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From Awareness to Action: Implementing Socio-Political Consciousness in HDFS Classrooms at PWIs and HBCUs

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ABSTRACT. This paper offers a reflective narrative of a Black Human Development and Family Science professor teaching race, culture, and diversity across two contrasting institutional contexts: a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). The analysis illustrates how the emotional labor of teaching at a PWI often involves balancing white students' discomfort with the need to confront systemic inequities, while the HBCU classroom functions as a restorative space that affirms cultural identity and nurtures collective resilience. By comparing these environments, the paper argues that diversity education is shaped by institutional climate and cannot be approached as a uniform practice. The discussion underscores that race and culture are foundational—not supplemental—to Family Science and calls for cultivating cultural humility and sociopolitical awareness in future practitioners. Through this lens, the paper highlights how context-aware, equity-centered pedagogy can better prepare professionals to support the strengths and needs of diverse families.

Keywords: equity-centered pedagogy, institutional context in family science, cultural humility, Black Joy, human development and family science

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Author Note: The author is a Black Human Development and Family Science professor with experience teaching race, culture, and diversity across both Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This paper offers a reflective narrative on the emotional labor and pedagogical adaptations required in these contrasting institutional contexts.



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From Awareness to Action: Implementing Socio-Political Consciousness in HDFS Classrooms at PWIs and HBCUs

In alignment with the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) Certified Family Life Educator Code of Ethics (CFLE)—which requires respect for cultural backgrounds and diversity-responsive practice—Human Development and Family Science (HDFS) emphasize critical dialogue about race and culture to better understand the contexts that shape family life across the lifespan. As an HDFS professor, I have taught courses on race, culture, and diversity at both a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Teaching these topics presents inherent challenges, yet the experiences differ significantly across institutional contexts, each with its own considerations for addressing race, culture, and diversity.

HDFS is an interdisciplinary field that examines human development and family relationships within their social and cultural contexts, emphasizing the continual interplay between individual development and the family environment (Walsh, 2017). Preparing equity-minded practitioners is central to this work, as future family life educators, social workers, and policy advocates must be able to recognize and respond to the systemic forces shaping family well-being. Integrating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) into HDFS is therefore not only a teaching strategy but a professional imperative. By fostering sociopolitical consciousness (SPC), CRP helps students move beyond surface-level notions of diversity and develop the skills to identify and address structural inequities—such as institutional racism and economic disparities—that influence family stability and resilience (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Connecting classroom learning to these real-world dynamics ensures that HDFS graduates are prepared to offer culturally responsive support that honors the strengths of diverse family systems.

This paper explores how CRP, with a focus on its SPC component, was implemented in courses on race, culture, and diversity. It compares the use of CRP across two institutional contexts—PWI and an HBCU. Using an SPC-informed lens to critique the norms and structures that sustain social inequality, the paper analyzes how CRP was adapted and how students in each setting responded to it. The analysis highlights differences in student engagement, self-reflection, and institutional responses to discussions of identity, privilege, bias, inequality, and social justice. Overall, while CRP and SPC supported cross-cultural understanding at the PWI, their use at the HBCU created opportunities to build cultural pride, advance social justice, and deepen critical awareness within the group. As an HDFS professor, I aim to help students become empathetic, ethical, and equity-minded professionals by teaching them to apply their knowledge of family dynamics and well-being to analyze how policy, structural racism, and economic inequality impact families.

At a PWI, the challenge often lies in connecting race as a theoretical concept to the lived realities of students and communities. Many students enter the classroom with limited firsthand experience with Black communities, relying instead on narrow media portrayals and unexamined implicit biases. Because these topics are frequently treated as taboo in broader society, students may remain unaware of how systemic racial disparities shape life outcomes. My approach focuses on dismantling these internal narratives by introducing foundational concepts that encourage students to reflect on their own privileges. By integrating diverse perspectives into the curriculum, I aim to move beyond stereotypes and foster a genuine understanding of experiences different from their own.

