

HOWARD UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

For African American and international students in the department of Communications, Culture and Media Studies (CCMS) in the Cathy Hughes School of Communications, the Ph.D. journey signifies an opportunity to contribute their research to help implement strategies that will impact and improve healthcare, help inform and influence policy, and ultimately shed light on and fight for justice and equality; a vision intrinsically tied to Howard's mission to discovery of solutions to human problems in the United States and throughout the world.

Ollie L. Jefferson's Ph.D., graduation was heightened with excitement the day after her defense when she found out that Ava DuVernay had tweeted, asked for a copy of her work and has since followed up with her.



"The day after my defense, I learned that my external examiner commended my work on Twitter," said Ollie L. Jefferson. "I am rarely on social media, especially during my doctoral studies, but I decided to check and found a message from my undergraduate colleague and former President of Tuskegee University, Brian Johnson Ph.D. He informed me that an extraordinary public figure was interested in my research. The next message was from Ava DuVernay requesting to read my dissertation. It is an honor to share my research with the show creator-writer-director-producer of the *Queen Sugar* television series!"

Jefferson is the first person in her family to attend a four-year college and ultimately earn a doctoral degree. Jefferson's doctoral journey traces back to her grandmother, Pastor Eddie B.

Lanehart, a visionary from the backwoods of Louisiana who recognized her determination to pursue higher education. "I believe the steps of a good woman are ordered by the Lord," said Ollie L. Jefferson Ph.D. "I followed my grandmother's footsteps. Although my grandmother did not complete elementary school, she was affectionally known as Big Mama for her immense love and belief in others potential. She planted seeds of faith that will never die because her prayers have driven me to leave a legacy for my daughters and their children's children for generations to come."

Jefferson's dissertation titled "The Oprah Winfrey Network's *Queen Sugar* Television Series: African American Women Exemplary Representations On-Screen and Behind the Scenes" provides a case study of how representations of women's characters and story narratives change when women are in charge as the media owner, creator, writer, producer, director, and executive. The analysis demonstrates counter-narratives and counter stereotypes vis-a-vis those of traditional mainstream TV programming. The multilayered female characters are informative, instructional, and entertaining in the way they defy stereotypes in their depictions as the activist, seasoned, reformed, and business woman.

"I would like to thank my dissertation committee: Tia Tyree Ph.D. (advisor), Richard Wright Ph.D. (chair), Dean Gracie Lawson-Borders Ph.D. (committee member); Valethia Watkins in Afro-



American Studies and Women Studies (committee member); and Sherri Williams Ph.D., the external examiner from American University," said Jefferson. "My dissertation advisor and committee members constructive criticism throughout my research enabled me to publish research that can galvanize the media industry decision-makers to recognize women and people of color not simply as performers and consumers, but also multitalented producers."

Jefferson's Ph.D., journey incorporates her over fifteen years career in film and television production and five years of teaching at the college and university level. Her dedication to academia also led her to complete two certifications in Women's Studies and Future Faculty Preparation. Jefferson is committed to a career in teaching, researching, and producing multimedia programming with an emphasis on diversity and inclusion for people of color. She aspires to work

with Oprah Winfrey and Ava DuVernay and serve on the Oprah Winfrey Network's Queen Sugar production.