

*Here She Is: The Complicated Reign of the Beauty Pageant in America*  
By Hilary Levey Friedman

Book Club Discussion Questions



1. Think about the title: Do you agree the reign of beauty pageants has been “complicated?” Can you think of another adjective to describe the history of the American beauty pageant?
2. Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt beauty and brains were mutually exclusive? What, if anything, changed your mind after?
3. In the Preface, on page xv, Hilary writes, “I have come to see Miss America as possibly the best example of the difficult and complicated nature of American womanhood.” Can you think of other examples that capture American womanhood for you?
4. What did being a “respectable” woman mean in the nineteenth century? In the first half of the twentieth century? In what ways do they differ from today’s view?
5. The hundredth anniversaries of the passage of the nineteenth amendment and Miss America occur very close together. What is surprising about the fact that their births were so close together, and what was different about each of their establishments?
6. If Lenora Slaughter were alive today, what do you imagine she might be doing professionally?
7. How would you answer the final question Hilary’s mom was asked—what are some of the guidelines you might give to young girls of the next generation—when she competed at Miss America?

8. Do you think Hilary would have been able to study beauty pageants if her mother had not been a former Miss America? How might her family connection have aided her research?
9. Despite progress, why do you think certain groups of women—like Jews, Latinas, lesbians, to name a few—remain severely underrepresented at major American beauty pageants?
10. Before reading *Here She Is*, what was your stereotype of a pageant queen? Did that stereotype change at all after reading the book?
11. Chapter 5 features Jacinta and Marta's involvement in child beauty pageants. Was anything about their experiences unexpected to you?
12. What competitive reality television show seems to be most pageant-adjacent?
13. Name some links between pageants and politics that surprised you.
14. Why do you think beauty contests have been a vehicle for men like P.T. Barnum and Donald J. Trump?
15. In what ways has feminism helped and/or hindered the endurance of beauty pageants?
16. If you were to design a sash to wear at public events, what would it say?
17. How would you react if a child, or grandchild, wanted to compete in a pageant?
18. Imagine you are judging a beauty pageant. What questions would you want to ask the contestants in an interview?
19. How do you envision the next phase of Third Wave feminism? The Fourth Wave?
20. What do you predict beauty pageants might look like 100 years from now?