



GRAB 'EM BY THE SAFETY PIN

BY WINGEL XUE

Ah yes, it's been over a month after the election and we're all still hearing near radio silence from our teachers, aside from the safety pin worn here and there.

Unfortunately, safety pins can't suddenly become sentient and take over classrooms to teach us how to deal with the effects of the election. Good intentions aside, safety pins are a terrible example for teachers to set for students in the gory aftermath of Trump's victory.

Other than being an incredibly meaningless symbol, it only serves to make white males feel better about not actively doing anything to protect minorities. Sure, flaunting a piece of metal stuck in a shirt is fine - do whatever you want - as long as it's not an excuse to throw aside actively seeking out change, as it frequently seems to be. No one will criticize you for wearing one, but don't just stand around telling everyone how "safe" you are. Go join a solidarity protest. Sign whitehouse.gov petitions. Donate to minority advocacy groups like the NAACP or the NCAI. Or better yet, ask your teachers to talk about the election.

The whole point of civics classes and getting an education is that we actually learn how we should compose ourselves as citizens, so it seems kind of important for us to at least talk about how we should react to our President-elect yelling "grab 'em by the p**y." A criticism of Trump's rhetoric in classrooms is *not* a political statement, it's teaching kids not to say things that are problematic and offensive.

Having an open dialogue between teachers and students is the only way to effectively communicate and effectuate change. For teachers to skirt away from those discussions because of hurt feelings or fear of controversy is neglecting an important responsibility: to educate.

Beyond a flaky two-minute announcement

over the intercom and one of the most poorly scheduled, inaccessible forums ever hosted, I'm not sure West has actually done anything to encourage these kinds of discussions. In fact, it'd *almost* make you think that the authorities here at West aren't particularly concerned with a genuine conversation about the election. Yes, dearest administration, while it's great that you can send out emails that poke at your staff to talk about the election and bask in the glory of praise from The New York Times for being so open to deliberation on a sensitive topic, those emails are an empty promise to students because teachers still aren't hosting these talks in classrooms. Sure, West High got a shiny trophy for not doing nothing, but we all know it's actually just a participation trophy because West also pretty clearly doesn't do nearly enough.

Let's not kid ourselves. Sending out a few emails and running one forum is not the same as encouraging training sessions for teachers on how to discuss controversial events. Yes, teachers feel uneasy speaking about such a thorny topic, but not for a lack of will to do so. It's the administration's responsibility to make sure that teachers feel comfortable having the discussions they want to have in classrooms, regardless of whether or not it might be controversial. (But then again, safety first - can't have those lawsuits, am I right, Dr. Shultz? As a disclaimer, this is pure speculation on the intent of the administration, but it speculation is what the student body is left with when there's no transparency concerning school policies on how teachers are supposed to interact with students post-election.) To be clear, this column isn't supposed to be a "Serial"-style investigation à la "I'm Sarah Koenig and this is 'Everything the West Administration Did Wrong Volume 439,'" it's a call for positive change in the administration. As for you kids, if

y'all want to talk about the election, bring it up in classes. Ask your teachers to include Trump-era policies and actions into in-class conversations in a way that's relevant - you have every right to do so.

A climate change denialist is about to take over the EPA. Ben Carson, who openly criticized desegregation planning for housing, is now running the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Steve Bannon, the face of the alt-right (Trump tested, KKK approved!), is Trump's chief strategist. These are exactly the kinds of problems our generation will have to face; issues like climate change and race relations are relevant to our lives and we need the education and skill set to deal with them in the future. And since your new Secretary of Education is about to slash all your funding anyways, may as well take a chance - it's not like there's anything to lose.

If we're already going as far as to allow teachers to wear safety pins, which is a pretty explicit political symbol, we may as well actually have productive conversations in classrooms about real-world problems like racism. Now that it's weeks after the election and we irrational teenagers have had time to calm down, we're probably finally ready to talk about it without breaking down every time someone says "Trump." With winter break almost upon us, it's the perfect time for us to learn how to be less crappy to each other. Happy holidays!

