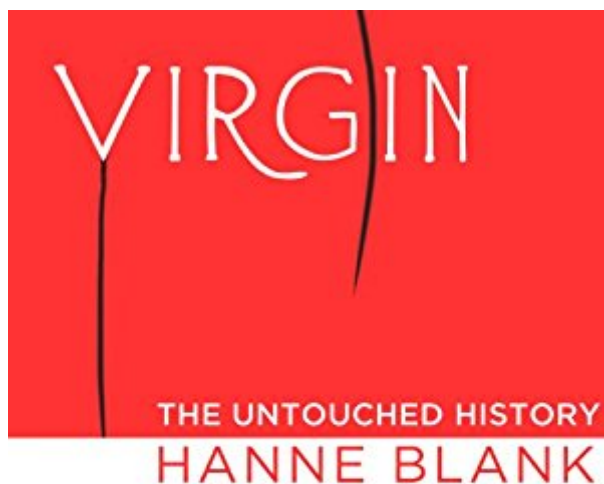


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# Virgin: The Untouched History



author of STRAIGHT and BIG BIG LOVE



## Synopsis

Why has an indefinable state of being commanded the attention and fascination of the human race since the dawn of time? In *Virgin*, Hanne Blank brings us a revolutionary, rich and entertaining survey of an astonishing untouched history. From the simple task of determining what constitutes its loss to why it matters to us in the first place, Blank gets to the heart of why we even care about it in the first place. She tackles the reality of what we do and don't know about virginity and provides a sweeping tour of virgins in history - from virgin martyrs to Queen Elizabeth to billboards in downtown Baltimore telling young women it's not a "dirty word." *Virgin* proves, as well, how utterly contemporary the topic is - the butt of innumerable jokes, center of spiritual mysteries, locus of teenage angst, popular genre for pornography, and nucleus around which the world's most powerful government has created an unprecedented abstinence policy. In this fascinating work, Hanne Blank shows for the first time why this is, and why everything we think we know about virginity is wrong.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I recently had an essay to write about the nature of human sexuality. It focused on and how different parts of society seeks to control sexual expression. The essay was for an English class and the nature of virginity was a topic that frequently came up during my research process. Although the essay was written in a part of the world that lives by the motto live and let live; the topic of virginity and what it means to people is a hard topic to find out about without having to wade through propaganda and religious filtering. Blank's endlessly researched and fact filled book will satiate any anthropologist or casual reader's curiosity. The book is a look at what it means to be a virgin

throughout history and having the reputation of being one or not being one shaped the people and the society that they lived in. The book never takes a break from its rumination of history to preach any viewpoint or defend the author's personal, political or religious interests, instead the reader is given objective and easy to read historical accounts from around the world backed up by intelligent evidence that will enlighten every person who reads it. I highly recommend this book to anyone who has ever spent time considering the nature of human sexuality before repeating any propaganda or rumor about a subject that has caused endless controversy that continues to this day.

Writer and Historian Hanne Blank provides a comprehensive, thought-provoking and entertaining read about the concept of virginity. Her interdisciplinary approach and analysis provides the reader with a better understanding of the complex social, economic and biological forces that have informed, and continue to inform, our ideas about virginity.

The information in this book is hard to find in other places and is desperately needed. The topics covered in this book are still hot today. Blank starts the conversations that we all want to talk about and makes them much more comfortable and digestible. It's a wonderful read.

I bought this book because I thought the title was interesting. I had never read anything by Hanne Blank before. She is a very incisive and witty writer. I learned much and enjoyed every page. I am going to read more of her writing.

As someone interested in history and anthropology, I found this book to be fascinating. In nearly every section I found information I wanted to pass on to someone else. I didn't necessarily agree with all of it, but that's what critical reading is for! I would highly recommend it to anyone who wants to know more about the social, political, biological, mental, etc. impacts of virginity--whether academically or for leisure.

