

# FORUM

NEWSLETTER OF THE NON-TENURE-TRACK FACULTY SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

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CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION

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### From the Editor

Janice Albert

This issue of *Forum* heads off energetically in two directions at once: action and reflection. Under the first heading, I call your attention to Deborah Normand's report on our Special Interest Group meeting at CCCC in Chicago. Also, Jim McDonald details the ways colleagues made use of Campus Equity Week last year at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

Those who attended CCCC in Chicago will recall the splendid speech at the opening general session by Chair John Lovas on the need to strengthen our sense of professional community and our support for all of its branches, including those teaching in two-year colleges and those teaching part-time. Lovas suggests we commit ourselves to educating the public through letters to local papers and legislators. In this issue, he models an instance involving his own community newspaper, with encouragement to go and do likewise.

I welcome reports from your own campuses about your activities. Do you have a success to report vis a vis the integration of an adjunct representative in the Academic Senate? Has your union made a difference in wages or working conditions? Do you serve on a Board that now includes a part-timer? Let us share your success with others by writing to *Forum* at the address below.

In addition, *Forum* provides an opportunity to reflect on ourselves more broadly. We note that the Non-Tenure-Track Faculty SIG represents faculty who may teach for "forty cents on the dollar," to quote Lovas's letter. We work under inferior conditions, often without any of the respect or entitlement that tenured faculty

## About Forum

*Forum* is published twice a year by the Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Special Interest Group of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. As editor, I welcome you to submit news items, book reviews, editorials, and/or articles related to non-tenure-track faculty in college English or composition courses.

Submissions for the fall issue should be received no later than May 1; for the winter issue, the deadline is September 1. Note: Submissions will not be returned.

You may submit your work electronically, via e-mail or an e-mail attachment, or through U.S. mail. For e-mail submissions, address your work to JMAAlbert2002@earthlink.net. If you choose U.S. mail, please send one hard copy of your submission(s) to:

Janice Albert  
*Forum* editor  
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Suite 1704  
Oakland, CA 94610

For both e-mail and U.S. mail submissions, include the following information in a cover note:

- your name
- your title(s)
- your institution(s)
- home address and phone number; institutional address(es) and phone number(s)
- if applicable, venue(s) where submission was published or presented previously

For additional guidelines or information about *Forum*, contact Janice Albert at the address provided or at (510) 839-1140.

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receive. At the same time, our nation complains of a shortage of teachers. As I write this, I'm looking at a *New York Times* story (April 30, 2002) that speaks of "thousands of vacancies" in the New York City system—10,000 needed by September in this one district alone. Some of those must be jobs for English teachers. Districts from all over the country have sent representatives to job fairs to recruit teachers for K–12 job openings.

Why this disparity? What's behind the decision of so many to stand in the long line rather than the short one?

To open this discussion, I've asked Carol Jago, editor of *California English*, to write about the question as she sees it. Carol has taught middle and high school English for 28 years. I invite your responses to this article.

In addition, Fred Ekstam responds to the question of whether an adjunct must become an entertainer to win the evaluation game.

In our reviews this issue, Pat Morgan gives us her thoughts on Randall Kennedy's book *nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*. Pat offered to review this book in connection with our ongoing e-mail discussion of Kenneth Hardy's lawsuit in defense of his academic freedom.

Briefly, Hardy, an adjunct at Jefferson Community College in 1998, led a discussion of words that are used to marginalize and oppress members of minority groups. After a student complained, the college decided not to renew Hardy's contract. Hardy sued. In August 2001, the U.S. Court

of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit supported a lower court decision that Hardy's speech was protected because it "touched on a matter of public concern." Now Randall Kennedy has taken that public concern to another level. Our review is offered in the spirit of freedom of inquiry, a basic right of all Americans, tenured or not.

Finally, our review of *Ghosts in the Classroom* drew a rebuttal that I am happy to share with you.

You can reach me at [JMAlbert2002@earthlink.net](mailto:JMAlbert2002@earthlink.net). Write!

