

Seattle University

ScholarWorks @ SeattleU

---

The Spectator Online

Newspapers

---

2-11-2021

## Seattle U Community Honors Actress Cicely Tyson After Passing

Ashley Hagar  
*Seattle University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hagar, Ashley, "Seattle U Community Honors Actress Cicely Tyson After Passing" (2021). *The Spectator Online*. 199.

<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online/199>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Newspapers at ScholarWorks @ SeattleU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Spectator Online by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ SeattleU.



# Seattle U Community Honors Actress Cicely Tyson After Passing

Ashley Hagar, Staff Reporter

Cicely Tyson garnered herself an esteemed career as a model and actress in television, film and theatre. Also an activist, she took on multiple roles showcasing the powerful history of Black women.

Tyson, aged 96, died Jan. 28—just four days before the beginning of Black History Month.

Tyson had an outstanding career that began with her modeling work. After being discovered by a photographer for Ebony magazine in 1951, Tyson began acting in off Broadway shows that eventually led her to larger roles, earning her Emmy awards and a Tony award in the industry.

In 1974, Tyson took on the portrayal of a 110-year-old slave in “The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman.” She went on to win two Emmy Awards for her role as Miss Jane Pittman. Tyson also earned an honorary Academy Award, a Tony Award, a Presidential Medal of Freedom and over 15 other awards and achievements throughout her historic career.

After receiving an Oscar Nomination for best actress in “Sounder,” Tyson interviewed with the New York Times to elaborate on how impactful her role was.

“The story in ‘Sounder’ is a part of our history, a testimony to the strength of humankind. Our whole Black heritage is that of struggle, pride and dignity. The Black woman has never been shown on the screen this way before,” Tyson said.

Professor and Director of Film Studies, Kirsten Thompson, grew up in New Zealand watching Tyson’s work. Thompson shared that she learned a lot about African American history and culture by watching Tyson.

“In New Zealand, we have different television and access to films, but even there I saw the miniseries ‘Roots,’ where Tyson played Kunta Kinta’s mother. I also saw her role in the ‘Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman.’ Both of those were something I saw as a relatively young kid and gave me insight as a child to African American history,” Thompson said.

Tyson, along with other Black actors such as Diahann Carroll, embraced the civil rights movement as activists through their work. Each of these stars executed various roles as historical figures in their work.

“They’re part of a generation that was engaging with key figures in African American history at a time when you have the emergence of the civil rights era, Black power and a new cultural renaissance that celebrates Black lives. They are inhabiting and playing roles that pay homage to that history,” Thompson added.



Tyson appeared in 29 films, at least 68 television series, miniseries and single episodes and 15 on and off Broadway productions. Just before her passing in January, Tyson gave advice to the youth in an interview with The New York Times Magazine.

"I try always to be true to myself. I learned from my mom: 'Don't lie ever, no matter how bad it is. Don't lie to me ever, OK? You will be happier that you told the truth.' That has stayed with me, and it will stay with me for as long as I'm lucky enough to be here," Tyson said in the interview.

Tyson played many influential roles during her lifetime and will be remembered for her efforts in sharing African American history around the world. Morgan Young, a third-year strategic communications major at Seattle U, is a fan of Tyson's work and recognizes the importance of her roles.

"Cicely Tyson was an icon. From fashion model to movie star, she was very influential for Black people and especially Black women. As a brown skin African American woman, it was always special seeing her in leading roles in various movies. We were all shocked about her passing, but grateful that she is now at peace and has left such a memorable legacy of her work with us," Young said in a written statement.

Just two weeks into Black History Month, students and faculty have taken the chance to honor Tyson's passing.

"Her passing set the tone to remember our ancestors and the pain they endured, yet to take this month to continue to stand up for our culture and over all being our best selves and remember to have pride in our beautiful history," Young continued.

Although the Film Department is not creating any explicit programming to honor Tyson, Thompson shared that some professors may choose to integrate her and her work into their curriculum when appropriate. Thompson also added that her passing is a reminder to reflect on Black history and culture.

"Black History Month I think, in general, is an opportunity for reflection, and reflecting through figures like Tyson is a way of looking back at important moments in Black history. She has a real range of contributions across different fields. Tyson, Boseman and Carroll are great examples of people who were working in roles that dialogued with the civil rights movement and made a change for the better in terms of the history of representation," Thompson said.