Teaching about race, culture, and diversity at a PWI often centers on building awareness, while the HBCU classroom creates space for a deeper kind of growth—one grounded in identity, affirmation, and cultural pride. In these settings, shared history becomes a foundation for learning, shifting the focus from simply introducing diversity to equipping students to lead with confidence and purpose. My

teaching involves guiding students to examine power structures with a critical lens and to recognize their cultural knowledge as a meaningful resource for advancing social justice. Moving between these two educational contexts has shaped my commitment to preparing practitioners who are not only equity-minded but also firmly anchored in belonging, community, and collective responsibility.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

CRP recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Developed by Gloria Ladson-Billing, CRP is an educational framework built on three foundational components: academic success, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billing, 1995). Academic success focuses on students achieving proficiency in content knowledge and skills, while cultural competence enables students to understand their own cultural identities and values while recognizing the cultural differences between diverse groups. However, socio-political consciousness encourages students to actively engage with society and work towards meaningful change (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This third component promotes students' critical awareness, helping them examine and challenge social inequalities. SPC extends learning beyond facts, allowing students to analyze how broader social forces—policy, history, bias, and institutions—affect opportunity and family well-being in various communities.

Integrating CRP and SPC into PWIs is essential for challenging dominant cultural narratives. This approach encourages students to critically examine issues like meritocracy and neutrality, moving beyond basic diversity awareness to understand systemic inequities such as wealth and healthcare disparities. For example, instead of asking students why some families are struggling, I encourage students to ask, what are the policies that created unequal access to resources for these families? This moves the discussion to a deeper analysis of systemic issues. At HBCUs, the integration of CRP and the development of SPC are fundamental to the institutional mission of providing opportunity and fostering community service (Johnson & Jackson, 2024). HDFS places a strong emphasis on inclusion and social justice (Letiecq, 2019), recognizing that family well-being is shaped by the equity of the environments in which families live. For HDFS students, developing this awareness is essential to navigating the complexities of culturally diverse communities. By centering these values, I prepare future practitioners whose work is rooted in a commitment to justice for every family they serve. Integrating a SPC perspective into my classroom, I create empowering environments where students' lived experiences with systemic inequity are validated as academic discourse. Through deep dives into issues like voter suppression, mass incarceration, and healthcare disparities, students progress from cultural competence to critical consciousness. Rooted in cultural affirmation and shared resilience, they leverage their shared identity to analyze oppression and take an active role in promoting social change. My HBCU classroom bridges the gap between understanding inequality and addressing it, providing a direct path from insight to transformative action.

PWI Experience

Despite the institution's stated commitment to "Openness and Inclusion," the lack of substantive support for equity-centered teaching created a persistent tension in my role as an HDFS educator. Although my objective was to create a classroom environment where students could thoughtfully discuss topics such as race, culture, and diversity, thereby fostering empathy, self-awareness, and a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012), the broader institutional climate often reflected discomfort with these very conversations. Preparing students for helping professions requires more than surface-level exposure to cultural differences; it demands cultivating cultural humility and the ability to engage ethically with families whose lived experiences may differ significantly from their own (Harindranathan

et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2023). These expectations are embedded in the CFLE Code of Ethics, which calls for respect for cultural beliefs, backgrounds, and differences, and for professional practice that is both responsive to diversity and grounded in humility (NCFR, 2018). Yet the university's practices did not consistently model or reinforce the values required to support this work.

This misalignment left me navigating the responsibility of preparing equity-minded practitioners within an environment that did not fully support or align with the discipline's ethical and pedagogical commitments. The work of fostering critical reflection, facilitating difficult dialogue, and preparing students to understand the social forces that impact families and communities occurred largely in isolation from broader institutional priorities. I felt myself carrying the weight of ensuring that diversity, equity, and inclusion remained centered in the curriculum—a responsibility that often came with feelings of isolation, exclusion, and emotional heaviness. These experiences reflect what Padilla (1994) first described as cultural taxation, the additional, often invisible labor placed on faculty of color because of their racial and cultural identities, labor that is rarely recognized or supported by institutions. Cleveland (2018) further illustrates how this burden is compounded when institutions rely on faculty of color to lead equity efforts without providing the necessary resources or structural support.

This cultural taxation was intensified by the institution's performative diversity leadership practices. As Wang (2025) notes, performative approaches often mask deeper systemic inequities and, in doing so, further marginalize and silence those most affected. Within this context, such practices also isolate faculty who ground their teaching in equity-centered pedagogy, leaving them to carry out this work without meaningful institutional support (El Amin, 2024). As a result, my classroom became the primary space where the field's ethical commitments were upheld, even as the institution's structures fell short of supporting them. This misalignment not only shaped my experience at the PWI but also highlighted how institutional climates can either strengthen or constrain the development of ethically grounded, equity-minded professionals in Family Science. As a CFLE, I am obligated to serve the field with integrity, which includes preparing equity-minded practitioners—even when the institution itself operates within the confines of performative diversity. To navigate that conflict, I adopted a more cautious approach to teaching race, culture, and diversity after the department chair and Dean instructed me to remove any language related to diversity, equity, and inclusion from program materials—including the syllabus, course descriptions, and learning outcomes.

