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Past, Present, and Future as a Social Studies Educator Activist

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ABSTRACT

Social studies classrooms can serve as sites of educator activism. This reflective article traces one educator's formation as an educator-activist and links biography to classroom practice and program design. An early love of history—nurtured by wide reading and influential secondary teachers of U.S. history and English—anchored a commitment to social studies. University experiences, including witnessing September 11, 2001 in New York City, further oriented the author toward civic engagement and positioned social studies teaching as a venue for activism. The article outlines practices intended to cultivate students' critical thinking and political efficacy. It concludes with lessons from EdD coursework and an action research study on teacher financial capability conducted while preparing to implement a required personal finance course for graduation. Together, these reflections show how personal experience, professional learning, and inquiry can shape activist praxis and inform teacher education.

KEYWORDS

social studies education, educator activism, practitioner reflection, critical thinking, action research

I pursued a Doctorate in Education (EdD) for increased opportunities to serve in leadership positions supporting teacher professional development (PD). This goal stems from my passion for lifelong learning, which has led me to attend history, government, and economic-related workshops and seminars throughout my career. At a week-long seminar in 2021, I met a graduate of the University of South Carolina EdD program who credited the degree for such opportunities to serve as a teacher leader. After exploring the website, I followed up with him to inquire more about his experience. He described the nature of the program and how the courses support students' action research. The idea of completing a dissertation in practice by identifying a problem of practice and developing and implementing a solution was attractive to me because I could maintain my fulfilling career while engaging in purposeful growth. This article reflects on my journey as a social studies teacher and how the iterative reflection that is such a strong component of the EdD journey has helped me recognize the significance of teachers and experiences that influenced my path, what I have gained through my EdD coursework, and, briefly, how I foresee my role as an educator activist in the future.

LESSONS LEARNED ON THE PATH TO BECOMING A SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATOR

I was drawn to social studies because of an early passion for history. This inclination emerged when I was a young student reading historical fiction. The first books I truly loved were *Caddie Woodlawn* (Brink, 1935) and the Little House series that began with *Little House in the Big Woods* (Wilder, 1932). These stories of young girls growing up as tomboys and pioneers in the late 19th century brought the past to life for me. Later, I read the *American Girls* series of books set in places like colonial Virginia, the Gilded Age, and America amid World War II. I loved the section at the end of these books that explained the historical context—illustrating the past through letters, posters, maps, material items, or photographs, and thereby opening my eyes at an early age to the types of primary and secondary sources historians use. Recognizing the significance of primary resources, including material culture, and the power of places throughout history, has had an extraordinary impact on my life. I have sought any opportunity to visit museums or historical sites to further my understanding of the past, including through participation in summer PD. For example, I have walked across Selma's Edmund Pettus bridge where Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, and others marched for voting rights in 1963, and have heard opinions announced in the Supreme Court of the United States twice.

Critical reflection as part of my EdD experience has illuminated how pedagogical and curriculum choices that my teachers made while I was in elementary and secondary school in Ohio strengthened my enthusiasm for research and inquiry and furthered my desire to become a social studies educator. For example, I recall having my first research opportunity in fifth grade. I had just transitioned into a new class, and I remember spending recesses inside with my teacher, who helped me to catch up. I investigated the Great Depression and synthesized what I learned through the creation of a collage, my first academic poster.

The next teacher who left a major imprint was an American history teacher I had in eighth grade, Mr. Mack, who demonstrated the power of storytelling as a pedagogical tool. As Sanchez and Mills (2005) wrote, "storytelling makes the content of American history more meaningful and interesting; and it offers students profound insights into the nature and challenges of life in the past" (p. 274). Mr. Mack brought the stories of history to life by telling them in a performative manner, often using props.

