. It has also allowed the organization to establish itself as a prominent force in supporting women's education.

## **Reinventing Miss America**

Recognizing the need for change, Miss America has undergone a significant transformation in recent years. In 2018, the organization announced that it would no longer judge contestants based on their physical appearance. This landmark decision aimed to shift the focus onto the contestants' achievements, intelligence, and social impact.

Furthermore, the revamped competition features a more diverse range of participants, ensuring that the Miss America stage is representative of the multicultural society we live in.

## **The Future of Miss America**

As Miss America progresses into the 21st century, it continues to adapt and evolve. The pageant now seeks to redefine traditional beauty standards and empower women from all walks of life.

Despite its intriguing history, the ultimate goal of Miss America remains constant: to provide a platform for women to showcase their talents, advocate for causes they believe in, and inspire others to chase their dreams.

The secret history of Miss America is a tale of resilience, controversy, and transformation. Behind the glitter and tiaras lies an institution that has shaped American culture and challenged societal norms.

Today, Miss America stands as more than just a beauty pageant; it represents an opportunity for women to make their mark and drive meaningful change.



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“Argetsinger...is a true pageant enthusiast; she brings empathy and respect to the women who have followed this path.” —The Washington Post

A Washington Post Style editor’s fascinating and irresistible look back on the Miss America pageant as it approaches its 100th anniversary.

The sash. The tears. The glittering crown. And of course, that soaring song. For all of its pomp and kitsch, the Miss America pageant is indelibly written into the American story of the past century. From its giddy origins as a summer’s-end tourist draw in Prohibition-era Atlantic City, it blossomed into a televised extravaganza that drew tens of millions of viewers in its heyday and was once considered the highest honor that a young woman could achieve.

For two years, Washington Post reporter and editor Amy Argetsinger visited pageants and interviewed former winners and contestants to unveil the hidden

world of this iconic institution. *There She Was* spotlights how the pageant survived decades of social and cultural change, collided with a women's liberation movement that sought to abolish it, and redefined itself alongside evolving ideas about feminism.

For its superstars—Phyllis George, Vanessa Williams, Gretchen Carlson—and for those who never became household names, Miss America was a platform for women to exercise their ambitions and learn brutal lessons about the culture of fame. Spirited and revelatory, *There She Was* charts the evolution of the American woman, from the Miss America catapulted into advocacy after she was exposed as a survivor of domestic violence to the one who used her crown to launch a congressional campaign; from a 1930s winner who ran away on the night of her crowning to a present-day rock guitarist carving out her place in this world. Argetsinger dissects the scandals and financial turmoil that have repeatedly threatened to kill the pageant—and highlights the unexpected sisterhood of Miss Americas fighting to keep it alive.



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