Teaching From the Margin

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Notes on Navigating a Multicultural Foundations Course at a Predominately White Institution

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Abstract

Situated in West's (1993) politics of difference theory, this article is based on the author's experiences teaching a multicultural foundations course as a Black faculty member for sixteen years at a predominantly White institution (PWI). Employing autobiographical self-study as a methodology, challenges and strategies for teaching while Black are outlined in a three-level typology—which includes the naiveté, transformational teaching, and belvedere levels—assists marginalized instructors in reflecting on and reconciling oppressive PWI classroom environments to thrive in one's career. The complex nature of teaching within marginalization at PWIs is addressed throughout.

Keywords: multicultural foundations courses, autobiography, self-study, marginalization, predominantly White institutions, Black faculty

Precis

At the time of this article's completion, I have taught a multicultural foundations course at a predominantly White institution (PWI) for just over 16 years. Although multicultural foundations courses today universally include an orientation toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and is a requirement for undergraduate students (de Novais & Spencer, 2019; Justice, 2020; Miller & Struve, 2020), the majority continue to turn out disaffected students (Cole & Zhou, 2014;

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Denson et al., 2020; Parker III et al., 2016; Vianden, 2018; You & Matteo, 2013). While any success I had in teaching the multicultural foundations course at my institution is its own debate, over the years I received various emails from my students—mostly positive—who thanked me for my efforts to learn alongside them as we unpacked diversity issues in education.

An email from a former student in 2014, whose name I immediately recognized from the thousands of students I have taught, ushered in a tidal wave of feelings. I stared at my screen for several minutes. I read the email slowly. Then I reread it. An excerpt is as follows:

> *I was a student of yours as an undergraduate. I don't remember the precise year, but it was most likely 2005 or 2006. I graduated [from the department] in 2007. While in your multicultural education class, we had a conflict…. I had never had a teacher of color, nor had I been raised in an environment that embraced diversity. Most of the department student body (at the time at least) mirrored the makeup of classroom teachers: mostly white, females of privilege.*

I reflected on this student's communication in the wake of a so-called reckoning on race in higher education (Bartlett, 2021; Harris, 2020; Haynes & Bazner, 2019; Segal, 2021) and as calls for more authentic conversations focused on the experiences of Black faculty continue to mount (Croom, 2017; Dade et al., 2015; Edwards & Ross, 2018; Gregory, 2001; Louis et al., 2016; Tillman, 2001; Young & Hines, 2018).

Consequently, this article is not a re-articulation of the oppressive experiences of marginalized faculty in academia; those assertions via books, reports, position papers, articles, and conferences have already been made ad nauseam. Apart from a few scholars' treatment on the topic (McGowan, 2000; Patton & Catching, 2009; Pittman, 2010; Sleeter, 2017; Stanley, 2006), there are limited practical solutions that Black or marginalized faculty might employ to safely traverse, in terms of personhood and career, the multicultural classroom space at PWIs. Black faculty need to know how to avoid the hazards of teaching about diversity at institutions while being productive in the role.

In the pages that follow, I relate my own story teaching a multicultural foundations course at a PWI in a southwestern state—one of the largest public institutions in the nation. I share these experiences, which I think are characteristic of marginalized instructors, and explore the complexities, complications, and paradoxes of being a Black professor teaching a multicultural foundations course at a PWI. I also offer some suggested strategies as part of teaching multicultural foundations courses that will help clarify some of these issues for novice Black faculty. Framed in West's (1993) politics of difference theory, this paper begins by briefly proposing a theoretical framework of exis-

tential empowerment for the "progressively co-opted" (p. 3) instructors within multicultural classrooms of the academy. Second, I used autobiography and self-study to analyze 16 years of teaching reviews as the backbone of the data corpus of my study. Next, I present a *Levels Theory for Black Faculty at a Predominantly White Institution* (hereafter Levels Theory) as a broad concept or typology with interdependent levels—which includes the naiveté, transformation, and belvedere levels—for considering the issues experienced by marginalized instructors teaching multicultural foundations courses at PWIs. I proffer that the three-level typology assists Black faculty and other marginalized instructors in reflecting on and reconciling oppressive PWI classroom environments to thrive in one's career.

