

OLIVER SCHOLARS

OLIVER NEWS - 2021 - SPECIAL EDITION



A WORD FROM OUR CEO *DR. DANIELLE R. MOSS*

The relief that many of us experienced at the issuance of a guilty verdict in the case of disgraced and former police officer Derek Chauvin, who murdered George Floyd for all the world to see, was short-lived. While we rejoiced and celebrated this historic exercise of justice, another police officer in Columbus, Ohio was shooting a teenaged Black girl, Ma'Kiah Bryant, to death after she called police for assistance. Her death, and the countless others that continue to occur on a seemingly daily basis, has left me feeling like the Chauvin victory won't have the kind of transformational impact so many of us are hoping for. We know we have only scratched the surface of a pervasive, systemic failure in policing that dates back to the slave patrols that were created as a response to enslaved Africans in America seeking freedom. We know that some officers have a demonstrated commitment to non-violent de-escalation in certain communities and not others. To ask questions before they draw their guns. And, finally, we know that there are countless committed police officers whose compassionate work in their communities is sullied by policy failures that make holding the police accountable for bad behavior extremely difficult.

What does this mean for Oliver Scholars? As an educational and youth development organization, we are in the business of selling hope to communities that have been largely underserved, undervalued, and overlooked by no fault of their own. And, despite everything, our scholars' communities still manage to nurture a spirit of excellence and possibility in them long before they come to us. There is value in the communities they come from and we make a point of acknowledging the strength and resilience of their families and other supporters as we work to help them fulfill their potential. Oliver Scholars has a commitment to creating spaces for our scholars, as future Black and Latinx leaders, to process and grapple with the confusion, hurt and sense of unprotected vulnerability they are experiencing because they already know that education and perceived social status offer no protection against the implicit biases that inform the violence against people who look like them. We have an opportunity to use education as a transformational tool so that they are positioned and equipped to create real change. We have a responsibility to teach them how to stay safe and to take care of themselves in this moment of national trauma.

Like many in our community, I am overwhelmed. I am angry. But, I am activated. Because, in the words of Civil Rights icon, Ms. Ella Baker, "We who believe in freedom cannot rest. We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes."