

Editor's Notebook

This issue of *Social Education* features a special section on civic power whose guest editor is Karen Barss of Facing History and Ourselves. The contributors to the special section and many other authors in this issue offer valuable practical suggestions for promoting civic awareness and engagement among young people.

Our guest editor provides more details about the special section in her introduction on the next page. Here, I would like to emphasize the importance of the role that the contributors see social studies teachers as playing in preparing students to take informed action in civic life. Eric Liu calls for “a Great Civic Awakening in the United States” and points out that NCSS members are “awash in civic and social capital and knowhow. You are why I am hopeful.” (254) Marti Tippens Murphy describes the civic initiatives of the Student Leadership Group Program of the Memphis region of Facing History and Ourselves. Laura Tavares draws on the experiences of teachers who organize difficult discussions in Northern Ireland and South Africa, two regions with a troubled past. She highlights these experiences to encourage U.S. teachers to discuss politics and current events at a time when, she points out, the partisan climate has become so intense that “many educators here report that they’re choosing not to discuss politics, teach current events, or engage with difficult issues for fear of how students, parents, or administrators will react.” (262)

Jessica Lander demonstrates the value of action civics projects in her vivid portrayal of the enthusiastic involvement of her classes, which include large numbers of immigrant students, in community issues such as hunger and gun legislation. The special section ends with a Facing History lesson based on an excerpt from the memoir of Congressman John Lewis on the importance of persistence and collective endeavors in the pursuit of social justice.

Outside the special section, Austin Lamb, who graduated from high school earlier this year, describes his experience as a teaching assistant in a media literacy unit taught by Chris Sperry of Project Look Sharp. The unit trains students to investigate current events, detect bias in the media, and study human rights issues. Lamb describes the process of introducing students to different perspectives on international news and the challenge of evaluating difficult and often violent world developments without becoming desensitized to them.

Catherine Hawke’s Lessons on the Law column reviews cases to be considered by the Supreme Court in its current term, noting that the Court “will continue to dominate political debates and serve as a litmus test for the state of our political discourse.” (278) Now that the Court will no longer have Judge Anthony Kennedy as its “swing vote,” a crucial question is what the post-Kennedy Court will look like.

Danna Bell and Lee Ann Potter point out that motion pictures

can inspire citizen action. In their Sources and Strategies column, they present a 10-minute film made in 1945, which is in the rich Library of Congress collection—*The House I Live In*, whose title comes from a Broadway song. In the film, Frank Sinatra stops a young man from being bullied because of his religion, and sings the song, which emphasizes that, in America, differences are to be celebrated. Bell and Potter suggest comparing the lyrics of the original song with those of the song in the film (which omits a stanza envisioning a multiracial neighborhood).

The first U.S. law that significantly restricted immigration by a specific nationality was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was in force for more than 60 years until its repeal in 1943. Andrea Reidell’s Teaching with Documents column features two letters written in 1921 that highlight the resulting difficulties faced by Chinese immigrants and native-born Chinese Americans. In the first letter, a Philadelphia-area public school principal asks the U.S. Commissioner of Immigration to investigate the status of a Chinese family trying to register two children at her school. In the second letter, the Commissioner replies that the father is a native-born U.S. citizen whose wife and two children have been lawfully admitted to the United States. Reidell suggests ways for classes to examine the impact of immigration policies in general and the Chinese Exclusion Act in particular.

Do voter ID laws suppress minority rights? This question is especially timely in an election year, and R. Zackary Seitz, Daniel G. Krutka, and Prentice T. Chandler review the conflicting arguments about the impact of these laws. They offer a lesson plan based on the C3 Framework, and point out that students “are accustomed to learning about electoral integrity and disenfranchisement in history, but investigating voter ID laws reminds them that these issues are enduring.” (298)

In our column on Teaching the C3 Framework, Carly Muetterties introduces the educators’ blog space on the C3 Teachers website, in which more than 50 contributors have shared their experiences of conducting C3-based inquiries. She presents three noteworthy blogs whose authors discuss the challenges they faced as they introduced inquiry-based learning in their classes and the successes they have achieved.

The results of the congressional elections in November will be far-reaching, and there are many close contests in the races that will determine which party holds the majority of seats in the Senate next year. In the final feature in this issue, *Social Education* staff describe 11 closely contested Senate races and recommend websites that classes can use to monitor these races as the elections draw near.

As always, the editors of *Social Education* welcome the comments of readers on any of the contributions to this issue at socialed@ncss.org.