



Black pageant winners make history, inspire Arkansas women to compete

Abby Zimmardi
Staff Reporter
@abbyzimmardi

When one sophomore saw that Miss Universe 2019 was South African, she was empowered by the success of a black woman as an African herself.

Nyasha Bgoni felt connected to Miss Universe, Zozibini Tunzi of South Africa, because Bgoni was born in Zimbabwe, Africa, and moved to the United States when she was 7, she said.

"You don't see a lot of African women in mainstream media," Bgoni said. "So then to see that 'Oh, this is an African woman. This is not just a black woman, this is an African woman,' and that was honestly really really important."

For the first time in pageant history, black women held the top four major pageant competition titles in 2019: Miss Teen USA, Miss America, Miss USA and Miss Universe.

The Miss Black and Gold Scholarship Pageant was the first pageant that Bgoni has competed in, and she won the title of 2019-20 Miss Black and Gold on Dec. 7, 2019. The Miss Black and Gold Scholarship Pageant is a scholarship competition that the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated has presented every year since 1976.

"For young black women, one of the things that we do depend on is the success of other women before us," Bgoni said. "So that kind of reinstates that idea of 'Yes, I can also achieve that as well.'" Former pageant contestant

and current judge, Patty Booker, said as a black woman, she needed to work harder to prove herself to the judges when she competed in pageants.

"That pressure is on you because you feel there are certain things the judges may not accept," Booker said. "There's a certain standard that they're looking for for appearance."

Booker said when the four black women were crowned in their respective titles, it was life-changing for her.

"To the African-American community, it meant a lot to us, to see women like myself be crowned," Booker said. "This is a representation of what America looks like."

Apple Dennie, the 2019 Miss Sweetheart of Arkansas said it empowered her to see four black winners because they showed her she can do it too, she said.

Dennie was surprised when she won a local title and was ranked as one of the top 10 contestants for Miss Arkansas. But after seeing that the title holders for the national competitions were black women like her, Dennie believed that anything was within reach, she said.

Dr. Tamera Glover, an assistant professor at Arkansas State University, has competed in and judged pageant competitions, she said. The last title she held was Mrs. Arkansas United States 2018.

"(Judges) go off of the way she carries herself, and just being able to connect with the overall vision for that particular system," Glover said. "So it's not about her nationality or her color. It is more so on her willingness to serve."

Miss Heritage 2019 Darian Tisdale thinks this milestone of black women winning major pageants is helping to overcome a stigma that black women cannot win pageants, she said.

"Having somebody to look up to that's the same skin color or has the same hair, whatever it may be, it's encouraging to see that," Tisdale said.

When Dennie was first participating, she was worried about racism but did not encounter any problems, she said.

"I was the only black girl there, and there's not always gonna be other black girls in the Miss Arkansas prelims," Dennie said. "No one has ever intentionally singled me out at all, but you feel like the odd one out when you're the only one in there."

As of September 2019, the Miss America competition is operating under a new system that

determines the winner based off of intellect, talent and not appearance, according to Miss America 2.0.

"Seeing all of these women that look like me being successful in an organization that it's not the norm, it impacted me to push harder," Dennie said.



Courtesy of Apple Dennie

Apple Dennie, the 2019 Miss Sweetheart of Arkansas, was empowered after seeing that the title holders for the national pageant competitions were black women, like her.



THE ARKANSAS

TRAVELER

The Arkansas Traveler is a public forum, the University of Arkansas' independent student newspaper and all content decisions are those of the editors.

Contact

203 Kimpel Hall
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Main 479 575 3406
Fax 479 575 3306
traveler@uark.edu