### **From the Chair**

Deborah Normand

Welcome to the Non-Tenure-Track (NTT) Faculty Special Interest Group (SIG) and the CCCC Committee on the Status of Non-Tenure-Track, Part-time, and Adjunct Faculty.

This year, the Steering Committee of the NTT SIG has merged with the CCCC Committee on the Working Conditions of Part-time and Adjunct Faculty to form the CCCC Committee on the Status of Non-Tenure-Track, Part-time, and Adjunct Faculty. This merger has resulted in one committee voice for you. The members of the committee are: *Deborah B. Normand*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA, Chair; *Janice Albert*, Chabot and Las Positas Colleges, CA, and editor of *Forum: Newsletter of the Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Special Interest Group*; *Michael Evces*, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA; *Kim Flachmann*, California State University, Bakersfield, CA; *Diane McElfresh Holland*, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY; *James McDonald*, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, LA; *Scott Oury*, Leverett, MA; *Yolanda Page*, Dillard University, New Orleans, LA; *Eileen Schell*, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY; *Anthony Scott*, Louisville, KY; *Karen Thompson*, Rutgers University, Piscataway, NJ; *Thomas Tipton*, Winfield, IL.

Our charges are:

1. To develop procedures and practices that equitably integrate part-time and adjunct and non-tenure-track faculty within our profession.
2. To demonstrate how poor working conditions, lack of benefits, and poor pay of part-time and full-time and adjunct and non-tenure-track faculty affect the quality of education undergraduates receive and to advocate for those conditions that improve learning.

3. To continue to support the work of CAW and other organizations on issues concerning part-time and full-time and adjunct and non-tenure-track faculty. This charge speaks to the interest of the CAW leadership in work on the relationship between working conditions and learning conditions in (2) above.
4. To maintain established platforms for the discussion of issues of concern to part-time and adjunct and non-tenure-track teachers of writing and literature (panels, SIG sessions, and discussion lists) and to continue publishing a national newsletter on issues of concern to part-time and adjunct and non-tenure-track teachers of writing and literature.
5. To evaluate the status of the current charges at the completion of this term and to recommend new charges that will reflect CCCC's continued commitment to this cause for the next term.

Plans for 2002-03 include but are not limited to:

- Establishing a listserv where the Committee and SIG members can post information and continue our discussion of issues that affect our working conditions and, thus, the quality of undergraduate education.
- Staffing an information/press booth at 2003 CCCC in New York to publicize our group and its efforts and the work of others who support our concerns. We will be seeking volunteers to help staff the booth.
- Asking the CCCC Executive Committee to continue its initiative to help part-time and adjunct and non-tenure-track faculty attend the annual convention. This year, the Executive Committee budgeted \$25,000 to help first-time part-time and adjunct and non-tenure-track faculty to attend the Chicago convention.
- Building bridges with MLA and, perhaps, staffing an information/press booth at the 2002 MLA convention.
- Working with other SIGs and groups within CCCC to help establish equity for all groups within our organization.
- Planning a session on Transforming Possibilities: Using the CAW Report and Other Tools to Convert Non-Tenure-Track and Part-time Positions to Tenure-Track and Full-time Positions.

*Deborah B. Normand is an instructor in the Department of English, Louisiana State University. She has 27 years of teaching (18 years full-time) in the same department and has received two university-wide teaching awards—one for excellence in teaching first-year students, the other for excellence in teaching undergraduate courses—but she is still considered un-tenurable.*

## Educating our Publics

John Lovas

In my Chair's address at the 2002 CCCC convention in Chicago on March 21, I made two arguments: First, that the profession needs to address the issues of knowledge-building in and about community colleges; and, second, that all of us who teach college writing need to better educate the general public about the fundamental inequities involved in mandated writing standards (composition courses) that are so heavily subsidized by part-time faculty and teaching assistants. While within the profession we've been in general agreement that part-time faculty are used much too widely, we have not been very effective in creating public opinion that supports our views. One way to change that situation is for each of us to look for opportunities in our local newspapers to point out how local part-time teachers subsidize general educational requirements.

