

Twitter Thread by Dr. Jeremy Littau

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With Biden preparing to take office today, a short reflection about being in higher ed teaching media courses the past four years: 1/

One of the core memories I have of the 2016 campaign were the class discussions. Most of my students feared Trump winning, but didn't think it'd happen. He was a clown. Voters weren't that dumb. Etc. 2/

What that belief did is create space for privilege that came out in discussions (bear in mind a lot of my students are white). I had a *lot* of students disaffected and ambivalent about the choice. They didn't read political coverage. Both sides were the same. A lot of that. 3/

The morning after the election, I had a lot of distraught students. I had about 15 in a class of 30 email me that they weren't sure they could come to class that. I was distraught myself. I couldn't blame them.

So I want to tell you a story I haven't told anyone before. 4/

About an hour before class, my then-colleague Dr. Imaani El-Burki came into the office. She has since taken another position, but at the time she was our joint appointed professor in journalism and Africana Studies.

She's an amazing person and I wish you could know her. 5/

Dr. El-Burki taught classes on media and race, media and gender. A lot of those critical cultural studies classes that are vital for budding journalists.

More important, she is a friend. One of those people that make academia rich because of the relationships we build. 6/

Anyhow, she walked in. I took one look at this brilliant Black Muslim scholar who has brought so much to her students, and I just fell to pieces. I knew what the election meant for her.

But my memory of that is she had a weary smile. I couldn't believe she was smiling. 7/

I've come to recognize that smile, one of knowing exhaustion from a lived experience. There is so much dignity and grace in the struggle, and it has made me stronger and more geared up for the struggle.

Anyway, I mentioned the students not wanting to come to class. 8/

Her reaction was we couldn't have that. If any day needed to have class, this was it.

So she and I hatched a plan.

I opened up my classroom to all majors. A room that seated 35 and had 30 students, and we just said we'll take all comers. 9/

And what happened next was kind of important. They showed up in droves. We were so packed that students were sitting on the floor in a horseshoe shape around the presentation area up front. I didn't count, but we packed about 70 in that room by my estimation. Hi, fire chief. 10/

The next hour was important and cathartic. There were tears. I told my colleague publicly that I loved her and valued her, that I was afraid for all my students of color, that I was sorry I hadn't done more, that I trusted my blind faith in people to do the right thing. 11/

So, why tell this story today? It's not because of what happened that day. It's because of what happened next. 12/

Over the past four years since that day in class, I've watched those disaffected students get off the sidelines. Some of those students who were ambivalent about their choice saw their privilege in the aftermath, but more importantly they did something about it. 13/

I cannot tell you how proud I've been the past year to see those very students doing field organizing, canvassing, campaigning, volunteering, advocacy work, etc. A lot of the faces in that room on 11/9 spent years doing the work to rebuild our country. 14/

As an educator, you plant seeds and then hope they grow. Sometimes they don't! But sometimes they do, and you realize they were absorbing it the whole time. I will never forget that class on 11/9. We planted a hell of a lot of seeds even as we grieved. 15/

And that's the lesson of the past four years, and the one I am taking forward with me. We will have a new president today, one who starts fixing a lot of the policy wrongs of the Trump years.

But we can't recede into privilege and assume it'll be fine. Because it won't. 16/

Today I'm happy for a new beginning, and it's ok to feel happy or relieved. But my message to students now is to stay engaged, because this is just a new phase. Keep using the news, keep using your voice. We can't make a difference if we don't do the work. 17/17

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