

RAISING DAVID WALKER

By Peter Snoad

Synopsis

Serena Fox, a black student doing her master's in forensic science at a Boston college, takes an elective course on the history of racism and is introduced to David Walker, the 19th century black abolitionist. Captivated by Walker and his "Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World", she begins to hear Walker's voice in her head and discovers that she can effortlessly recite whole passages of his famous manifesto.

One morning she enters her living room to find a man dressed in period clothes sitting on the couch. He says he's David Walker. Serena thinks it's a prank: the guy must be a friend and fellow-actor of her white live-in boyfriend, Josh McCaffrey. But after a brief conversation with the man, she's not so sure. Is this David Walker's ghost or is she going crazy?

Serena seeks the counsel of Tom Kellett, the professor teaching the course on racism. Their discussion suggests one reason why Walker might have "returned": the unfinished business of his own death. Officially, he died of consumption, but there has always been a strong belief in the black community that Walker was murdered by agents of Southern planters panicked by his incendiary writings. A visiting friend, Chiku Holmes, convinces Serena that David Walker has a plan for her. Together with Josh, they visit Walker's gravesite at a South Boston cemetery. Appalled to find only an unmarked grassy plot, Serena vows to launch a campaign for a David Walker memorial. But then she decides it's not enough: to learn the truth about his death, she must get his remains exhumed.

This is further evidence to Josh that his girlfriend is mentally ill, but he still can't persuade her to seek professional help. Kellett, also concerned about Serena's mental state, nonetheless supports her quest for a Walker memorial. But he warns that the campaign will founder if exhumation is part of the package—there's simply no evidence to justify it, and people are loath to disturb the dead.

Intense opposition does emerge: Families with loved ones buried in the same cemetery as David Walker go to court to stop the exhumation. Hostile news media fan the flames of controversy. And Serena becomes a target of hate calls. To cap it all, Josh decides he can't take it any more and moves out of their apartment. Serena is not deterred—but the news that her mother has fallen victim to predatory lending causes her to waver and question her priorities.

After a climactic emotional exchange with Walker, Serena realizes that she, too, is truly "called" to be a leader in the broader contemporary fight for racial justice. A chastened Josh returns, affirming his love for her and seeking reconciliation. But Serena isn't ready to take him back until he has explored his own identity and privilege.

CHARACTERS: (*Requires 2F and 3M with doubling*)

SERENA FOX, early 20's, forensics student, African American

JOSH McCAFFREY, early 20's, drama student, white

*TOM KELLETT, 50's, college lecturer, white

CHIKU HOLMES, 20's, friend of Serena, African American

DAVID WALKER, abolitionist, African American

*THOMAS JEFFERSON

*TV HOST

STUDENTS (2)

**Played by the same actor*

Note: In the first scene of the play, the actors who appear later as Josh McCaffrey and Chiku Holmes play the roles of the two Students.

SET: Single set; most of the action of the play takes place in the living room/kitchen of Serena and Josh's apartment. Minimal representation is required for scenes in a college classroom, a cemetery, and an office.