

Oberlin Cable Co-op Essay

Carmello J Williams

I didn't grow up in Oberlin. I'm from the west side of Cleveland, and where I'm from, it doesn't take much for young Black boys to be misunderstood. I struggled in school when I was younger. I have ADHD, and being left-handed made writing more frustrating than people realized. My handwriting was messy. Some teachers saw a kid who couldn't sit still and figured that was the full story.

My mom and my grandmother never accepted that. They asked questions. They pushed for testing. They made sure I got help instead of being labeled. I remember them sitting in meetings, calm but firm, making it clear that I deserved more than assumptions. Watching that taught me something important: sometimes showing up for someone is the biggest form of love.

In 2023, my family and I moved to Oberlin. I had been here before with my grandmother, but living here felt different. Slower in a good way. More peaceful. People look at you when they talk to you. They remember you and that stood out to me.

Starting at Oberlin High School felt like a reset. The teachers didn't rush to judge me. They expected effort, but it felt like they believed I could give it. That changes how you move. I met students from all kinds of backgrounds, and instead of feeling like I had to defend who I was, I felt welcomed.

One thing I really love about Oberlin is how connected everything feels. You see the same faces at football games, paying your internet bill, at the store, at the bank, and at community events. When our football team broke a 31-game losing streak with a 13–12 win, it felt bigger than sports. I had the game-sealing interception that night. I can still hear the crowd

and my mom's loud voice screaming and cheering. It wasn't just noise. It felt like the town was proud again.

Sports are a big part of my life here. I play varsity football and basketball. I've earned honors like First Team All-Conference, First Team All-County, and multiple Player of the Game awards. Those are things I'm proud of, but what sticks with me more is when younger kids come up after games. They tell me they were watching. That reminds me that how I carry myself matters.

Outside of athletics, I try to stay involved. I volunteer through House of God Church, where I've helped sell BBQ dinners for years to support church and neighborhood programs. I've also been playing drums there since 2015. Sitting behind a drum set and keeping the beat clears my mind in a way not much else does. During the holidays, I volunteer with the Salvation Army. I've also spent time at the Oberlin Community Center working with youth programs, and stocking the food in the pantry. Those experiences showed me that community doesn't just happen on its own. People choose to build it.

I'm apart of Black Student Union and the Student Council. I made Quarter 2 Honor Roll this year and was recognized as a Ninde Scholar. Those things matter to me because they show progress. Oberlin gave me room to grow without writing me off.

What I appreciate most is that people here show up. For games. For fundraisers. For school events. When people show up for you, it makes you want to show up for them, too. I plan to double major in Exercise Science and Education because I want to coach and teach. I want to stay connected to communities like this one. Places where someone's potential is noticed early, instead of overlooked.

Oberlin feels like a place where you can breathe and keep building at the same time.
That balance means more to me than I expected when I first got here.

Thank you!