At the beginning of class, I outlined ground rules and emphasized that some topics might be emotionally sensitive. I highlighted the importance of respecting diverse viewpoints, remaining open to new ideas, and recognizing our shared humanity. I encouraged students to lean into their discomfort rather than dismiss it, reminding them that discomfort can be an opportunity for growth. I also advised students to assume positive intent from their peers and to avoid assumptions and generalizations. I hoped that establishing these ground rules would help ward off potential defensiveness and create enough space for meaningful engagement, especially within an institutional climate that was not actively supporting these conversations.

I intentionally selected books and readings that not only amplified the voices of marginalized groups but also introduced fundamental concepts of diversity. For example, in one of my classes, I selected *"Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education"* (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). I chose this book because it offers a comprehensive and accessible introduction to social justice concepts for beginners. By presenting key ideas and providing reflective discussion questions, it supported meaningful class conversations about race and diversity, helping students move from theoretical understanding toward a deeper commitment to pursuing social justice.

During classroom discussions, I noticed that several white students were more comfortable joining conversations that celebrated cultural diversity than those that focused on systemic barriers and racism. These observations come from my four years of teaching Family Science–related courses at a PWI. In these courses, students were asked to think about how race, racism, culture, diversity, and social structures shape children’s development, family relationships, and overall well-being. Over time, a clear pattern emerged: many students eagerly participated in conversations centered on multicultural appreciation, yet some became hesitant or uncomfortable when discussions shifted toward examining inequity, structural racism, and the ways these forces affect families and communities. This pattern showed up across multiple semesters and course sections and shaped how I understood students’ engagement with content that required deeper reflection on race and power.

In this setting, students often emphasized kindness and equality for everyone but were less willing to engage with topics related to white privilege. This tendency reflects a broader dynamic in which diversity is framed as a cultural celebration rather than an invitation to examine inequity and power. Authentic diversity discourse requires shifting from cultural awareness to strategies for systemic change. As Herring and Henderson (2011) argue, diversity efforts cannot stop at celebrating differences; they must also confront disparities, inequality, oppression, and stratification. Some students’ discomfort with discussing race further complicated these conversations. Hakkola and Rosebaum (2024) underscore this point, finding that many white students are not only uncomfortable discussing race but are especially hesitant to do so in large group settings. I observed this dynamic firsthand when one student expressed reluctance to participate because she feared saying the wrong thing or being perceived as racist. Hakkola and Rosebaum (2024) identify this fear as a significant barrier that prevents students from engaging meaningfully in conversations about race.

Despite these challenges, our class discussion on implicit biases and microaggressions was surprisingly well-received. To help students understand the effects of microaggressions, we explored the crucial distinction between intent and impact. We watched a video illustrating how intent reflects what a person means to communicate, while impact reflects how that message is actually received. I explained that because our social identities—such as race, ethnicity, age, gender, and social class—shape our experiences, people may respond differently to the same words or actions. To deepen this understanding, students participated in a small-group activity where they shared a time when their words had an unintended impact. This activity helped them recognize how microaggressions, as subtle forms of prejudice (Sue et al., 2007), are connected to implicit biases and how these dynamics operate in everyday interactions.

After taking the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998)—a common tool for measuring automatic associations about race, gender, and other social categories—many students were surprised by their results. Some reflected that they had little contact with Black individuals prior to attending college. I selected the IAT because it offers an accessible entry point for helping students recognize how implicit attitudes can operate outside of conscious awareness, which is particularly relevant in Family Science, where practitioners work closely with culturally diverse families. One of the strengths of the IAT is its ability to prompt self-reflection by revealing discrepancies between individuals’ stated beliefs and their automatic responses (Goodall, 2011; De Houwer, 2002). At the same time, I acknowledged critiques of the instrument, including concerns about its test–retest reliability and debates about whether IAT scores predict discriminatory behavior (Castillo, 2018). By situating the tool within both its contributions and its limitations, students were better able to understand the IAT as a starting point for examining bias rather than a definitive measure of their character or intentions.

