

OLIVER SCHOLARS

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A WORD FROM OUR CEO
DR. DANIELLE R. MOSS



"What are you going to do in the spaces that you occupy to advance democracy and equality?"



Washington, D.C. holds a special place in my heart because of the woman in this photo. You see, that's my paternal grandmother. Born and raised in D.C. at the height of Jim Crow segregation, she got her first job as a domestic at 8 years old, worked three jobs for over two decades and lived on 3-4 hours of sleep each night to purchase her own home in the North West section of the city she loved. She was a community activist. At the height of the War on Drugs in her neighborhood, she was recognized in her local newspaper for gathering the kids in the area and taking them caroling during the holiday season, and then hand-delivering baked goods to the municipal workers who could not take off on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

She hated this photo though, because she did not want to take this photo and because it is a symbol of all that she could not be or have because of how caste and racism work in America. But she asked me to keep this photo close, because she said that all my dues had been paid; that I should always demand respect in the spaces that I occupy and that whenever I felt discouraged, she wanted me to look at this picture and know on whose shoulders I stand.

When the Insurrection of January 6th erupted in our nation's capital, many of my colleagues rushed to issue statements denouncing the behavior we all witnessed as we sat glued to our televisions. I needed a moment. I needed to process what I saw, and I needed to understand what this moment meant for me personally as a Black woman nonprofit executive in 2021 fighting to do good in an industry where only 16% of CEOs are people of color. But my thoughts quickly turned to my Oliver Scholars family. Questions about what this moment means for us swirled in my head as media pundits and others struggled to put the pieces together.

I don't work in politics in any formal way - though like most Americans these days, I have political opinions. But, as CEO of Oliver Scholars, (Continued on page 2)

I recognize that my work in advancing Black and Latinx leadership is in fact very patriotic work. The foundation of what we do as we identify, nurture, and support underserved gifted students is a not-so-subtle nod to the American Dream.

We tell our young people, many of whom are falling between the cracks in their current educational spaces despite enormous academic and social potential, that we've got a prescription to help catapult them beyond their current circumstances and into lives where their life outcomes will be less influenced by their zip codes and more the result of their own efforts coupled with their ability to navigate an American caste system that is designed to make failure inevitable for so many who look like them. We are selling hope and possibility and opportunity.

We are promoting this view of the future alongside our partner schools – public schools that are willing to nominate young people and position them for opportunities that the system can't offer and independent schools that we hope share our values about what society can become when we work to remove the institutional and structural barriers that have constricted and limited the opportunities of Black and Brown people in this country for generations.

So, this is why the Insurrection at the Capitol on January 6th has everything to do with our work at Oliver Scholars. Because an assault on democracy and the promise of our country, is an assault on everything we believe and everything we do and everything we stand for at Oliver Scholars. Like many of you, I'm already focused on what comes next as we usher in a new administration and begin to focus on healing our country's divide – a divide that has been over 400 years in the making. Whatever comes, I understand that it won't be ideal – nothing ever is. While the folks with good policy, advocacy, and constitutional knowledge double down in Washington, Oliver Scholars will continue a) engaging our scholars in educational and social-emotional programs to help them process what has happened; b) working to advance Belonging, Equity and Inclusion within our own organization and across the college success sector; and c) calling on philanthropy to invest more money and resources in leveling the playing field for all leaders of color who are working to advance equity in their own communities.

My only question for you is: What are YOU going to do in the spaces that you occupy to advance democracy and equality? If we've learned nothing else in this moment, we now understand that democracy is fragile and relies on the will of the people to hold it sacred. What is a bold and decisive step you can take at home, with your alma mater, in your classrooms, in your corporations, in your community in support of democracy and justice? Let us commit to making fewer statements that reflect our collective moral outrage and lean into actionable and effective strategies that lead to demonstrable and visible change. I want the people of color in your spaces and organizations to say unequivocally that they are having a different and more positive experience because of your courage; an experience that is life affirming, and an experience that opens the doors not just to their survival but to their thriving. Less talk. More action.

Everybody can't do everything; but everybody can do something.

Dr. Danielle R. Moss