

# Reflection

## Major Project 1

### Personal Antiracist & Inclusivity Statement

While at Disney for Halloween celebrations, a young Black father approached my group and asked about our costumes. "I'm not comfortable with my own ignorance," he said, smiling huge, "so do you mind if I ask what yall are supposed to be?"

It's stuck with me. *I'm not comfortable with my ignorance.* Such gentleness and respect, and frankness, and genuine interest.

And--well, shouldn't we all be uncomfortable with our own ignorance?

One of the most valuable takeaways from ENGL 567 this quarter is the call to face--and own--our own levels and nuances of privilege. The word *privilege* is deeply coded as *bad*, entrenched in implication and shame. The rhetoric around it is volatile. But *having privilege itself* does not inherently make one a "bad person." To challenge privilege, we have to acknowledge it. That is--we have to become comfortable with being uncomfortable with our own ignorance. And we have to seek to change it.

I'm still learning how. I've gathered link after link to material discussing power and privilege, language inequities, how they're informed by and inform one another. I've written it into community guidelines in the syllabus; I've placed my land acknowledgment; I've kept the same Key and Peele video(s) on Black English/White English that left the first most horrifying awkward silence of my 3-quarter career because I need to stay comfy with being uncomfy.

Major Project 1 asks students to draft their own Antiracism and Inclusivity Statement, coming at the end of 4 weeks reading about and discussing linguistic code, language variety, and how sociocultural (-political, -economic, etc.) context creates these varieties but also form systems of power, privilege, and oppression. By Week 5, we circle back to identity to really examine privilege as contextualized in our personal lives with some activities that scale up in discomfort

(<https://peacelearner.org/2016/03/14/privilege-walk-lesson-plan/> ; <https://www.presence.io/blog/7-easy-activities-that-encourage-students-to-open-up-about-identity-and-privilege/>), and ask ourselves: why are we uncomfortable with identifying our own privilege?

The Major Project asks students to respond to a sampling of videos that will highlight social and cultural inequities, then draft a response to their own considerations on and relationship to privilege. The goal here is not to force confessions of racism or impose feelings of guilt and self-consciousness, and certainly not to curate an exhibition of calls to action or ENGL 131 Manifestos. Students are invited to discuss privilege in both negative *and* positive lights, not just their position but their experiences;

students can also draft suggestions of how to combat privilege, or make commitments to specific ideas and strategies for themselves. The goals, at the core, are to a) practice engaging with multimodal spaces, b) delve into a place of metacognition and reflection, and c) draw out one's awareness towards systems of privilege and oppression in a supportive space.

I'm going to run into problems. I know this. The content I choose for students to watch will not be comprehensive (this is impossible). I might slip into bias for what issues are most prominent to me (as would anyone). There's a high chance I'll be the minority in a heavily multilingual STEM filled class and I might hit roadblocks of cultural dissonance: what do I mean by systemic white supremacy, what if we don't know the history of American racism, etc.? At some point I may even have to negotiate perceptions of classroom ahistoricism, apoliticism, and neutrality to defend the pedagogy and hard stops here. I'm going to stumble into new staring silences, silent questions of: Why aren't you saving us from being uncomfortable?

I'm going to make mistakes. I know this. But I also know that antiracism and inclusivity is not an endpoint; it's a process. The best I can do is my best, which here is to disrupt the whitewashing curriculum and stop avoiding discussion about privilege systems in which scholarship still in many ways participates--and to keep learning. Specifically, to keep from learning *alone*.

I entered Autumn 2020 still clinging to the excuse that "I can't teach BIPOC stories or content because I am not BIPOC and it's harmful to speak from an experience that I don't know firsthand." But that's the thing: we shouldn't speak from it, or over it, or around it. We should speak with it.

I am white. I am a young white queer graduate student given the task of leading a foundational class for twenty-odd first years in an increasingly important moment of Change.

I don't say this to duck accountability. I say it to challenge post-multiculturalism guilt, of which I am--well, guilty. The tiptoeing around racism in the classroom, around privilege and oppression and the perpetuation of such within the structure of language/comp classes and the institution itself--the white guilt and fear of facing one's own privilege--the dancing around one's whiteness in the name of *ethicality* and *neutrality*.

Fuck that: I am white. I have no claim to neutrality. And this is why it's so important for me to lead classes constantly challenging my privilege, in the spirit of Change.