



Queen of the Virgins: Pageantry and Black Womanhood in the Caribbean (Caribbean Studies Series)

M. Cynthia Oliver

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Beauty pageants are wildly popular in the U.S. Virgin Islands, outnumbering any other single performance event and capturing the attention of the local people from toddlers to seniors. Local beauty contests provide women opportunities to demonstrate talent, style, the values of black womanhood, and the territory's social mores.

Queen of the Virgins: Pageantry and Black Womanhood in the Caribbean is a comprehensive look at the centuries-old tradition of these expressions in the Virgin Islands. M. Cynthia Oliver maps the trajectory of pageantry from its colonial precursors at tea meetings, dance dramas, and street festival parades to its current incarnation as the beauty pageant or "queen show." For the author, pageantry becomes a lens through which to view the region's understanding of gender, race, sexuality, class, and colonial power.

Focusing on the queen show, Oliver reveals its twin roots in slave celebrations that parodied white colonial behavior and created creole royal rituals and celebrations heavily influenced by Africanist aesthetics. Using the U.S. Virgin Islands as an intriguing case study, Oliver shows how the pageant continues to reflect, reinforce, and challenge Caribbean cultural values concerning femininity. *Queen of the Virgins* examines the journey of the black woman from degraded body to vaunted queen and how this progression is marked by social unrest, growing middle-class sensibilities, and contemporary sexual and gender politics.

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