To illustrate my point, I offer this letter published in the *San Jose Mercury News* on April 16, 2002. The *Mercury News* had reported a story in *The Wall Street Journal* that claimed Foothill College had hyped its record on transferring students to selective universities. I used that story as a hook to write this letter:

### *"The Truth about Transfers"*

*Apparently, the news that community colleges transfer students to elite institutions shocks the sensibilities of some reporters, so they make the story that Foothill is "hyping" its claims about transfers (Page 6B, April 3). Such reporting ignores two stories of substance.*

*Story one: Community colleges have successfully transferred students to top universities for decades. Foothill and De Anza colleges have strong records in this regard. Since I taught at Foothill for 12 years and have been at De Anza for 25 years and counting, I can testify to my own students transferring to Oberlin, Wesleyan, Georgetown, University of Virginia, Emerson, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and many others, as well as University of California and California State University campuses. Students and their parents figured out long ago that most community colleges offer superior teaching in the first two years and represent the best bargain available in higher education.*

*Story two: Foothill and other community colleges recruit international students because Californians fail to finance the colleges adequately. The Legislature has long refused to meet the full cost of instruction in community colleges. Anywhere*

*from 40 percent to 70 percent of the teaching in California community colleges is subsidized by part-time faculty who are paid about 40 cents on the dollar. The financing system in community colleges is archaic, based on seat time. International students pay full tuition, so they bring positive cash flow, something taxpayers have refused to do.*

*John C. Lovas  
Palo Alto*

I'd like to urge every reader of *Forum* to look for a hook in their local newspapers, and to write a short, clear, focused letter pointing out the particular situation at your college or university. We have a morally sound position. We have the writing skill. We simply need to take the time to write. If thousands of us make similar points across the country, we'll have a real impact on public opinion.

*John Lovas has taught writing and literature at the college level since 1960, the last 25 years at De Anza College, Cupertino, California. A former Chair of National TYCA, John currently serves as Chair, Conference on College Composition and Communication.*

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### **Campus Equity Week at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette**

James C. McDonald

Plans for Campus Equity Week at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette began April 2001 when the faculty senate, which had supported adjunct faculty issues in the past, formed a Campus Equity Week committee. The committee gave organizers an official title that lent credibility to publicity and recruiting efforts, while the senate's monthly meetings, published minutes, and listserv provided ready means to publicize committee activities. Outside the faculty senate, adjunct faculty working conditions had not been an issue. The administration had seldom spoken to these issues and had seldom been pressed to. No news stories on part-time faculty issues had appeared before Campus Equity Week.

In the fall semester, the committee began weekly meetings attended by four to ten people, mainly graduate students and adjuncts in English but also including one to three senators. Meetings were publicized through faculty senate outlets and by distributing flyers in adjunct mailboxes across campus. Early on, the committee made pay for adjunct faculty the central issue. Adjunct faculty in English, math-

ematics, and modern languages—the departments that employ the most adjuncts—earn \$1800 a class, while adjuncts teaching for the University College and other departments earn as little as \$400 per credit hour (\$1200 for a three-hour class), and there had been no increase in adjunct pay in many departments for twenty years. Amy Clary, an English graduate student, researched past university budgets to compose a fact sheet that accompanied press releases, appeared on our campus CEW Web site, and was distributed to students on a CEW information table. An adjunct pay increase was an issue all the organizers could agree on and conveyed a message that we could communicate quickly and forcefully. The pay issue also resonated with recent successful campaigns to increase salaries for K-12 teachers in Lafayette Parish and for permanent faculty in state colleges and universities, campaigns that maintained that faculty pay was important to the quality of education.