Yet even as students confronted their own biases, I was navigating the limits placed on how openly I could name these dynamics. Navigating the university's diversity, equity, and inclusion climate, I was careful and strategic with my word choices. I found myself replacing precise terms like "implicit bias" with "preconceived notions," "structural racism" with "systemic issues," and "whiteness" with "dominant worldview". While I used "racialized groups" instead of "minority" to avoid connotations of inferiority, the broader institutional pressure to dilute this language represented the very structural barriers I aim to dismantle. There is immense power in naming these factors correctly; it validates the experiences of marginalized groups and defines problems clearly so they can be effectively addressed. By contrast, this forced censorship prevents students from truly developing the SPC required to address the social inequalities that marginalized families experience. Choosing alternative words left me feeling complicit in upholding a system that harms me and people who look like me. I was constantly bargaining between using accurate language or "safer," fewer triggering words—yet I had to ask: safer for whom?

Teaching these topics at a PWI required a profound level of emotional labor. I found myself constantly prioritizing the emotional comfort of my white students, often at the expense of my own well-being, which frequently triggered my own racial trauma. This labor is invisible; it involves upholding a professional demeanor even as my own history and identity are discussed as abstract concepts or 'differing perspectives.' I was tasked with supporting the emotional well-being of the students, yet I had to carry the weight of my own racialized experiences alone, often feeling depleted by the very discussions I was leading.

This depletion made me wonder if my BIPOC students were carrying that same heavy silence. I questioned whether they felt acknowledged and empowered, or if they, too, were performing a version of emotional labor just to exist in the room. While I wondered if using 'safer' words would help white students participate more openly, I had to confront a hard truth: while prioritizing communication over confrontation might prevent a conversation from shutting down, our ultimate goal was to foster awareness and address systemic issues—not just avoid discomfort.

This question of language and its impact surfaced again in a particularly emotional discussion. A class discussion about the term "People of Color" took an emotional turn. A Black student expressed that she does not like the term "People of Color" because it conflates the experiences of Black Americans with those of other non-white racialized groups. A white student responded that she uses the term for its inclusivity and because she prefers it to "minority." The Black student then explained how the term oversimplifies the unique history of Black people in the United States. The conversation ended with the white student crying and saying she just wanted to do the right thing. I immediately intervened and asked the white student to step outside to regain her composure, inviting her back when she was ready. I felt it was important to avoid shifting the conversation's focus to her emotions, which is a common occurrence in cross-cultural discussions about race and diversity. When she returned, we discussed how crucial it is to listen to the lived experiences of racialized groups to truly understand their perspectives. The goal of our classroom conversations, I explained, was not necessarily to reach an agreement but to foster understanding.

While teaching about race, culture, and diversity at a predominantly white institution, I found that small group activities helped many of my white students engage more comfortably across cultural lines. In these smaller settings, students were more willing to participate without the fear of being judged. Despite the challenges of discussing sensitive topics, these conversations often led to meaningful breakthroughs. In one discussion on developmentally appropriate ways to address race with young children, we used melanin as an accessible entry point. I explained that melanin is a natural

pigment that determines skin, eye, and hair color, and that everyone has varying amounts based on their genes. Teaching children about melanin helps them understand skin color as a natural biological trait and reinforces the importance of not attaching judgment to appearance.

A few weeks after our class discussion on melanin, one of my students, an early childhood assistant teacher, shared with the class an exchange between two four-year-old preschoolers in her classroom. In the story, a white boy told a light-skinned Black girl that she was not Black because her skin was not dark. The young girl insisted she was, explaining that her parents were Black and had told her she was Black too. After they went back and forth, my student intervened, affirming that the girl was indeed Black but had a lighter skin tone. The student explained that many Black people have a range of skin tones due to varying levels of melanin. To help children understand diversity in skin tone, the student created a lesson plan about melanin. The plan included arts and crafts activities using different paint colors, allowing children to mix colors to match their own skin tone. Students also used various colored markers and crayons for drawing, and the students read aloud to the class the following books: *Same Difference* (Rawles, 2010), *Our Skin: A First Conversation About Race* (Madison & Ralli, 2021), and *The Colors of Us* (Katz, 2002). The student said that without our class discussion on how to talk to children about race and diversity in a developmentally appropriate way, she would not have known how to manage the situation between the two children. Using melanin to facilitate a conversation on these concepts helps children to normalize differences as a natural part of human diversity.