Theoretical Framework

The impressions of West (1993) underpin this article as he advises that Black intelligentsia should become critically aware of the *politics of difference* that reveals the very operations of power within their immediate work contexts, which:

> puts them in an inescapable double-bind—while linking their activities to the fundamental, structural overhaul of these institutions, they often remain financially dependent on them. For these critics of culture, theirs is a gesture that is simultaneously progressive and co-opted…There is, of course, no guarantee that such pressure will yield the result one wants, but there is the guarantee that the status quo will remain or regress if no pressure is applied at all. (pp. 3-5)

Considering such marginalizing effects, proposals to support Black faculty in academic spaces abound (e.g., Cupid, 2020; Endo, 2020; Jones et al., 2020a; Jones et al., 2020b; Thompson & Louque, 2005). Such ideas have credibility because the road to promotion and tenure is circuitous, and for marginalized faculty, their research, service, and teaching agendas can be negatively impacted. However, teaching remains an understudied feature of this tri-fold mission in the academy, requiring serious attention and deliberation as many Black faculty have been denied permanent status at universities due to poor classroom performance (Basow et al., 2013; Parker, 2017). Although the charge of teaching is not considered a high priority in some institutions of higher education and adversely impacts salary (Fairweather, 1993; Porter et al., 2020), it quickly becomes as important as research and service while contributing to a climate of high stakes tenure in the academy (Parker, 2017).

Many critical race theory scholars propose that such discussions on the marginalization of Black faculty are sine qua non for advancing

diversity in the academy—considered one of the last bastions of White privilege and power (Feagin, 2002)—among faculty that remains largely male (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020a), heterosexual (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2009), and White (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020a; Trower & Chait, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). By contrast,

> African American and Hispanic people, who account for approximately 31% of the national population, comprise only 4% and 3%, respectively, of the full-time professors (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Of all the full-time faculty in U.S. degree-granting postsecondary institutions in fall 2018, 40% were White men; 35% were White women; 7% were Asian/Pacific Islander men; 5% were Asian/Pacific Islander women; and 3% each were Black men, Black women, Hispanic men, and Hispanic women; American Indian/Alaska Native and those who were of two or more races each comprised 1% or less of full-time faculty. (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022, p. 3)

The scarcity of Black professors in the academy is disproportionate to the 14% demographic rate of Black America in the United States (U.S. Census, n.d.).

Since academia is a mirror of society, it would follow that the experiences of the ivory tower would reflect the interests, culture, and values of the status quo faculty for which it was designed. Long ago, Newman et al. (1978) pointed out that White institutions have historically discriminated against Black members of society by way of systemic exclusionary practices that caused diminishing effects on income, employment, health, and the list goes on. Fast forward over four decades later, Kendi and Blain (2021) arrive at the same deduction in which discrimination of Black people in White institutions in America is normalized. These writings converge to underscore two shameful reminders: how little progress the country has made in breaking down racist barriers to support Black people and such research performed on the status and suffering of Black people in America are relegated to the margins—much like the people who experience such indignities.

Dovidio et al. (2001) assert that in addition to the adverse effects of prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination directly affecting the opportunities for stigmatized people, another consequence involves the unique career and psychological vulnerability of the disparaged. The academy is a societal structure that keeps those who are different from the White, male, heterosexual portrait in controlled configurations of academic apartheid throughout the university. Further, the minuscule presence and revolving door status of underrepresented faculty (Edwards & Ross, 2018) create a particularly tenuous predicament for us (Aguirre, 2020; Croom, 2017; Parker, 2017).

Methodology

Even though self-study research related to instruction for multicultural foundations courses is in its early stages, there are advantages to conducting self-study about enacting multicultural instruction in higher education. Given the significance of equity and social justice reform in teacher education, of particular importance is how self-study can support the development of instructors who are responsible for implementing curricular reform efforts (Cherng & Davis, 2019; Ghosh, 2023; Parkhouse & Massaro, 2019; Smith, 2009) amid student resistance (Arsal, 2019; Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020), presumed incompetence of marginalized instructors (Harris, 2020), and the political firestorm of diversity in higher education (Brown, 2004; Smith, 2020; Rolle et al., 2000). I firmly advocate that self-study may support scholars of color teaching in PWIs to improve our practice through a critical assessment of praxis (Kitchen & Berry, 2021; LaBoskey, 2004; Samaras, 2002). The research question driving this study is: How does one come to understand the role of marginalization as an instructor of a multicultural foundation course at a PWI? Drawing on West's work, I present these findings in the form of several stages of instructional growth I experienced in learning how to teach controversial subjects as a Black woman at a PWI.