At first the organizers worked on relatively small tasks, such as information gathering, as they decided what to do for a November 1 noon teach-in. Some focused on classroom activities, composing an I-Search writing assignment for composition classes that had students interview part-time faculty on campus, developing questions for class discussions and writing assignments using readings from Michael Dubson's *Ghosts in the Classroom*, and conducting a teacher workshop about these activities. Organizers also obtained a video of the Barbara Wolfe documentary on adjunct faculty, *Degrees of Shame*, and arranged to air it in an existing film series on campus during Campus Equity Week. For the teach-in, two creative writers in the English Department wrote short plays—*Everyjunct* by Vickie Lloyd, a graduate student, and *Screw U.* by Joe Camhi, an adjunct. Martha Highers, another graduate student, recruited actors and organized rehearsals. Kristi Guillory, a graduate student in folklore who has recorded two CDs of Cajun music, agreed to play music at the teach-in to provide relief between speeches. As Campus Equity Week drew closer, we decided who would speak and what we wanted to say, limiting each speech to five minutes. The campus AAUP chapter helped publicize Campus Equity Week, including distributing flyers and gathering signatures on petitions at an information table on the busiest corner of campus.

As chair of the faculty senate committee and a tenured member of the faculty with more protection than the other organizers, I handled the publicity, mailing out press releases and following the mailings up with phone calls. I spoke before the Student Government Association and arranged an interview on the local public radio station, which publicized the teach-in throughout Campus Equity Week. The editor of the campus newspaper, *The Vermillion*, agreed to run not only a story

about Campus Equity Week, but also a book review of *Ghosts in the Classroom*. The reporter interviewed the university president as well as me and three adjunct faculty. Several adjuncts wrote letters to the editor to follow up the *Vermillion* story. The teach-in itself was sparsely attended, but it was a successful media event. The Lafayette daily newspaper, *The Daily Advertiser*, covered the teach-in with a story and photo on page three. The Lafayette CBS affiliate also covered the teach-in in its six o'clock new broadcast, and later a student news show on the local cable access station did a brief story. Two weeks after the teach-in, *The Daily Advertiser* ran an editorial arguing for increased adjunct faculty pay and more permanent faculty, focusing on the need for the legislature to address this problem.

The news stories required the university president to make his first public statements on adjunct faculty issues, and while he stated sympathy for the committee's positions at the time, in the weeks after Campus Equity Week, the administration expressed a desire to make internal policy changes that would reduce reliance on adjunct faculty. In another development, the regional accrediting association, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (or SACS), is requiring the university to develop a policy regarding adjunct faculty. Whether there will be a pay increase this year is unknown.

*James C. McDonald is assistant department head of English and AAUP chapter president at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.*

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### **Where Tenure Is Easy**

Carol Jago

The plight of non-tenured traveling college teachers is puzzling. After the arduous journey to earn a Ph.D., many continue to struggle and scrimp for years, piecing together temporary positions at various college campuses. Why not have a room of your own at the local public high school? It is true that your charges will be a few years younger than those you would like to be teaching, but in many cases the curriculum can be just as intellectually challenging. In my tenth-grade class we read *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, *Grendel*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Frankenstein*, *Julius Caesar*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Black Boy*, and *Woman Warrior*. It isn't as though your brain will rot just because you are working with 16-year-olds.

One of the things I like best about my job is that teaching in a high school allows you to get to know young people deeply. Meeting students every day for a

full school year, you develop powerful relationships. From September to June you can watch students grow as thinkers, readers, and writers and see how you have played a part in that growth. Sometimes you can save lives. Of course, if writing original literary scholarship is your goal, such a daily regimen would be an impossible distraction. If teaching is your goal, however, daily contact is a pleasure.

High school students possess a rare candor. They will challenge the texts you offer at every step. “Why do we have to read this?” “It’s boring.” “I hate Shakespeare.” Do you really think that college students feel otherwise? I contend that many of them do but simply know better than to voice such feelings aloud to their college professors. High school kids operate under no such constraints. Yet, once teenagers discover that you are genuinely interested in what they have to say about a particular poem or play, they tend to stop fighting and come along for the academic ride. Sometimes when the discussion warms up—yesterday, for example, when we were debating who would make a better president: Brutus, Cassius, Antony, or Julius Caesar—I feel like an air traffic controller in a storm. Teenage energy is contagious.