HBCU experience

Although I felt a level of responsibility to prepare equity-minded and culturally responsive practitioners at both the PWI and the HBCU, the level of responsibility teaching at an HBCU is more about affirming Black students' identities, nurturing Black joy, promoting social justice, and creating space to heal from racial trauma. Teaching concepts of race, culture, and diversity at an HBCU is a unique and deeply impactful experience and a natural part of the educational environment.

Crucially, the heavy emotional labor required at a PWI—the constant 'bargaining' and self-censorship—is non-existent at an HBCU. In this space, these conversations are not just permitted; they are welcomed and protected. It offers both Black students and instructors a safe environment to explore racial realities without the burden of justification or the exhausting need for explanation. Free from the constraints of tone policing, there is a profound sense of freedom to be one's authentic self. This allows us to examine systemic issues critically, with a sense of pride and collective responsibility, always moving toward the ultimate goal of promoting social change.

The HBCU serves as a sanctuary where students' Black identities are affirmed (Ratcliff, 2025). For many students, this environment provides the first opportunity to see themselves, their culture, and history at the center of the curriculum rather than at the periphery. This shift from marginalization to centrality is a powerful act of validation, creating a learning environment where students feel seen, understood, respected, and encouraged to bring their authentic selves into the learning environment without censorship, explanation, or judgment.

A core component of my instruction is the integration of social justice into every facet of the curriculum. As a Black professor at an HBCU, my role is to help students connect historical injustices to present-day systemic issues, equipping them with the critical lens needed to analyze and challenge the injustices deeply enmeshed within society. This underscores the importance of integrating SPC into my instructional approach, fostering an environment that promotes a sense of shared responsibility and collective action. The classroom is a dynamic space where students can see their own experiences reflected in the curriculum and find common ground with peers as they work toward a more just world.

The HBCU classroom functions as more than an academic space; it offers students an essential place to process and recover from racial trauma. When we openly discuss issues such as anti-Black racism, colorism, misogynoir, and hair discrimination, students can name and validate how these forces shape their lives, families, and communities. For instance, when a student expressed anxiety about not feeling “Black enough” because of her lighter skin, our conversation on colorism helped the class move from individual pain to a broader understanding of how identity is shaped by systemic forces. This kind of shared reflection supports students’ emotional well-being and strengthens their self-concept—skills that are vital for future Family Science professionals. As students develop this critical self-awareness, they become better prepared to help diverse families build resilience and navigate similar forms of systemic oppression.

To help students process racial trauma and develop SPC, I utilize a reflective essay assignment centered on Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois’s concept of “double consciousness”. After reviewing Du Bois’s work, students answer the following questions to explore their own lived experiences:

1. What are your thoughts, feelings, and emotions as a racial being in the United States today?
2. What are your early memories of your positionality within the constructs of race/racial identity?
3. How does the constant “two-ness” of double consciousness manifest in your personal identity, self-worth, and social interactions? What are the potential psychological and emotional consequences of this internal conflict, and how do you successfully navigate it?
4. How did Du Bois’s articulation of double consciousness help you understand your own experiences of navigating multiple identities?
5. In what ways do intersecting systems of oppression (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation) compound the internal conflict of self-identity, and what are the implications for achieving social justice today?

The resulting essays are compelling and often gut-wrenching, revealing the heavy emotional labor of navigating white-dominated spaces as the “only Black student in the school”, the exhaustion of code-switching, and the persistent pressure to shrink oneself to fit in. Conversely, many students share how they have reclaimed their voices, leveraging this “two-ness” as a source of strength and cultural pride to challenge negative narratives. Within the context of HDFS, this exercise helps HDFS students move from simply learning about social justice to developing a practical skill: recognizing how systemic pressures shape the lives and mental health of the diverse families they will serve. Through honest self-reflection, students practice cultural humility—an ongoing process of self-critique and learning (Yeager & Bauer-Wu, 2013) that aligns with the cultural competence and SPC emphasized in CRP. This work prepares them to draw on families’ strengths while understanding the broader social forces that affect family well-being.

While addressing racial trauma is essential for developing professional empathy, it must be coupled with a deliberate focus on the equally important work of reclaiming joy and excellence. Creating a classroom environment where students can honestly discuss the impact of systemic oppression provides a necessary haven for vulnerability and student healing. However, the intentional promotion of Black joy, the celebration of culture, resilience, and achievement, is a vital counterpart that facilitates a positive racial identity. This joyful affirmation serves as a powerful act of resistance against narratives of pain and struggle, reminding students that their identity is a profound source of strength and a cornerstone of their future professional practice.