A final teacher who impacted the course of my life's work was my 11th-grade Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) teacher, Mr. Pana. The first lesson I gleaned in his class was that challenging students and setting high expectations was OK. Because of the vast timespan the APUSH course covers, students were expected to prepare over the summer by reading and outlining the first six chapters of the text. This task helped me realize that I was accountable for my own learning, a life lesson I try to instill in my own students. The second lesson I took from Mr. Pana was about the interpretative nature of history. While Mr. Mack told us stories that brought history to life, Mr. Pana demonstrated what Adichie (2009) later described so eloquently as "the danger of a single story" by assigning *A People's History of the United States* (Zinn, 1995) alongside our traditional textbook, *The American Pageant* (Bailey & Kennedy, 1991). Although I did not realize it at the time, Mr. Pana was modeling educator activism, as a teacher driving us to consider ideas of social justice. To Wergin (2011), "one of the most important roles of an expert educator is to disrupt, to challenge [and] to disorient" (p. 126). Mr. Pana disrupted the traditional U.S. history narrative of continual progress by exposing us to the history of the marginalized or oppressed and letting us come to our own conclusions. This practice is akin to what Freire (2005) referred to as *problem-posing education*, where

> People develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (p. 83)

Besides reading Zinn, Mr. Pana also showed our class *Eyes on the Prize* (Hampton, 1987–1990), a documentary series that profiled the civil rights movement from 1954 to 1965. In particular, the story of 14-year-old Emmitt Till's 1955 murder in Mississippi for challenging Jim Crow norms left an indelible mark. Learning that Till's murderers were not held accountable helped me to understand that our justice system is not always just. Upon reflection, Mr. Pana's pedagogy taught what Newman (2006) called defiance, as APUSH helped us to "become truly conscious" and to consider morality "in the face of the evident amorality of our universe" (p. 10).

In addition to having model elementary and social studies educators, I also had English teachers in high school who emphasized books about the African American experience that further complemented what I was learning about the nation's past. I recall reading Ralph Ellison, Maya Angelou, and Toni Morrison. Teaching in Florida for the past 20 years, I appreciate the privilege of engaging with multiple perspectives at a young age. When I taught African American history, I frequently experienced the sentiment that much of what I had learned in school about African Americans and other marginalized communities had not been taught to them. I grew up in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, prior to teaching in a Southern state, which may explain the difference, or perhaps older generations of social studies teachers never learned certain history and therefore did not teach it.

While reading first stoked my desire to learn, learning more has also forced me to question the stories I once loved. For example, at a recent National Council for Social Studies Conference, one of the keynote speakers referenced the *Little House* series and how her family even took a vacation to visit the sites in the books, which illuminated how the work ethic and pioneer spirit celebrated in the series cost of many Native Americans' homes and lives (Chugh, 2023). Both Brink (1935) and Wilder (1932) have been scrutinized for their portrayal of indigenous peoples. As I continue to develop my critical stance as an educator, I continue to revisit and reflect upon what I have learned—or mislearned—in the past.

CONSIDERING SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHING AS A SITE OF EDUCATOR ACTIVISM

I finished my bachelor's degree in 2002 with a double major in social studies education and politics. Three core experiences in college reinforced the significance of social studies education as a component of creating a more equitable world. The first was reading Gourevitch's (1998) account of the Rwandan genocide in a writing seminar. While the book opened my eyes to the impact of colonialism in Africa, it also made me ashamed that I had not realized the genocide was happening. I know I cannot teach my students everything, yet that book impressed upon me the importance of connecting to current events in social studies.

Another core experience was a course on the historical roots of Africa's contemporary crises. This concept of looking to the past to understand the problems of the present is vital not just for Africa. In my EdD coursework, while reading about critical race theory (CRT), I loved *And We Are Not Saved* (Bell, 1989), which examined the roots of racial injustice in the United States by highlighting pivotal moments when an alternate decision might have been made.

The third core experience was that I was living in New York City on September 11, 2001. Observing the aftermath made me recognize that teaching the event would require looking back at the history that led to such an act of terrorism. For a politics course, I had read Huntington's (1998) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, which argues that a Western position of global hegemony could alienate disempowered and unemployed youth to the point of joining violent causes. Altogether, these core university experiences made me recognize that as a social studies educator, I should encourage students to connect the past and present, develop skills to think critically and consider multiple perspectives, and keep abreast of current events.

Upon moving from Ohio to Florida in 2003, I struggled to obtain a full-time social studies position. I spent my initial year teaching middle school drop-out prevention courses in biology, English, and geography, followed by 3 years at a charter high school teaching reading and math. The first-year experience might have gotten my feet wet as an educator-activist, as I could not stand that 11–12-year-olds were publicly labeled as potential dropouts. Sensing the blow to their self-esteem, I was concerned, like Senge et al. (2012), that labels "may quickly become self-fulfilling prophecies" (p. 48). This labeling, based on test scores, predicted a student's inability to pass state testing and was a new concept to me. I challenged the use of this labeling in middle school team meetings.