It is true that, unless you have the presentational skills of a Jay Leno, high school students won’t sit back and listen to you lecture. This doesn’t mean that they don’t like a good literary story, though, or that they won’t sit open-mouthed when you tell them about Sylvia Plath’s life with Ted Hughes or about how Edgar Allan Poe’s first choice of bird for “The Raven” was a parrot. I see myself as a bit of a trickster, always looking for ways to hook students on wanting to know more about a text or author, provoking them to ask me for the information I so want them to hear.

Another objection to teaching high school is the class load. Many public school teachers face five classes of 35 students a day. No one can do the kind of teaching we want to do—and know we are capable of achieving—under those conditions. At the same time, not all teaching positions are equal. Some schools offer combined interdisciplinary courses, reduced teaching loads for mentoring, or various creative ways of making an English teacher’s work doable. I was able to break up my class load by being an advisor, first to the school newspaper and later for the school yearbook. Do you like theatre? Cheerleading? Leadership? There are many, many ways to put your interests and talents to work while decreasing the number of *Hamlet* essays you take home over the weekend.

I know there is little prestige in calling yourself a high school English teacher. You probably feel that taking a position at Zenith High isn’t a very good return for your investment in graduate school. What will your parents think? How will you ever pay off those student loans? Before discarding high school teaching as a career option, though, consider the benefits. Though teaching salaries vary widely from

state to state and district to district, I make \$72,000 a year before teaching summer school. Barring possible future gross malpractice, my job is secure. I have managed to support and provide health insurance for a husband and son, and though I drive a 12-year-old car, life is good.

Best of all, in many areas—particularly urban centers—high school teaching jobs are plentiful. Maybe it's time to get off the road and into a room of your own.

*Carol Jago has taught middle and high school English for 28 years. She is the author of *Sandra Cisneros in the Classroom* (NCTE) and *Cohesive Writing: Why Concept Is Not Enough* (Heinemann).*

### **The Adjunct as Stand-up Comedian?**

Frederick Ekstam

Jill Carroll's article "Getting Good Teaching Evaluations without Stand-up Comedy" (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 15, 2001) compares an adjunct's teaching with playing a role. In many ways, she is entirely correct. Until the last year and a half, most of my experience has been at the community college level as an adjunct in writing courses. An adjunct faculty career *can* exist largely at the mercy of the popularity contest called Student Evaluations; if an instructor's course seems too "hard," students will complain, word will spread, and enrollments in that instructor's course(s) will decline. However, by always insisting on respect, not just for the teacher but also for the other students and the college, an adjunct can run a professional classroom and still make students happy (and there's nothing wrong with using humor in a classroom, especially a writing classroom). And there are ways to tell when students are "looking deeper and working harder." These are, unfortunately, non-quantifiable, but real nonetheless. Teachers must measure concrete results over the course of a term: are the students (or a substantial portion of them, anyway) showing improvement in desired areas? These can be very small victories indeed (which we have to settle for most of the time anyway), from seeing a decline in the use of sentence fragments, subject/verb disagreements, and other usage errors, to subtler ones, such as students' increased awareness of their academic surroundings or a cognizance or the construction of a persuasive argument.

The key here is caring: an adjunct *must* love teaching. Students will sense this and generally give it their best shot; instructors who love their subject and also love conveying it to not-so-eager young minds will be receptive to its importance in the curriculum and in their careers. It is a great feeling when students tell us something like, "I always hated English class until I took yours." (One of the greatest compli-

ments I ever received came from a student in the military; he told me near the end of the term, “My supervisor told me the other day that my writing doesn’t suck as bad as it used to!”)

