

**Beauty Pageants as an American Institution**  
**EDUC 1760A**  
**Fall 2019**  
**Tuesdays 4-6:20 pm**

**Professor Hilary Levey Friedman**

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Office Hours: Mondays 1-3 pm at 164 Angell Street (above Brown Bookstore), Room 202

Beauty pageants are often ridiculed, and even vilified, in American society. Yet their lasting power—from “There She Is” to *Toddlers & Tiaras* to pageant waves—is undeniable. What accounts for the enduring power of beauty pageants? This course draws on interdisciplinary scholarship across the social sciences and humanities to examine how and why pageantry and American femininity have become linked in the public consciousness as they transformed from beauty contests to the largest source of scholarship money available to women in this country. Together we will examine how pageantry intersects with major institutions—namely the educational system, but also the political system and mass media. By the end of this course you will be able to use beauty pageants as a lens to carefully examine these institutions, along with gender, race, age, and appearance, and apply that critical thinking to other cultural phenomena.

This is a writing designated course, with no prerequisites, for Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors.

**Course Outline**

*September 10- Introductory Meeting (Week 1)*

- → Watch documentary Miss America from PBS’ American Experience (2002)

*September 17- T&A (Week 2)*

- Byrd-Bredbenner, Carol, Jessica Murray, and Yvette R. Schlussel. 2005. “Temporal Changes in Anthropometric Measurements of Idealized Females and Young Women in General.” *Women & Health*. 41(2): 13-30.
- Etcoff, Nancy. 1999. *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*. New York: Doubleday. Pg. 89-115.
- Hamermesh, Daniel S. 2011. *Beauty Pays: Why Attractive People Are More Successful*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Pg. 66-85.
- Wolf, Naomi. 2002. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. New York: Harper Perennial. 1-19.

*September 24- The Likeablest & Loveablest of All Maidens: Historical Evolution of Beauty Pageants (Week 3)*

- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 1999. *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Pg. 1-57.
- Banner, Lois W. 1983. *American Beauty*. New York: Alfred A Knopf. Pg. 249-270.
- Dorey, Annette K. Vance. 1999. *Better Baby Contests: The Scientific Quest for Perfect Childhood Health*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company. Pg. 25-39; 77-91.
- Peiss, Kathy. 2012. Pg 10-21 in *Meet Miss Subways: New York’s Beauty Queens 1941-1976*, Text by Amy Zimmer. Kittery, ME: Smith/Kerr Associates.

October 1- *Ready for Primetime: Miss America in the Television Era* (Week 4)

- Deford, Frank. 1978. *There She Is: The Life and Times of Miss America*. New York, NY: Viking Press. 3-40; 166-208; 295-368.

October 8- *Pageants Go Co-Ed (or Pageants as a College Sorority)* (Week 5)

- Goldin, Claudia. 1992. "The Meaning of College in the Lives of American Women: The Past One-Hundred Years." NBER Working Paper 4099: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w4099>.
  - Robbins, Alexandra. 2004. *Pledged: The Secret Life of Sororities*. New York: Hyperion. 65-97.
  - Tice, Karen W. 2012. *Queens of Academe: Beauty Pageantry, Student Bodies, and College Life*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1-40; 68-101.
- ➔ Watch That Junior Miss Spirit (1970)

**Friday, October 11- Short paper due**

October 15- *Post-Grad Pageants* (Week 6)

**Guest Speaker: Allie Nault, Miss America's Outstanding Teen 2016 (Miss New Hampshire's Outstanding Teen)**

- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 1999. *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Pg. 87-122.
  - Levey Friedman, Hilary. September 12, 2013. "There She Is, Miss America: Big Money to Be Made." *The New York Times*. [Page 8 of Sunday Review on September 15, 2013.]
- ➔ Watch Miss America interviews from 2011 and 2014

October 22- *Ivy League+ Beauty Queens* (Week 7)

**Guest Speaker: Cara Mund '16, Miss America 2018**

- Shindle, Kate. 2014. *Being Miss America: Behind the Rhinestone Curtain*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. Pg. 127-212.

Note: reflection paper this week should be on proposed final paper topic

October 29- *A Pageant for Everyone: Race and Ethnicity* (Week 8)

- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 1999. *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Pg. 123-180.
  - Craig, Maxine Leeds. 2002. *Ain't I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race*. New York: Oxford. Pg. 45-77.
  - Llorens, Hilda. 2013. "Latina bodies in the era of elective aesthetic surgery." *Latino Studies*. 11(4): 547-569.
  - Roberts, Blain. 2014. *Pageants, Parlors, & Pretty Women*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. Pg. 149-191.
  - Yano, Christine R. 2006. *Crowning the Nice Girl: Gender, Ethnicity, and Culture in Hawai'i's Cherry Blossom Festival*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press. Pg. 13-38.
- ➔ Watch Miss Navajo (Sundance, 2007) and Miss You Can Do It (HBO, 2013)

November 5- *The Pageantry of Politics* (Week 9)

- Hinojosa, Magda and Jill Carle. 2016. "From Miss World to World Leader: Beauty Queens, Paths to Power, and Political Representations." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*. 37:1, 24-46.

