

# Dear Higher Education

LETTERS FROM THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MOUNTAIN

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## Weary in Well-Doing: My Journey of Finding Hope

BRITTANY DAVIS

*Dear Higher Education,*

My name is Brittany Davis, and I've dedicated my life to uplifting students and my community during the most challenging times. In creating safe (brave) spaces, I am reminded why this work is essential and timely.

On November 5th, I made a conscious decision to prioritize my mental health and avoid all coverage of the election. I proceeded into the living room with a cup of tea, trying not to think about the possibilities. I intentionally avoided social media platforms and decided to spend one last night in peace, as chaos was on the horizon.

I had proudly cast my vote early with the hopes that we could move forward, even though the appeal of power and patriarchy looped in the background. I had engaged with the commentary around Vice President Harris and her nomination for President. I was overwhelmed by comments that spoke not of her qualifications but of her inability to lead as a woman and, more importantly, a Black, Indian-identifying woman. As a Black-identifying woman myself, I started to think about my credentials and about America's rhetorical vacuum, which featured meritocracy as a euphemism for white and male.

So I inhaled the quiet for a few more hours. I tried suppressing my fears of what the next four years could yield. While speaking with a close friend, I decided the time had come to face the inevitable. I saw the election results and immediately went into denial. Thinking that what was happening could not be true, I went to sleep, hopeful that the morning would provide comfort.

In the morning, I couldn't avoid it any longer. I checked my Top Stories, and there he was, with the title of President-Elect. I felt betrayed by those in this country who had once again declared war on my humanity, assuming they had realized my humanity at all. How could this happen? Who was to blame?

As a student support aide, I had to get myself together and be present for my students. It was First-Generation Student Week on campus, and our students deserved to be celebrated. While I was speaking with students about their post-graduation plans, one student became emotional. When we asked what was wrong, she mentioned that she could not think about graduation when, as a DACA student, the possibility of being deported was her worst fear.

I could feel the tears swelling in my eyes and the lumps in my throat beginning to form. I had no words to comfort this student, since I had no words to comfort myself. A splitting headache consumed my body, and I recalled a similar feeling during Trump's first presidential term.

The prelude to this administration was captured in the policies and practices of institutions across the country. Their declarations against wokeness, DEI, the LGBTQIA+ community, and immigrants were from familiar playbooks. Through my scholarship, I critique how diversity rhetoric performatively engages with racial politics without intentionally addressing structural violence and institutional racism. The notion that DEI has benefitted those in marginalized communities is how racism and the pervasiveness of whiteness go unseen.

I spent the next few hours trying to process everything, to understand how we got here and what would come next. Did we choose to go back under the presumption that we were moving forward? I prided myself on being level-headed and knowing the right words to say at any moment, but now the words escaped me as if my body was paralyzed from the neck up.

Later that day, a colleague shared a link for a healing circle that would occur that evening. My first thoughts were to retreat and deal with everything alone, but I needed to speak with others.

When I arrived home, I jumped on the Zoom call with 200 individuals from different backgrounds. The call started with a reflexive exercise before we were placed into breakout rooms. I could hear the frustration in everyone's tone and in the emotional undertones. For those in education, the threat of the Department of Education being dismantled was their first thought.

As I listened to everyone, I started to feel that the only way forward was to go together. Some individuals, done with waiting for others to change their circumstances, had decided to run for office in their local elections, boldly declaring that it was their time. I was in awe of these individuals who stood firm in their beliefs and who had this unwavering faith that, despite everything, we would be okay.

When it was my time to speak, my immediate thought was to simultaneously scream and cry. But I wanted to acknowledge those who desired to be on the frontlines and face this situation head-on. Then I said that "I was weary in well-doing," and looking for a glimpse of hope. The group understood my dilemma and could relate to my sentiments. We assured one another that this would not be how the story ends.

When we returned to the main room there was a call to action. We each repeated several statements, and I could feel my body's equilibrium beginning to level and my head slowly rising. I had forgotten that the most potent form of resistance was in the collective, and realized that that's where my strength would be found.

A sense of relief came over my spirit, and I began strategizing about how our campus community could address the current state of our democracy.

We held an open forum where faculty, staff, and students could discuss the sociopolitical climate. Students expressed their disappointment and fears regarding the incoming administration. While professional staff members were uncertain as how to support students and provide them with answers, in those moments we all found comfort in knowing that we were not alone, and did not have to tackle the world's problems in a silo.

I continue challenging my students to show up for themselves first and to find their chosen community, and I have started to take my own advice.

This is not the time to retreat but to stand firm in our beliefs. In understanding my own journey, I often reflect on my ancestors and their strength. Their perseverance has given me the ability to rise above these challenges to truly do the work that I was called to do in higher education.

I acknowledge that the road ahead will require us to face our fears, build coalitions, and remind ourselves that this work is not in vain.

We must find comfort in community, understand the challenges before us, and not grow weary in well-doing.

*To get to the other side, we will have to go together.*  
-Brittany Davis

## About the author

**Brittany Davis** is a graduate of Florida International University with a Master of Science in International Intercultural Education and a graduate certificate in African and African Diaspora Studies (AADS). She has a Bachelor of Arts in Africana Studies and a minor in Psychology from Mercer University in Macon, GA. She focuses on gender empowerment, accessibility, and representation in higher education to support students' transition and achievement. Ms. Davis has presented at the CIES conference, where her research project focused on gender equity in an international, intercultural context. She has also co-presented at CUAA, FLACADA, NACADA, the Girlhood Studies Collective, the Faculty Women of Color Conference, and Hip Hop Across the Americas to share her scholarship on student support studies, Black girlhood studies, Black women in the academy, and Black femininity in hip-hop culture. She facilitates the First-Year Experience, a course for incoming first-year students, and AFA 2004: Black Popular Culture and Global Dimensions in AADS. Ms. Davis is a doctoral candidate in the Ph.D. in Higher Education program at Florida International University, with a research focus on institutional non-performativity and responses to racialized incidences on and off campus.