Following my first 4 years teaching out of my content area, I transitioned into work as a full-time graduate student studying history until an opportunity to teach social studies at a high school became available. Through reflection, I can see that I have always viewed teaching social studies as an opportunity to try to teach for social justice, what Pitts (2020) described as "teaching as a vehicle for care or teaching in ways that will lead to change" (para. 20). In the following sections, I explore the various subjects I have had the pleasure to teach and how this teaching can raise students' awareness of contemporary problems and their power to create change.

Government

I have taught all levels of American government in Florida: regular, honors, and AP. To provide students with knowledge and tools to increase their political efficacy, or the belief that their actions can impact policymakers, I teach about our political institutions, how they work, and how policymakers are connected to the people via elections, interest groups, the media, and political parties. In addition, I seek to show students that many politicians at the local, state, and federal levels are just ordinary people with occasionally nontraditional paths to political power. This practice was especially easy during the years when a former large-animal veterinarian represented our congressional district. I always try to tie in current events and local issues in my curriculum. For example, my students maintain a monthly current event log where they summarize articles and reflect on the topics. Reading current events can be a form of teaching for activism, as students can apply critical lenses and consider whose stories are being told and why (Pitts, 2020).

When covering local government, I use education as an example of federalism and to discuss equity. Federalism relates to the division of power between the national government and the states, and states have reserved powers over public education. This concept is easy for students to understand as I ask them if they have lived in other states and then ask them to describe what differences in curriculum they can note. The best example I have received was from a student who had lived in Hawaii, where they learned to play the ukulele! When discussing equity in education, it is partly a debate over whether education is a right. My students can see how equitable education for all is difficult when classrooms are filled with unique students taught by a unique teacher. We analyze data from across our county schools to evaluate issues schools face regarding performance, school grades, teacher quality, and the impact of state support for school vouchers to attend private schools. Always, I am weaving in examples and allowing students to share their own. One I share is that while traveling to a conference with a fellow district teacher, I learned he was sending his only son to a private school because his zoned elementary was facing a dearth of teachers.

I want students in my government classes to see that the decisions made by our school board, city and county government, state government, Congress, and the Supreme Court all have a bearing on their lives and freedoms. I strive to teach them to follow current events so they can know what is happening and take action to change the outcomes if they do not like where decisions are headed. There is nothing more rewarding to me than when I hear from students who are applying to intern with the state legislature, working with a member of Congress in DC, holding political signs at the local library, running for school board, or even just letting me know they voted for the first time. These students demonstrate that my classes may have been effective in helping them become agents of change.

United States History

The initial assignment in my APUSH course is for students to read the first chapters of two texts with very different interpretations of Christopher Columbus: *A Patriot's History* (Schweikart & Allen, 2007) and *A People's History* (Zinn, 1995). The assignment, which reflects my own APUSH experience, starts the course with an opportunity to teach the concept of historiography, or the writing of history, and to show them that all history is an interpretation. In a great article on teaching historiography to high school students, Hoefferle (2007) asserted:

> One reason for teaching historiography is that it is fundamental to understanding history and the historical profession. We do our students a disservice if we represent history as a noncontroversial presentation of 'the facts.' We all know that historians disagree and there are multiple versions of the past 'as it really was.' Our students need to know this too if they are to understand our profession. Historiography not only enlightens students as to the inside story of the historical profession, but it also makes history more alive and interesting to them. It helps them to understand that everything is not already known and agreed upon, that there is a place for them in the profession, that in the future they can contribute to the ongoing historical debates about the past. This takes them away from being simply passive receivers of the truth, to active pursuers of the truth. As educational researchers have emphasized in recent years, active learners are better learners and enjoy their education much more than passive learners. (p. 41)

According to Hoefferle, many historians believe students are incapable of understanding historiography until the graduate level. Indeed, I first encountered the term as a graduate student in history, but I realize, looking back, that my high school teacher was exposing us to the concept in APUSH, where we read *The American Pageant* (Bailey & Kennedy, 1991), a more conservative text, alongside Zinn (1995). Bailey (1997) described Zinn as the "rare exception" covering "the American panorama from the perspective of the underside" (p. 134). I admire that my high school history teacher was exposing us to history from below, which has made me a better teacher, learner, and pursuer of truth. Reading Zinn against a typical U.S. history textbook taught me to always consider multiple points of view and historians' agendas—and to wish the same for my students.