Data Collection and Analyses

I leveraged a few sources of data as a basis of my career-long reflection on teaching the foundations of multicultural education course. First, I used autobiography to pull out memories, supported by instructional notes and calendars. Over several months, and unprompted by guiding questions, I reflected on my experiences teaching the multicultural foundations course (Raynal et al., 2023). The recollections came in waves, so I used a note-taking app on my phone to record my teaching memories (Pearson et al., 2023). I focused my spontaneous memories (Berntsen, 2021) on multicultural teaching strategies, student resistance, and the way I felt during these 16 years in the classroom. During that time, my journal amassed 17 distinct entries with over 15,000 words. I utilized a self-constructed Levels Theory as a broad concept or typology with interdependent levels—which include *naiveté*, *transformation*, and *belvedere*—as a priori themes that are rooted in DEI-related literature and used as a basis for categoric coding of data (Saldana, 2021). The Levels Theory is used as a typology to organize major ideas that emerge from the data as well as to chart my teaching journey. The three-level typology assists Black faculty in reflecting on and reconciling oppres-

sive PWI classroom environments to thrive in one's career. Next, the themes from the Levels Theory and the data were then entered into a spreadsheet and coded, for which I noted the convergence and divergence from pre-determined thematic meanings. I looked for recurring patterns among the data corpus that buoyed each theme.

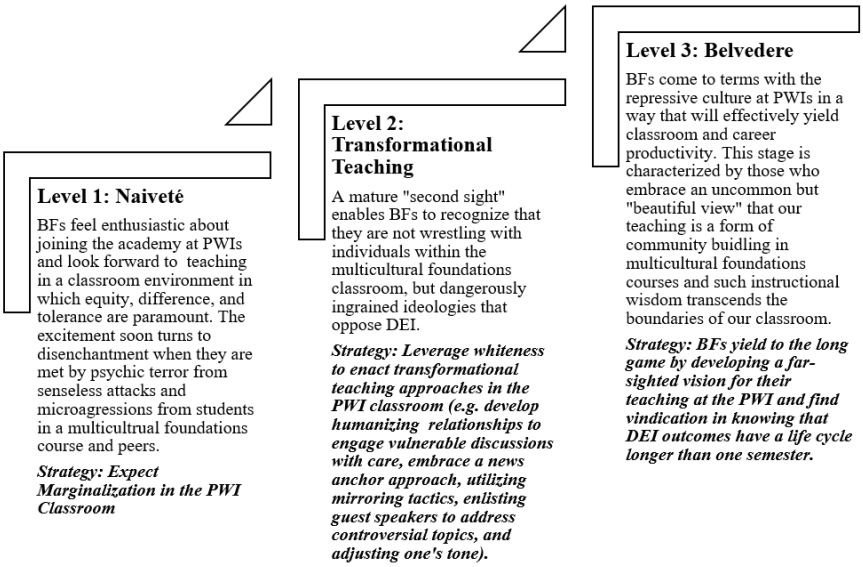
Second, the qualitative findings are complemented with 16 years of student evaluation data housed on a platform operated by a division of measurement and evaluation at the PWI. The student evaluations are rich in quantitative data and descriptive statistics that charted my average teaching evaluations that spanned from 2004 through 2021 and demonstrate my teaching impact over time. The questions on the student evaluation for faculty teaching are established in advance by the measurement and research committees at the PWI. The question items were posed to students utilizing a Likert-like scale of one to five, from least to most effective. In addition, open-ended questions are included in the student evaluation instrument and serve to capture qualitative comments from students. I used these findings to confirm or refute the themes (Norris et al., 2015) identified in my autobiographical journey.

A Levels Theory for Black Faculty at Predominantly White Institutions

The Levels Theory, depicted in Figure 1, provides an overview of the three major themes identified in this self-study, which marks my

Figure 1

Levels Theory for Black Faculty (BF) at Predominantly White Institutions



gradual level of awareness and competence as a teacher of multicultural education. Level one in the typology is marked by unchecked gullibility or naiveté of marginalized instructors. In level two, the battle-tested Black faculty member leverages mistakes, successes, resources, and best practices to transform the relationships and learning outcomes in the PWI classroom. The belvedere is considered the apex of all three levels and exemplifies a quiet understanding that foregoes short-term wins for a long-term vision to support the next generation of equity-minded students.

Level One: Naiveté

Many of today's Black faculty have been drawn to academia for the love of teaching, and the unconscious expectation is that everyone there, peers and students alike, share in an egalitarian spirit of acceptance and tolerance. The academy, for these trusting academics, is where the classroom is exhorted as a place where truth-seeking and knowledge are paramount. When Black faculty are assigned to college teaching, it is often diversity-related or multicultural foundations courses despite our training or degree (Jimenez et al., 2019). However, Black faculty take on the charge of teaching multicultural courses with rigor, responsibility, and integrity because we realize how our predecessors, who entered PWIs at the height of the civil rights era under semi-protective Affirmative Action policies (Equal Employment Opportunity, 1965), fought and paid a huge dowry for our presence.