And yes, we *are* role-players. Sure, we’re scholars, but we’re also husbands and wives, significant others, parents, friends, hobbyists, etc. Teaching is what pays the bills, but it does not and should not define us as people. For my “role,” I am one of the dwindling few who still wear a coat and tie when teaching. I find that “dressing” helps me not only get into my role as a teacher but to separate it from everything else I do. The lines between academics and entertainment are often blurred, anyway, and combining them is not necessarily a “bad” thing. I frequently begin class informally, talking about anything but English/writing, loosening up both my students and myself. This informality lasts no more than five minutes; then I simply say, “OK, let’s get to work,” and proceed with the day’s lesson/discussion. This lets my students know that I am something besides a stodgy middle-aged English teacher and also that I value them as something other than student “consumers,” to be taken care of to everyone’s hopeful satisfaction (for them, decent grades; for us, instilling some form of scholarship).

And, when it comes to writing, I insist on attention to detail. This means boorrriinggggg reviews of grammar, punctuation, etc., but it also lets them know that writing is serious business and that mistakes born of inattention can make the writer look like a moron. It also lets them know that writing is not for the lazy or careless, and that those two qualities will not get them a good grade in my class. I am much stricter than most of my peers in this regard, but I firmly believe that you can’t play the game if you don’t know the rules. I get very little pressure, either from my students or the colleges, to “lighten up” on the workload or the details; my professional pride does not want their future teachers or employers asking, “*Who* taught this person to write?”

Finally, near the end of the term, I point out something to them that they may not have realized: most of them have become better writers. They have become harder working, more discerning, more self-challenging, more confident. And that means we—they and I—have both done our jobs. I have consistently received better-than-average evaluations, and this is because I care about writing, about teaching writing, and about what writing skills can do for my students. And this is why we do it, isn’t it?

Or is it the money?

*Frederick Ekstam works as the Engineering Liaison in the Writing Across the Curriculum program at the University of Missouri-Rolla.*

### Book Reviews

*nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*

by Randall Kennedy, Pantheon, 2002

Reviewed by Patricia G. Morgan, Career Instructor, English Department,  
Louisiana State University

If the stark black and white design of the dustcover shouts “Nigger” at you and leads you to expect passionate stands and powerful, absolute conclusions, be warned: don’t judge this book by its cover. Randall Kennedy has written a thorough, readable exploration of the roots and ramifications of a racial epithet that is an inextricable part of American culture, but he draws conclusions that suggest broad-based implications rather than directives, and his tone does not shout. Kennedy is currently a professor at Harvard Law School; with *nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*, he has produced a detailed exploration of the history of a word from its Latin root (*niger*, or black) to its presence in modern America.

Kennedy builds his discussion on dozens of incidents reported by names we recognize. Contrasting with the expected de-humanizing descriptions of slave references, the racial insults thrown at Branford Marsalis, Tiger Woods, and Michael Jordan establish a continuum of prejudice and hatred that can be traced back through the experiences of Dick Gregory and Hank Aaron to the harsh reminders of “place” that were used to lash out at blacks in America as far back as the 1700s. Kennedy does not pinpoint the transformation of “niger” as a notation on ships’ manifests in the 1600s to “nigger” as an insult, but he documents the nature of the word with copious examples from the pages of American writings. No reader of Kennedy’s work could ever hide under the comfortable “isolated incidents” cover, or behind misguided arguments that “it’s just a word” or that every minority group has been treated just as badly. Consider, for example, the appearance of the “N-word” (a euphemism that Kennedy invokes for variety—he can hardly be said to dodge the very word he explores) in court decisions in the Lexis-Nexis database. Researching in the same time frame, Kennedy found that *kike* made 84 appearances, *wetback* 50, *gook* 90, and *nigger* 4,219.

In an interview published in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Kennedy said that he is “...not afraid to say that a position is very close, that there’s a strong argument against either position” (Feb 3 2002). His self-described ability “to walk around a subject and see the complexity of the subject” is apparent throughout this book. Kennedy does not use his research to make black and white pronouncements about

the nature of the N-word. Instead, he catalogs usage in numerous contexts and establishes a wide range of meanings. His discussion argues against simple division into acceptable use by blacks and unacceptable use by whites. He posits that white individuals can, in fact, “earn” the right to use the N-word, and that automatic rejection is simple-minded. In the context of entertainment, Kennedy maintains that Quentin Tarantino has the same license as Spike Lee, and he airs the debates over self-hatred and negative images in black entertainers’ various uses of *nigger*.