The lessons on historical interpretation and its power continue through my history curriculum. I am pleased that the College Board caught up with the idea when they redesigned the course in 2014. The new exam includes a short answer question that tasks students with reading two different historians' interpretations of an era or event and describing evidence that supports each interpretation. However, this change was controversial in the context of the education culture wars, alongside debates over the Common Core and CRT. In one of the most remarkable criticisms of the framework, neurosurgeon and then-presidential candidate Ben Carson stated, "most people when they finish that course, they'd be ready to sign up for ISIS" (Strauss, 2014, para. 1). Educators must be aware of and able to defend their curriculum against such criticisms.

The final area where I have tried to be an activist while teaching history is teaching African American history. I have worked to continue to learn about the experiences of African Americans to be a better teacher. After learning about the civil rights movement in APUSH, I took a civil rights course through dual enrollment. In college, I had the opportunity to visit Senegal and Goree Island. At Goree, the site of a former slave factory, there is one of Africa's several doors of no return, where one can imagine enslaved peoples would have experienced their last glimpse of Africa. In graduate school, I studied African History with a minor in Early American history and read a range of excellent scholarship on the role of Africans and African Americans in the colonial period, including how slavery commodified the enslaved (Smallwood, 2007) and the ways laws were shaped to marginalize those of African descent and to codify slavery (Brown, 1996). When our district decided to offer African American history, I quickly volunteered, even though I believe

the course to be superfluous if we take an inclusive approach to U.S. history.

When the College Board announced AP African American Studies, I went through the application process and secured administrative support to pilot the course. Our school had been approved to pilot the course, but within weeks of that announcement, Florida announced its ban on the course (Mazzei & Hartocollis, 2023). This decision was part and parcel of Florida's ongoing attacks against The 1619 Project; diversity, equity, and inclusion programs; and CRT, which is not even taught in our high schools (Morey, 2021).

These attacks on our curriculum and teaching practices were accompanied by a parental rights bill and book bans. Such statutory changes and the related media coverage instilled fear in many teachers. For example, one history teacher in my school considered removing a slide about Buffalo soldiers, late 19th-century African American regiments in the United States Army, from a presentation, afraid it might be classified as CRT. I have tried to explain the statutory language to combat this chilling effect. As the National Education Association (2023) advised:

> Despite the rhetoric around them, these proposed or enacted laws do not prohibit teaching the full sweep of U.S. history, including teaching about nearly 250 years of slavery, the Civil War, the Reconstruction period, or the violent white supremacy that brought Reconstruction to an end and has persisted in one or another form ever since. Nor should these laws and policies undermine efforts to ensure that all students benefit from curriculum that teaches the truth about our country and prepares students to meet the demands of a changing and increasingly globalized world. (para. 2)

Teaching U.S. history from multiple perspectives and encouraging others to maintain fidelity in their history classrooms has helped me to identify as an educator activist.

There are opportunities for educators who want to learn more about our nation's history to deepen their understanding and their students' understanding. For example, I spent 3 weeks in 2018 with other educators in a National Endowment for the Humanities seminar entitled Stony the Road, which focused on Alabama's civil rights history. In 2023, I participated in another seminar on slavery in the North, and yet another in 2024, on the Gullah Geechee people and their contributions and struggles in U.S. history. Encouraging the same kind of enrichment for students, I have taken them to hear Ibram X. Kendi speak on anti-racism at our local university and to hear author Scott Ellsworth discuss the history of integrating college basketball. I also had students participate in an Equal Justice Initiative student essay contest and learn about the unfortunate history of lynching in our county. Teaching history accurately and in a manner that allows students to think critically about our nation's past is a form of activism. I refer to *critically* with the secondary meaning of to think "in a way that involves the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgment" (Oxford Languages, 2024).