facebook.com/uatrav
twitter.com/uatrav

Editorial Staff

Chase Reavis
Editor-in-Chief
dreavis@uark.edu

Kate Duby
News Editor
kmduby@uark.edu

Samantha Van Dyke
Managing Editor
snvandyk@uark.edu

Drew Watzke
Sports Editor
ajwatzke@uark.edu

Miranda Stith
News Editor
mvstith@uark.edu

Andrew Elkins
Associate Editor
atelkins@uark.edu

Elias Weiss
Opinion Editor
ecweiss@uark.edu

Elizabeth Green
Photo Editor
elg005@uark.edu

Nathanael Davis
Associate Editor
ncdavis@uark.edu

Design Staff

Julia Nall
Design Editor

Parker Lane
Staff Designer

Advertising

To advertise with The Arkansas Traveler,
email mhdird@uark.edu

Professional Staff, Advisers

Robyn Ledbetter**
Student Media Director
479.575.6420
rledbet@uark.edu

Cheri Freeland**
Business Manager
479.575.3408
freeland@uark.edu

Bret Schulte**
Faculty Adviser
479.575.6659
bjschulte@uark.edu

** All content decisions are those of the student editor and his or her staff. Professional staff and advisers serve to administer certain business operations and offer advice, guidance or technical assistance as requested by the student staff.

Letters

Letters should concentrate on issues, not personalities and must be fewer than 300 words, typed and signed by the author(s). Letters will be edited for accuracy, space and style. Students must list their majors and classification. To submit letters, e-mail travop@uark.edu.

Columnists' and cartoonists' opinions

Columnists' and cartoonists' opinions are their own and not necessarily the views or opinions of the editorial board.

Memberships

The Arkansas Traveler is a member either institutionally or through individual memberships of the Society of Professional Journalists, the Associated Collegiate Press, The Columbia Scholastic Press Association and the Arkansas College Media Association.

Corrections

The Arkansas Traveler strives for accuracy and clarity in its reporting and will correct all matters of fact. If you believe the paper has printed an error, please notify the editor at 479.575.8455 or e-mail the editor at traveler@uark.edu. All corrections will be printed in the space below each week.

Women's involvement in local, national politics grows

Abbi Ross
Staff Reporter
@AbbiRoss10

On the heels of a record-breaking year for women in Arkansas and U.S. politics, Mariam Siddiqui spent her summer and the fall semester of her senior year in Washington D.C., getting the chance to see female politicians in action.

"Being in D.C. and a woman in politics, I was actually kind of surprised because a lot of the people I was working around were women," Siddiqui said. "And for my committees specifically, I worked with a lot of women of color, which was really nice because I have, like, a skewed idea of who works in politics and who doesn't."

Siddiqui, a senior majoring in political science, spent her summer interning for U.S. Representative Rashida Tlaib in Washington, D.C., where she worked on policies and legislative issues.

Siddiqui spent the fall 2019 semester in Washington, D.C., working with the House Judiciary Committee. A lot of her work in the fall was focused on the impeachment process and an act that would remove marijuana out of Schedule I drugs, which would have an effect on Arkansas and its recent medical licensing.

For Siddiqui, it was refreshing to see women, especially women of color,



Cayden Hartman Staff Photographer
Professor Janine Parry welcomes students back to class during her gender and politics class on Jan. 14.

and like-minded people working in these spaces.

"Predominantly the people on (Capitol) Hill are typically white men, but the amount of women and women of color involved at the staff level and also now at the member level, it was encouraging and inspiring to see that there are strides being made to change the atmosphere," Siddiqui said.

Of 135 legislators in the Arkansas Senate and the House of Representatives, 33 are women, with seven in the Senate and 26 in the Arkansas House, according to the Center for American Women in Politics. This broke the 2009 record of 32 women.

Siddiqui ran for UA student body president in 2019 and has since worked on voter registration and getting a polling place on campus, she said.

Siddiqui, who is back in Fayetteville, will soon start working on NWA campaigns and hopes to get involved on campus again, she said.

Janine Parry, a political science professor, is looking forward to seeing if the number of female candidates hits record levels for the U.S. House and Senate elections as well as the few governors elections that will be held in 2020, or if they will stay flat from the 2018 election year numbers, she said.

"It had been flat for so

long," Parry said. "That's why it was a news item. Any increase was considered a really big deal."

The percentage of women in the Nevada state legislature hit a record of 50.8% in 2018 -- something Parry will be following in 2020, she said.

"There are some patterns in terms of what kinds of bills female legislators are more likely to introduce, as compared with male legislators," Parry said. "But we don't know if that's going to grow or change or what difference that will make once they are half the body."

See "Arkansas women" on page 10