Kennedy’s thorough and even-handed exploration of modern usage is typified by his treatment of the David Howard incident in Washington, D.C. Howard was the white agency head who referred to “niggardly” disbursement of funds due to budgetary constraints; subsequent protests forced his resignation. Kennedy gives space to the case against Howard, but also includes a range of voices criticizing what Kennedy ultimately labels “excessive and uninformed outrage.”

The final chapter asks, “How Are We Doing with *Nigger*?” Kennedy answers that “major institutions of American life are handling this combustible word about right.” This reader is not so sure of his optimistic conclusion. His examples from academia raise concerns that at least one major institution—the education system—is uncomfortable and uncertain about the N-word (or anything that resembles it) in the classroom. Kennedy’s description of David Howard’s “linguistic lynching” is followed by a description of an incident he rightly calls “even more alarming,” particularly for those of us who are in the classroom. At the University of Wisconsin at Madison, a professor used the word “niggardly” during a lecture on Chaucer. A black student told him after class that she was upset by the word; he explained its origins to her then and to the rest of the class the next day. When he brought up the word in class to redefine it, the student left in tears and called for a stringent speech code barring “offensive” words. We might be tempted to dismiss the anecdote as illustrative of outraged ignorance, but the outrage is genuine and the results, as in Howard’s case, are potentially damaging.

Consider, as Kennedy does, the recurring protests against Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Traditionally, academics argue that the work is a satire and its use of *nigger* (215 times) is ironic, exposing the nature of those who use it. But not every reader sees the satire, and not every opponent of the book has bothered to read it. It is condemned by many simply because Twain used the N-word. The debate stands, Kennedy argues, as “a frightening example of how thought becomes stunted in the absence of any sense of irony.”

The simple appearance of *nigger*, regardless of the context, creates a combustible situation. In 1998, an instructor at a community college in Kentucky conducted a discussion on taboo words in an interpersonal communication class.

Kenneth Hardy made the point that epithets label and marginalize groups, and students supplied examples that included *bitch*, *faggot*, and *nigger*. A student in the racially mixed class complained, first to the instructor and then to her minister, a civil rights activist who warned administrators that African-American enrollment would decline if the matter were not satisfactorily resolved. Despite the context of the class and despite the instructor's position in the debate—that certain words are too volatile to use at all—the instructor was released at the end of the term. He filed suit, and after several rounds, a panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that administrators did not, as claimed, have the right to fire a teacher for using “such language.” Instead, the court argued, Hardy's language addressed “matters of public concern” and his speech was thus protected.

Doubtless the court ruling is a victory for academic freedom, but Kennedy's book contains implicit warnings that a battle is underway in the classroom. As non-tenured faculty, we are particularly vulnerable to outraged students who misunderstand, misinterpret, or simply dislike the content of our classes. We are also at risk from groups that protest our choice of literature or discussion topics, and from administrators who depend on public support and financing.

Kennedy has said of this book that he wants the readers “to come away enlightened about [the complexities of the word *nigger*].” The combination of detailed information, thoughtful analysis, and eminently readable prose works in favor of his goals for this text. However, as front-liners in the classroom, we should not be lulled by Kennedy's conclusion that institutions handle the N-word “about right”; if we assume that academia is consistently progressive or enlightened, we do so at our peril.