Building on this foundation of affirmation and cultural pride, I draw on West African storytelling and communalism to shape the learning environment. I created a classroom where intergenerational

wisdom is shared and valued. This approach offers an important counterbalance to the Western-centric theories that often dominate HDFS. By using storytelling as a core teaching tool, I center students' histories and lived experiences, creating a space where they feel seen and supported. This shared dialogue builds cultural pride and a strong sense of identity. Ultimately, this teaching practice honors ancestral knowledge and helps ensure that academic learning connects meaningfully to students' cultural heritage.

Fundamentally, teaching concepts of race, culture, and diversity as a Black professor at an HBCU is a transformative act that nurtures Black joy. It is a commitment to not only educate the mind but to heal the spirit and strengthen the identity of Black students. The classroom acts as a reflection of the wider community, where each lesson aims to foster social awareness, build a sense of belonging, promote social justice, and nurture the inherent joy and resilience of the Black experience. By incorporating Black history and cultural perspectives, serving as a mentor, and being a positive representation, I aim to equip emerging leaders with the confidence, cultural awareness, and skills necessary to contribute to a more just society. This work has shaped not only how I teach but also how I evaluate whether students are truly engaging with these concepts in meaningful and transformative ways.

Indicators of Effective Engagement

From my perspective as a Black woman teaching in both PWI and HBCU contexts, “effectively addressing” issues of race, culture, and diversity requires more than covering content—it requires cultivating a learning environment where students can engage with this material confidently, critically, and with humility. Effectiveness begins with my own grounding: having a deep understanding of the language, frameworks, and histories that shape conversations about identity and inequity, and being comfortable enough with that language to speak with clarity, confidence, and authenticity about systemic issues.

I know this work is landing when students begin to use that language themselves in meaningful ways, for example, when they incorporate concepts such as intersectionality, privilege, or implicit bias into their writing and discussions with accuracy and nuance. Evidence of effectiveness also emerges in the “aha” moments when students connect course concepts to real-world inequities, such as the linking of implicit racial bias of educators to disproportionate suspensions of Black boys. I see it when students apply classroom learning to their own professional contexts, as in the melanin example discussed earlier in the paper. Finally, I recognize effective engagement when students move from passive participation to active inquiry—when more voices enter the conversation, when students initiate deeper dialogue beyond small groups, or when they reach out after class wanting to unpack a concept further. These indicators signal that students are not only understanding the material but are beginning to practice cultural humility in ways that will shape their work with diverse families. Together, these indicators affirm that students are not only grasping the material but beginning to embody the cultural humility and critical consciousness that guide my practice as a Family Scientist.

Conclusion

Taken together, these experiences underscore that teaching about race, culture, and diversity is deeply shaped by institutional context, a reality that carries important implications for how we approach this work as Family Scientists. Reflecting on these two institutional experiences, it becomes clear that teaching about race, culture, and diversity requires careful attention to context. At the PWI, this work often means navigating the tension between institutional scrutiny and the meaningful moments when students move past defensiveness and begin to engage in honest self-reflection. The HBCU setting, by

contrast, offers a space where teaching can also support personal healing and the reclaiming of cultural narratives. In that environment, the classroom becomes a place where identity is affirmed, and collective resilience is strengthened. While the PWI classroom emphasizes the challenging work of unpacking privilege and bias, the HBCU classroom highlights restoration and affirmation. Both settings, however, play a vital role in helping students develop the critical consciousness needed to understand today's families.

At its core, the work of the Family Scientist extends beyond any single institution. Our responsibility is to show that race and culture are not optional add-ons to the curriculum, but central forces shaping family relationships, development, and well-being. We aim to help students move beyond memorizing concepts and toward practicing cultural humility as an ongoing commitment. By nurturing sociopolitical awareness, we prepare future practitioners to enter the field with both compassion and the critical tools needed to address systemic inequities. In doing so, we ensure they are ready to support the vulnerabilities—and leverage the strengths—of the diverse families they will serve. In embracing this work collectively, we strengthen our students' capacity to serve diverse families and ensure that the next generation of Family Scientists enters the field prepared to advance justice, healing, and meaningful change.

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