This review is for the Kindle edition specifically. The book itself is great, and very interesting, but it's abundantly clear that the kindle version was run through OCR software without any additional editing or proofreading. At times, the randomly italicised words started to distract me from the text. Why was the word "of" italicized here? Why the first "five"? Was this some kind of elaborate word-scramble to produce a hidden meaning in the text? It wasn't until the chapter comparing "Beverly Hills go210" with "The Rocky Honor Picture Show", however, that the absurdity truly came

to light. Perhaps the next book should be about the lost art of proofreading?

A billboard in Baltimore used to read, "Virgin: teach your kids it's not a dirty word." That it could be thought of as a dirty word, and that social forces might pay good money to change this concept, illustrate part of the ambivalent feelings our society has toward virgins and virginity. The ambivalence, at many levels, is exhaustively examined in *Virgin: The Untouched History* (Bloomsbury) by Hanne Blank. An independent historian (with some books of erotica to her credit), Blank says that she was working as a sex educator and wanted to find authoritative sources on virginity. Despite the medical, historic, religious, and social implications of the subject, she found few. "Even though my interests were limited to virginity and virgins in the Western world, it was rapidly becoming obvious to me that if I wanted to read a comprehensive survey of virginity, I was going to have to write it." Her book is indeed comprehensive, and it is scholarly but far from dry, as she examines the surprisingly complicated topic of what a virgin is, and tries to make sense of why the subject has been on our collective minds for so many centuries. Just defining what a virgin is is a tough exercise. And it isn't just a philosophical or verbal one: "It is an exercise in controlling how people behave, feel, and think, and in some cases, whether they live or die." The confusion is shown by Augustine, who said that if a virgin resisted rape, then she was still a virgin after rape. The defining emphasis on a potentially procreative act, rather than any other canoodling, isn't because of any inherent biological cause, but seems to be due to social factors, like a father's valuing his daughter's virginity as a bargaining chip in matrimonial negotiations. No other animal besides ourselves seems to recognize or value a condition of virginity. Sometimes the explanation given is that humans are the only animals with hymens, but this is not true; lots of mammals have them, and they have hymens that are useful in, say, sealing out water, or only opening up when the female is in estrus. No animal besides ourselves pays the hymen any attention, and this is despite that the human hymen serves no function. There is no accurate test for virginity, although many have been proposed, from the supposedly physiological to the downright superstitious. "The simple fact is that short of catching someone in the act of sex, virginity can be neither proven nor disproven. We cannot prove it today, nor have we ever been able to." Just to show how patriarchal is the interest in such tests, there is always one form of evidence that is universally considered inadmissible in the matter: the woman's own verbal testimony. "Of all the countries of the developed world," writes Blank, "the United States is the only one that has to date created a federal agenda having specifically to do with the virginity of its citizens." Our federal government is attempting to establish virginity as the only proper sexual status for its never-married citizens. That young people should

abstain from sex is the basis of millions of dollars of federal programs; that they do not abstain, and never have, is obvious but makes no difference to those with a pro-virginity agenda. Usually such agendas come from religious groups. Funding, for instance, goes to a program called Free Teens USA, which is run by people with strong ties to the Unification Church of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon. The church maintains that any sexual activity outside of marriage is an abomination, and Reverend Moon has advocated that a woman who is threatened with rape ought to kill herself rather than undergo extramarital coitus. Less extreme religious groups may advocate virginity, but the results are poor. Abstinence programs do not reliably lower risky sexual behavior. When the Centers for Disease Control did research into programs that were supposed to reduce such behavior, none of the programs that were successful were centered on abstinence. (Since then, the CDC has discontinued such research and removed the results from its website, and its recommendations for contraception have been replaced by statements of official support for abstinence and abstinence only.) Blank's book is not a polemic, but her enlightening historical review of western attitudes to virginity would be good reading for anyone making governmental policy about our virgins. It is also a call to remember the long confusion of historical definitions and attitudes, and that "losing one's virginity" is probably not one physical, emotional, or psychological event, but a process of sexual development that is different for everyone and ought not be oversimplified as one coital act.

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