

Dr. Jonathan Zimmerman

In 2003, during a fifth-grade current-events lesson about the United States' newly begun war in Iraq, a student asked Bloomington, Indiana teacher Deborah Mayer if she had ever attended an anti-war protest. Mayer told the class that she had driven by such a protest a few days earlier and had honked her horn in support. Her school board declined to renew Mayer's contract, noting that she had deviated from the board's approved curriculum. And four years later, a federal appeals court upheld the board's decision on similar grounds.

Across the country, Mayer's defenders decried the apparent assault on her "academic freedom." But K-12 teachers in America have never enjoyed such freedom in a manner that university academicians would recognize. During wartime, especially, school boards and courts have discouraged or blocked teachers from engaging their students in an open, critical dialogue about the United States and its place in the world. Dr. Zimmerman's talk will explore these restrictions, the fate of the teachers who broached them, and the implications of this history for contemporary democracy.



You Can't Say That: "Controversial Issues" and Teacher Rights in America

Jonathan Zimmerman is Professor of Education and History and Director of the History of Education Program, New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. He is the author of numerous books, including *Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory* (Yale, 2009) and *Innocents Abroad: American Teachers in the American Century* (Harvard, 2006). Dr.

Zimmerman is also a frequent op-ed contributor to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New Republic*, and other popular newspapers and magazines.

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