- Kitto, Kris. "Understanding the Beauty Queen Politician." September 15, 2008. *The Hill*.
- Levey Friedman, Hilary. "Here She Comes, Miss (Elected) America." June 26, 2012. *Slate*.
- Levey Friedman, Hilary. "From reigning to campaigning: Beauty Queen political candidates." October 3, 2012. *The Hill*.

*November 12- Toddlers & Tiaras: Childhood and Pageantry (Week 10)*

- Adler, Jerry, Pamela Abramson, and John McCormick. September 17, 1984. "Babes in Pageantland." *Newsweek*, Pg. 58.
  - Anderson, Susan. 2009. *High Glitz: The Extravagant World of Child Beauty Pageants*. Brooklyn, NY: powerHouse Books. Pg. 6-29; 122-141.
  - Jordan, Pat. April 1994. "The curious childhood of an 11-year-old beauty queen." *Life*. 17:4, Page 56 (9 pages).
  - Levey Friedman, Hilary. 2009. "Pageant Princesses and Math Whizzes: Understanding Children's Activities as a Form of Children's Work." *Childhood*. 16(2): 195-212.
  - Orenstein, Peggy. 2012. *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*. New York: Harper. Pg. 73-94.
  - Ramsey, John. *The Other Side of Suffering: The Father of JonBenet Ramsey Tells the Story of His Journey from Grief to Grace*. Nashville, TN: FaithWords, 2012. Pg. 88-96.
  - Ramsey, John and Patsy. 2001. *The Death of Innocence: JonBenet's Parents Tell Their Story*. New York: Onyx. Pg. 51-62.
- Watch *Living Dolls* (HBO, 2001) and *Painted Babies at 17* (BBC, 2008)

*November 19- Grand Supremes by another Name: Other Forms of Pageants (Week 11)*

- Adams, Natalie Guice and Pamela J. Bettis. 2003. *Cheerleader! An American Icon*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Pg. 69-90.
- Best, Amy L. 2000. *Prom Night: Youth, Schools, and Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge. Pg. 35-62.
- Marling, Karal Ann. 2004. *Debutante: Rites and Regalia of American Debdom*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press. Pg. 152-172.
- Mears, Ashley. 2001. *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Pg. 1-26.

*December 3- "We're all born naked and the rest is drag." (Week 12)*

**Guest Speaker: Pulp Friction (Luis Santiago), Miss Gay Rhode Island 2019**

- Lindsay, Cecile. 1996. "Bodybuilding: A Postmodern Freak Show." Pg. 356-367 in Rosemarie Garland Thomson (ed.). *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. New York: New York University Press.

→ Watch *Paris is Burning* (Lionsgate, 2012 [1991]); *Pageant* (Cineaste, 2008)

NO REFLECTION PAPER THIS WEEK AS FINAL PAPER DRAFT DUE DECEMBER 2

*December 10- The Reality of Pageants (Week 13)*

- Caramanica, Jon. May 27, 2011. "Savviness and Stars Lift 'Idol.'" *The New York Times*.
- Edwards, Owen. "The Object at Hand: American Idol." *Smithsonian Magazine*. January 2006.
- Pozner, Jennifer L. 2010. *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press. Pg. 33-96.
- Quindlen, Anna. "There She Was. There She Goes." *Newsweek*. April 17, 2006.

**Monday, DECEMBER 15- Research paper due**

*December 17- Presentations on research papers*

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## **COURSE ORGANIZATION AND REQUIREMENTS**

In addition to class time each week (2.5 hours), most weeks you should anticipate spending at least 8 hours to prepare for seminar (between reading, watching documentaries, and writing your weekly reflection papers). You should anticipate spending approximately 12 hours working on the first writing assignment (watching the movies and writing) and approximately 24 hours on the second writing assignment (doing research, analyzing, and writing, and meeting individually with me). Actual times will vary for each student; final grades are not determined by the amount of time a student spends on the course.

