Editors’ Introduction to Special Section

Teaching *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: Essays in Conversation

When we read Peter Smagorinsky’s provocative article, in which he exchanges racism with misogyny in a quest to cultivate empathy, we were riveted, to say the least. Reviewer comments echoed our sense of the power of the piece. One said she would renew her subscription if we published the article. Another commented, simply, “Please publish this . . . . There will be backlash. So be it.”

We consulted with the guest editors, who concurred. However, upon further consideration, our own editorial limitations became clear. The author of the article is White. Both guest editors are White, as are we. As moved as we were by Smagorinsky’s experiment, we recognized that our own perspectives, despite our best intentions, were insufficient. Fortunately, brilliant colleagues stepped forward in response to our invitations to participate in the conversation. Thus, this section includes an array of voices and perspectives, and it involves diction that may offend some readers. We trust that our readership will appreciate how words, especially those that stretch us into areas of discomfort and even pain, can lead to learning and, perhaps, healing.

Initial submissions by these four esteemed contributors varied in their presentation of sensitive terms. Sometimes the terms were spelled out; other times, they were filled with asterisks or dashes. In the copywriting phase of production, we consulted with numerous experts in language and publication. Ultimately, in the context of academic freedom and with a passionate wish to avoid censorship, we decided to allow each author to determine how to present sensitive terms to express ideas clearly, with intended connotations. Please note that the language employed by each author is presented in the spirit of noncensorship and with scholarly purpose.

We are honored to publish Peter Smagorinsky’s article and to feature exceptional respondent articles written by Leigh Patel, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Jocelyn Chadwick—all of whom offer thoughtful, compelling, and invaluable contributions to this ongoing dialogue. We trust you will be challenged, stimulated, disturbed, and enlightened by these articles.