Economics

When I teach AP Microeconomics, most of the material is about modeling economic concepts. Textbooks are frequently geared toward college students and offer examples such as comparing two roommates' opportunity cost of doing the dishes or typing papers. Economics shows that each should specialize in what they do best to increase their consumption and have more time for leisure. Incorporating social justice topics naturally emerges with the discussion of the Lorenz curve, which demonstrates a country's degree of economic inequality, and through the discussion of types of taxes, which clarifies that certain regressive taxes, such as sales taxes or Social Security taxes above a certain income, disproportionately impact those who have lower income. These topics open the door to discussions of public policy alternatives that would decrease wealth disparities in the United States.

In regular and honors economics courses, standards often reference macroeconomic and microeconomic concepts and financial literacy. These courses contain greater breadth than the AP curriculum and offer an opportunity to explore how a national economy and banking and business practices can either help or hinder opportunities in life and income inequality. In the past, for example, I have had students choose a project where they could write a reflection on a book like *The Working Poor* (Shipler, 2005) or *Nickel and Dimed* (Ehrenreich, 2001) or volunteer at the local homeless shelter to see what they can learn about socioeconomic issues in our community. In teaching financial literacy, I have employed the Next Gen Personal Finance (2024) Racial Discrimination in Finance Unit to convey the history behind the modern racial wealth gap. These types of lessons allow students to think prudently about how a society's economic decisions, as well as their own personal decisions, may impact others.

WORKING THROUGH THE EDD COURSEWORK

As an EdD student, my reflexivity muscles have been stretched and strengthened as I work and reflect on my curriculum, pedagogy, and potential as a leader in education. In this section, I review how my EdD courses have inspired new insights in these three areas. I then reflect on my emerging action research project and the hopes I have for personal finance education as a tool for equity.

In my first course, on diversity within the curriculum, I gained new insights and confirmed my existing beliefs by reading about the politicization of education and how frequently it reflects the societal conflicts of each era. The extension of human rights "has been neither constant nor linear," and periods of extension "have often been followed by periods of retrenchment and conservatism" (Banks, 2020, p. 7). I have taught this principle in APUSH, but I also see it reflected in local educational policy. From 2016–2019, my district seemed to be very concerned with our racial achievement gap—the worst in the state—and the disparity in discipline with more citations for minoritized students, sparking an equity plan to address those two issues and hire and retain more teachers of color ([Redacted] County Public Schools, 2018). Since 2020, we have been in a period of retrenchment and backlash where our state now is mandating moves away from culturally responsive training in workplaces and believes there is no place for that practice in the classroom. Reading Banks (2020) also reaffirmed the benefit I experienced from having a multicultural education in high school. Educators opened my eyes as a teenager and put me on a path to being a teacher who attempts to do the same.

In subsequent advanced study into diversity and the curriculum, I learned more about the origins of CRT. Ladson-Billings (1998) outlined the history of CRT's growth out of critical legal studies and how it made its way into the "nice field of education" (p. 7). Despite a range of beliefs or methods, critical race scholars adhere to two common interests (Crenshaw et al., 1995), namely to understand how a system of white supremacy and subordination of people of

color has been created and maintained throughout U.S. history and "to change the bond that exists between law and racial power" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12).

I also considered how scholars such as Bell (1989) and Hannah-Jones (2019) used the power of storytelling to address aspects of race in U.S. history. Bell, for example, demonstrated how critical choices, such as at the Constitutional Convention, established precedents for lasting racial inequalities. Florida statute currently outlaws teaching these scholars, likely because CRT suggests systemic racism persists, rather than merely being part of our history. As an educator, historian, and daily news reader, I struggle to find a red line where American racism ends.[1]

My coursework on curriculum theory helped me consider to what extent critical pedagogy has informed my curriculum. Rereading Freire (2005) led me to question whether I am an oppressor or oppressed. The United States calls itself the land of freedom, yet Freire's ideas illuminate how some Americans, past and present, have been oppressors and others have been oppressed, as Florida social studies courses illustrate. During the Cold War years, Florida mandated an Americanism versus Communism course to promote capitalism and denounce communism (Riley & Kysilka, 2003). Today's standards still encourage banking-style pedagogy to transmit values of patriotism and capitalism (Najarro, 2022), and Florida teachers are still expected to teach the "evils and dangers of communism" (Governor's Press Office, 2024). While I believe income inequality has become too extreme and overconsumption leads to poor health, materialism, and environmental harm, I also know that titans of industry, such as Rockefeller, increased income inequality at the same time they made access to things like light for the home accessible to the working class. I am not radicalized enough to believe we need to destroy our country's economic and political systems, but I do believe there is a need to educate all U.S. students to be intelligent voters who are wary of these systems and their repercussions. This recognition strengthens my belief that encouraging research, critical thinking, and dialogue in social studies constitutes critical pedagogy.

