

My name is Dr. Talya Zemach-Bersin, and I graduated from CB West in 2003. I now teach in the Education Studies program at Yale University, which is also where I received my PhD. My research is on the history of education, and, incidentally, the history of the culture wars in education. There's a wonderful book by a religious studies professor called WHY LIBERALS WIN THE CULTURE WARS (EVEN WHEN THEY LOSE ELECTIONS). The thesis of this book is simple: conservatives might succeed in using culture wars wedge issues to rally their base and win elections, but they **always** lose the culture wars. Why? The answer is stunning: BECAUSE THEY'VE ALREADY LOST.

That's right. By the time conservative culture warriors, like many of you here today, pick up an issue, it's already a lost cause. You are fighting for a world that is gone. You are fighting for a world that is already lost. You are fighting, in fact, because you know that what you were accustomed to (in this case, a society that commits to the project of failing to provide an inclusive environment for LGBTQ people) is already yesterday's news. And that's the message I want to share with everyone here today: You cannot turn back the clock.

Don't take me wrong, there's a great deal you can do: You can methodically weaken the academic and mental health outcomes for your students. You can conspire to increase suicide rates of an already very vulnerable population. You can even conspire, as you apparently wish to, to dismantle the faith Americans hold in public education and turn school board meetings into an embarrassing circus.

But you just cannot turn back the clock. You've already lost.

Today, young people of all gender and sexual identities grow up knowing that they can legally marry. Today, young people can flip on any streaming device of their choice and find affirming, joy-centered television featuring gay characters. Today, young people can hop on Instagram or TikTok and find whatever proudly queer content they'd like. Sure, ban books from the library, but have you ever met the internet? LGBTQ role models ABOUND. Heck, the most popular self-help podcast for American moms is hosted by a lesbian couple!

Once, in high school, I remember a teacher saying that gay people were "rampant" in ancient Rome. He didn't mean that in a positive sense. But I do: wonderful successful gay people are "rampant" today -- in government, in music, in sports, in Hollywood, in law, in business, in education, in literally every sector you can imagine. Rainbow flags might not be in your classrooms after tonight, but they are just about EVERYWHERE ELSE.

And no business or institution of higher education wants to recruit people who melt into pretty little snowflake puddles when they see a rainbow flag. They want people who can cooperate and succeed in affirming diverse environments.

To those here prepared to support Policy 321, even if you win tonight, you've already lost the war. The world moved on from your bigoted fear of gay kids many years ago. This, tonight, is the last gasp of a sad lost cause.

To the young people here today: No doubt, it'll be sad to go to a school where the administration has conspired to make you feel unwanted. But you ARE wanted. And a rainbow flag isn't the only way to know whether a teacher is kind and inclusive or bigoted and hateful. It's pretty easy to sniff that kind of thing out. We're all pros at that.

Stick together. Celebrate one another. Let this battle strengthen you. Build affirming communities for yourself with good friends and wise mentors. And rest in knowing that you've already won.

A better world awaits. And so does another school board election.

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