Course requirements consist of the following:

1. **WEEKLY WRITTEN REFLECTIONS.** Each week students are expected to write a two-page reflection paper synthesizing their understanding of the readings for that week that will account for 20% of the final grade. These reflections should be submitted no later than 4 pm the day before class (Mondays) via Canvas. At the end of each reflection please write 2-3 discussion questions that may be used in class. Note that for the week October 22, your reflection paper should be devoted to your proposed final paper topic.
2. **FIRST WRITING ASSIGNMENT.** The first 4-6 page paper in the course will be due **OCTOBER 11**. This paper will count for 20% of the final grade. You have two choices: 1) Critically compare one fictional portrayal of beauty pageants (*Drop Dead Gorgeous* OR *Miss Congeniality*) and a “real” portrayal of beauty pageants (*VH1 Goes Inside the Miss America Pageant*). You should also draw upon historical conceptions of beauty pageants, as discussed in class and in the readings. 2) Imagine one of your Brown roommates tells you she or he is considering competing in a beauty pageant. Based on course readings thus far, offer at least two critical perspectives on participation and at least two supportive perspectives.
3. **SECOND WRITING ASSIGNMENT.** This paper, of 18-20 pages, will be due **DECEMBER 15** and will require that each student select an aspect of pageantry to explore in greater detail on his or her own. Some original research will be expected—whatever is best suited to the topic so that could mean archival work, interviews, participant observation, or media/content analysis (more to come on specific details)—along with synthesis of secondary materials. As scholars studying a relatively understudied popular phenomenon we must push ourselves to move past opinion and anecdote to engage with theory and data. Rough drafts will be due to on **December 2<sup>nd</sup>** and comments will be returned to you by **December 9<sup>th</sup>**. With the paper you must submit a 1-2 page letter explaining how you did or did not incorporate proposed changes from your draft paper. During the final class period on **December 17<sup>th</sup>**, each student will be required to present a brief (5 minute) summary of her or his paper. This paper assignment will count for 40% of the final grade.
4. **ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN DISCUSSIONS.** Because this is a seminar course, success depends on the interaction of students with each other. This means that each

week, students need to come to class prepared to discuss issues raised in the readings and engage with one another; sitting attentively and silently absorbing what is being discussed is not sufficient. Therefore, attendance at weekly seminar meetings is necessary, and participation in discussions will count for 20% of the final grade (5% of which is related to the final in-class paper presentation). A student who misses more than two seminar meetings will not be able to pass the course. There will be no make-ups, including for athletic or other extracurricular absences. If you miss a class you need to submit a 5-page discussion of the week's readings/documentaries before 5 pm the Friday after the missed class.

**Due dates for papers are firm.** No exceptions or extensions will be granted without official letter from Dean or medical professional. Papers submitted late will be penalized. Any late paper will be marked down half a letter grade for each 12-hour period it is late (or portion thereof). If a paper is submitted more than five days late, without official excuse, it will be considered an F.

The evaluation of your papers will consider several elements. A strong paper will contain the following:

- a clear and specific **argument** that is developed over the course of the paper
- support for that argument based on **evidence** from primary and secondary sources
- a well-organized **structure**
- clear, accessible **writing**

Some additional requirements for the paper:

- Include a bibliography of all cited materials at the end of your essay. The bibliography should follow a consistent style, e.g., Last, First. *Title*. Place: Publisher, date.
- Type your paper in standard fonts in 12 point, 1-inch margins, and double spacing.
- Number your pages.

It is important to distinguish between your own work and the work of others. You need to reference the sources you have consulted, whether directly quoting, paraphrasing, or otherwise drawing on a given source. Plagiarism is unacceptable. Any plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment and referral to a dean so that the situation can be dealt with according to Brown's established policies for academic conduct.

*No curve is involved in this course. You will receive the grade that you earn. I do not offer extra-credit either during the course or after receiving your final grade. Because grade disputes can become emotional for everyone, I require that all questions and concerns you have about grading to be conducted in writing. Please email me within 72 hours of grades being posted with detailed questions about any issues you have about your grade and I will respond accordingly.*

## **HUMAN BEING NOTES**

I want you to do well in this course. To do that you must take care of your basic needs. Some college students experience difficulties affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day. Some of you may feel you lack a safe or stable place to live. You may also be balancing paid work, childcare, or other family obligations. If any of this applies to you please know you can reach out to me (if you feel comfortable), and I can help you access resources, or that you can reach out to your Dean and/or advisor. If you have concerns about the non-tuition cost(s) of a course at Brown

you may apply to the Dean of the College's Academic Emergency Fund. The Fund can be found in the Emergency, Curricular & Co-curricular Gap (E-Gap) Funds in [UFunds](#). More information is available at: <http://brown.edu/go/egap>. Students may also submit inquiries to [egap-funds@brown.edu](mailto:egap-funds@brown.edu).

Finally, please inform me early in the term if you have a disability or other conditions that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact [Student and Employee Accessibility Services](#) at 401-863-9588 or [SEAS@brown.edu](mailto:SEAS@brown.edu). Students in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact one of the deans in the Dean of the College's office.

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