# "Since they can't have children, they recruit them": Anita Bryant's anti-gay legacy leaves a lasting impact



Known primarily as a beauty queen and a successful spokesperson for the Florida Citrus Commission, where she featured in numerous television advertisements, Anita Bryant, who died last week, was also a popular singer whose music charted on the Billboard lists. However, her fame is inextricably linked to her outspoken opposition to gay rights, which has sparked extensive discussion over the years.

Born in Oklahoma and crowned Miss Oklahoma, Bryant later transitioned into a successful career in entertainment, performing in various television specials and taking the lead in her own variety show produced by Paramount. Despite her glossy public persona, Bryant is perhaps most infamously remembered for launching a vehement campaign against the gay rights movement during her peak. She founded the anti-LGBTQ+ organisation Save Our Children, which propagated the unfounded notion that gay men posed a threat to children, infamously stating, “Since they can't have children, they recruit them.” This rhetoric not only served to vilify the gay community but also echoed into contemporary discussions surrounding accusations of 'grooming' in relation to LGBTQ+ visibility, particularly during events like Drag Queen Story Hours.

As recollections of her career surfaced, some noted key moments of resistance against her ideology, such as when gay bar owners refused to serve Florida orange juice, opting instead for the concoction dubbed the "Anita Bryant Cocktail," which combined vodka and apple juice. Demonstrators actively campaigned against her, leading to significant financial repercussions for her and, over time, contributing to her professional decline.

Brian McNaught, a noted sex educator and author, remarked on Bryant's complex role in the evolution of the gay rights movement, stating that “as awful as her behaviour was, she made the word 'Gay' known worldwide and helped us forge a community.” This duality highlights how her advocacy, paradoxically, propelled the LGBTQ+ fight for recognition and rights, culminating in larger societal changes decades later, including the battle for same-sex marriage.

Bryant's activism was viewed by many as an early example of what is now referred to as "cancel culture," with communities uniting against her ideologies and taking tangible steps to express their dissent. The repercussions of her public stance against LGBTQ+ individuals sparked discussions about the motivations behind such vehement opposition, with suggestions from psychologists and therapists that such outbursts often stem from personal conflicts or unacknowledged struggles.

In light of her death, commentators have pointed to contemporary parallels, particularly the resurgence of anti-gay and anti-trans sentiments in today’s political climate. The current landscape sees a growing number of individuals and groups expressing concerns over legislative measures that seem to undermine the rights of LGBTQ+ people, with many advocating for vigilance and advocacy against such trends.

A recent Gallup poll indicated that approximately 70 percent of Americans are supportive of gay marriage, suggesting a significant shift in societal attitudes since Bryant’s heyday; however, challenges remain, particularly regarding perceptions of gender identity and gender-affirming care. The LGBTQ+ community continues to navigate these complexities as they respond to historical and contemporary forces at play in the ongoing struggle for equality.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.thepinknews.com/2025/01/10/anita-bryant-dead-84-gay/> - Corroborates Anita Bryant's death, her career as a singer and spokesperson for the Florida Citrus Commission, and her anti-gay activism.
* <https://floridacitrushalloffame.com/inductees/anita-bryant/> - Details her role as the spokesperson for the Florida Citrus Commission, her involvement in numerous commercials, and her impact on the citrus industry.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anita_Bryant> - Provides comprehensive information on Anita Bryant's life, career, music, and her anti-gay activism, including the 'Save Our Children' campaign.
* <https://www.distractify.com/p/anita-bryant-orange-juice-commercial> - Discusses her role in orange juice commercials and the impact of her anti-LGBTQ+ advocacy on her career.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anita_Bryant> - Explains her early life, beauty pageant wins, music career, and later activities including her Christian ministry and financial struggles.
* <https://www.thepinknews.com/2025/01/10/anita-bryant-dead-84-gay/> - Mentions her performance at the Super Bowl half-time show and other notable appearances, as well as her family and survivors.
* <https://floridacitrushalloffame.com/inductees/anita-bryant/> - Highlights her induction into the Florida Citrus Hall of Fame and her lasting impact on the industry.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anita_Bryant> - Details the financial repercussions and personal costs of her anti-LGBTQ+ activism, including her bankruptcy and decline in public image.
* <https://www.distractify.com/p/anita-bryant-orange-juice-commercial> - Describes the backlash against her, including the 'Anita Bryant Cocktail' and the broader impact on her career and public perception.