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Oped: The Miss Connecticut Scholarship Organization

Does The Miss Connecticut Scholarship Organization restrict it's highest scholarship prize from Black Women?

The Miss CT Scholarship Organization is a subsidiary of the famed and renowned Miss America Organization. Regardless of one's beliefs in pageantry, The Miss America Organization is the largest provider of scholarships for women in America. Which means, all women, of every ethnicity, socio-economic circumstance and educational degree should have the right to these scholarship funds upon entry, qualifications and preparedness into the competition.

There has not been a Black woman crowned Miss Connecticut in 21 years. Let me repeat, it has been over 2 decades since a Black Woman was crowned Miss Connecticut. Every year, teens from ages 13-18 and Miss from ages 18-28 vie for the title of Miss Connecticut. There are several months of preparation, a 16-page contract, dedicated community service and of course, stage etiquette which go into the performance and scoring of each contestant. In addition, contestants are judged in areas of Talent, Interview, Onstage Question, Fitness and Evening Gown.

Through my observations and personal experience, it is clear through statistical data, that Black Women in the Miss division of Miss Connecticut do not have equal opportunity to the highest scholarship prize and exposure that the Miss America Pageant provides despite them being highly qualified or prepared. Why is this? In order for a flower to grow you must uproot, tend to the soil and nourish it. The Miss America Organization opened its doors to Black contestants in 1970 which means, for 50 years there were no black contestants onstage. In fact, activist, Phillip Savage and entrepreneur, J. Morris Anderson established Miss Black America in response to the lack of space for Black and Brown contestants. While other States within the Miss America Organization have made significant strides in crowning black women, Miss Connecticut Organization has not!

The most recent Black woman to be crowned Miss Connecticut was in 2002. For many who have gone through the program, she was and continues to be viewed as one of the most successful Miss Connecticut's, having placed Top Ten at Miss America. However, why should it stop there? Over the last two decades, a handful of Black women competed for Miss Connecticut. This means, approximately 1 black woman per every 20 white women participated in the Miss Connecticut Competition and only 1.4 percent of Black Women was crowned Miss Connecticut in 94 years. Although the recent crowning's of a Latina and Indian woman opens the door for more, there is still a large void to be filled. Only 7.4 percent of women of color have been crowned Miss Connecticut. Today, Black Women are more educated by race and gender so, if any source of scholarship is limiting, it can be very harmful.

It takes having lived through situations to understand the issues or challenges they bring. How are we deconstructing systems today to improve them? We 1. Address the problem, 2. Have conversations 3. Take action immediately and importantly, 4. Make changes by shifting out and

ushering in new leadership. If the Miss Connecticut Board does not reflect society, it will never affect change in society. So, my question is, **Does The Miss Connecticut Scholarship Organization restrict it's highest scholarship prize from Black Women? Does The Miss Connecticut Scholarship Organization Help Black Women or Cause more harm? Does The Miss Connecticut Scholarship Organization ensure that all women, including volunteers, contestants, sponsors and prospective board members, have access and opportunity to serve, compete and win?**