*Pat Morgan has been a teacher for more than 30 years, most of it at Louisiana State University. In a previous issue of Forum, she reviewed John McWhorter's Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America.*

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Reconsidering *Ghosts in the Classroom: Stories of College Adjunct Faculty—and the Price We All Pay*

by Michael Dubson, Camel's Back Books, 2001

Reviewed by Anne Cassebaum, English Department, Elon University, Elon, North Carolina

Ray Jablonsky's review of *Ghosts in the Classroom* (Forum Fall 01) was so scathing and supercilious that I knew I had to read the book for myself. What I found between the pages of this collection was not a “pity party,” but adjuncts'

well-told tales of the abuse and misuse of adjunct faculty. And while Jablonsky states that the collection has no real audience, I would argue that graduate students, administrators, and all faculty would do well to pick it up. The tales are vivid and wide-ranging.

For full-time faculty and administrators with a reasonable sense of justice and decency, there are examples of adjuncts' financial and day-to-day struggles that are as eye-opening as Harrington's *Other America*. Viewing separatist department meetings and faculty luncheons from the other side may help administrators and full timers to note other double standards and hypocrisies they engender or tolerate. M. Theodore Swift points out that while administrators market the importance of a degree for success and respect, they undercut this logic by exploiting adjuncts with advanced degrees at their institutions. "Can college officials expect the outside world to support and honor their institutions when, from the inside, a huge group of *teachers* are treated so poorly?" (9). Let's hope there are enough administrators and full timers out there who can [re]see themselves as they read these stories.

The editor, Michael Dubson, opens with NEA statistics that make this book a must-read for graduate students: over half of the 1,100,000 college and university teachers—560,000 in all—are adjuncts. In my experience, students contemplating graduate school do not necessarily know this. I find them shocked to learn the number and identity of their respected teachers who are adjunct. Graduate students also need to hear from people like Diana Claitor of the deep satisfactions of teaching. Certainly the half of grad students who may teach as adjuncts will need to understand not to take their invisibility personally or to confuse their worth with administrators' or full-timers' perceptions and treatment of them.

Most important is that this collection lays groundwork for solidarity and unions. Adjuncts reading it may feel less isolated as the weight of their numbers and similarities build up. Grad students will get a heads-up on the fantasy that an adjunct job will be a foot in the door to the tenure track. Even Martin Naparstek's story of jobs lost as a result of standing up for basic rights is as empowering as it is frightening. Ed Meek's call for a union is a critical essay; he shows how the budgets of institutions are balanced on the backs of the adjuncts.

We need this book, especially because even a former adjunct like Jablonsky can turn his back on labor history and call on everyone to go it alone. His critique is based on capitalist assumptions accepted as if Ayn Rand were God: solutions are individual and the fittest always survive. Converting part-time jobs to full-time ones is not a solution, either; such changes once left *him* without a job. Jablonsky finds three tales he likes and announces that the authors "are those who will be hired

full-time”—as if the cream always rises to the top in academia. (In *Invisible Faculty*, Gappa and Leslie confirm that they could find no evidence that adjunct faculty are inferior.)

Jablonsky is right on some points: it will never be a perfect world and there are not enough full-time academic jobs to go around. The solution, though, is not to put a ban on complaint about exploitation, but to organize for fair working conditions and salaries. “Academia is nothing but *Survivor!*” exclaims Jablonsky. That’s true only if we allow it to be.

Maybe Michael Dubson’s next book will be tales of unity from institutions where colleagues no longer tolerate other colleagues being offered McJobs. In the meantime, *Ghosts in the Classroom* is good background reading.

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### **Coalition for the Academic Workforce (CAW)**

The Coalition for the Academic Workforce (CAW) was formed to address the issue of the increasing use of adjunct and part-time faculty and the limited or negative growth of tenure tracks in academe. The CAW conducted a survey of working conditions for adjunct and part-time faculty in various disciplines, and the results of that survey were published this past year.

The CAW is planning a conference in conjunction with the American Association of Colleges and Universities annual convention in Seattle to be held January 22 to 25, 2003. The theme of the CAW conference is “Courage to Question.” The conference will be a working group to make recommendations for appropriate faculty credentials and the necessary working conditions to promote the best learning for undergraduate liberal education. Watch for the call for proposals and plan to participate.

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