Building on this foundation, a course on curriculum leadership invited me to assess various leadership styles and how they applied to contemporary leaders of my choice, as well as to probe my own potential for leadership. This exercise helped me identify my strengths and weaknesses relative to formal leadership roles, but it also highlighted my role in the classroom as its own form of leadership. I am a leader to my students, and as assistant department chair, I also support my colleagues. For example, I found myself challenged within my course on organizational change in education to create an implementation plan to integrate a new technology our state has adopted, and I was able to use that process to test my leadership skills as well as to attempt action research on a small scale. These courses strengthened my desire to continue to teach where I feel my leadership is a force for change, as I have recognized the impact my own teachers have had on me. Becoming an action research practitioner allows me to expand my potential to lead without abandoning teaching for administration.

This thread led directly to my dissertation in practice. While I initially wrestled with several problems of practice, I imagined I could have the greatest impact in my community for both fellow educators and our students through inquiry into teacher preparation for the new personal finance course that will be mandatory for all Florida students beginning with the Class of 2027. My action research aims to investigate teacher financial capability and well-being with the thesis that teachers with financial well-being will be better personal finance instructors.

This topic addresses an equity issue concerning Florida and other states. Bryant (2024) identified financial literacy as "the civil rights issue for our generation" because of the disproportionate impact financial illiteracy currently has on communities of color (p. 54). States like Florida are taking steps to remedy this inequality by mandating personal finance education. However, at least in Florida, state standards reflect objective financial knowledge goals (Dorothy L. Hukill Financial Literacy Act, 2022). Literature suggests objective financial knowledge alone does not directly lead to financial capability (Gudmunson & Danes, 2011; Xiao et al., 2014). Financial self-efficacy, or the belief that you are capable of meeting personal finance goals, is necessary to achieve financial capability and well-being, and experiential learning is key to achieve financial self-efficacy (e.g., Blaschke, 2022; LeBaron et al., 2019).

To ensure that my district implements the course in a way that will enhance all students' financial well-being, I believe action research intervention is warranted. While a required personal financial education course can be a tool for reducing inequity, if it fails to address students' financial trauma (McKenzie, 2022) or provide effective models, it may increase inequalities (Al-Bahrani et al., 2019), reinforcing the racial wealth gap (Hamilton & Darity, 2017). For example, people may attribute wealth disparities to personal shortcomings, reasoning that all students completed the same personal finance course. Therefore, my goal is for all social studies educators in my district who are assigned to teach the course to be financially capable themselves and also aware of how to teach personal finance in a way that will increase students' financial self-efficacy.

To achieve this aim, I proposed a book study for teachers interested in enhancing their financial capability and will share resources and a presentation on the knowledge gained through my literature review and action research with the other high school social studies teachers in my district. Literature suggests offering diverse models of financial mentors within course material, using problem-based learning and other pedagogical methods that increase the confidence students need to make financial decisions, and having students create a set of resources they can access after graduation—as many students benefit from "just-in-time" education when they are making a financial decision like home-buying—can increase the course's effectiveness (Drever et al., 2015; Yao et al., 2023). This work is an opportunity to create a curriculum that can be a "vehicle for freedom" (Pitts, 2020, para. 2), namely financial independence.

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[1] A short-lived Broadway play called *Ain't No Mo'* addressed this issue head-on. In the opening sketch comedy vignette, the date is November 4, 2008, and a pastor is holding a funeral service for "Righttocomplain," indicating the election of Barack Obama resolved all issues of race and power in the United States. The rest of the play reveals all the ways that is not true.

CONCLUSION

Where my action-research cycle ends with my dissertation will be where the next work begins to use my research and training to support other educators. Reflecting on the significance of the teachers in my own life while working on my action research, and learning from and with my peers and professors in the EdD program, has ultimately reaffirmed my confidence as an educator-activist and my desire to continue to lead from the classroom. I hope to be a steward of the profession, as suggested in this text's introduction, who is willing to challenge the status quo when necessary and support evidence-based change that can increase opportunities for all students.

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