The innocence of Black faculty is quickly replaced by unexpected duplicity that occurs in the PWI classroom. Black faculty will soon come to understand that their very presence as a person of color in the academy is political (Basow et al., 2013). Their faculty teaching position is further complicated by a Black faculty-White student power differential (Aguirre, 2020), which may cause distress for White students with delicate constitutions who find it upsetting to participate in DEI discussions (DiAngelo, 2018). For many Black faculty, the multicultural classroom becomes a place of terror (Young & Hines, 2018), oppressive whiteness (Flynn, 2015; Hill-Jackson, 2007), pain (Aguirre, 2020), socio-political arbitration (Darder, 1991), and plagued by student microaggressions and resistance (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Haynes, et al., 2020; Hill-Jackson, 2007; Louis et al., 2016; Sleeter, 2017). Black faculty will soon be betrayed by a hegemonic ethos that typifies a silent yet defiant classroom culture.

You must be aware of, as Coates (2008) explains, the façade of politeness and political correctness inside the PWI classroom that continually victimizes the marginalized instructor. Hill-Jackson (2007)

notes that White students cloak their feelings about "otherness" from their marginalized instructors and engage in a kind of multicultural theatre; a surreptitious performance that opposes concepts presented in the multicultural foundations course. For those students who find it difficult to conceal their feelings about DEI matters, Black faculty in multicultural courses are met with folded arms, sour countenances, and other dismissive body language, or students who verbally push back in disrespectful ways about multicultural ideas. For several decades White students have been emboldened and, in recent years, may take to social media to discredit Black instructors (Yancy, 2018). On occasion, these students will feel the need to report you to other faculty or college leadership as your teachings will be considered heresy, hereby inventing the call-out culture (Ahmad, 2015; Huell, 2020).

While department heads and college administrators should model diversity leadership by triggering mechanisms to safeguard Black faculty from the hostile climate in the academy (Chun & Evans, 2015; Martins, 2020), you cannot wait for or expect the university leadership to acknowledge your plight. Despite the presence of progressive-minded leaders, Black faculty continue to experience both subtle and obvious emotional distress caused by their students with nearly no protection from administration (Gorski & Parekh, 2020; Tuitt et al., 2009).

Eventually, the constant emotional assault by students at PWIs may lead to a Black faculty member's acrimony or attrition. I must counsel you against becoming bitter by the hegemony within the academy because it stifles productivity. The constant worry about our students' actions and reactions at PWIs is taxing for Black faculty and may interfere with your course objectives and aims. "One hallmark of wisdom in the context of any struggle is to avoid knee-jerk rejection and uncritical acceptance" (West, 1993, p. 25). At this stage, Black faculty are encouraged to pause and assess the situation, recalibrate, and then pursue inventive pedagogical approaches to redirect the oppressive nature of the classroom.

Strategy #1: Expect Marginalization in the PWI Classroom

To overcome naiveté, I had to quickly learn that the oppressive environments within the multicultural classroom are to be expected (Basow et al., 2013). For White students at PWIs, our Black faces become avatars of political correctness. It is assumed by our White students that we come with a set agenda to brainwash them toward radical or "woke" thinking and unscrupulous intentions to exert our power as faculty members over them. This awareness should marshal the realization for Black faculty that supremacist ideology is omnipresent in the academy, and instructional marginalization becomes a byproduct of one's positionality.

Feagin (2002) and Kendi and Blain (2021) theorize that a white supremacist way of thinking is inextricably linked to the hegemony in American society. Here, it becomes necessary to discern that supremacist ideology is manifested through every societal structure (health, law enforcement, education, etc.), and marginalization becomes the outcome in which inequity is condoned, validated, and reproduced in society. Students at PWIs, as members of mainstream society, become unwitting participants of supremacist thinking. Although faculty are symbols of expertise and power in American culture, the Black instructor is perceived as "other" and less capable than the White, male, heterosexual norm (Yancy, 2018). In the email cited at the beginning of the article, my former student confides, "I had never had a teacher of color." The student's statement, while innocuous, signals her unfamiliarity with a Black person in a position of authority. Students in multicultural classrooms at PWIs, like other members of society, come to accept the supremacist ideology as their truth and resist instructors who do not represent the status quo representation of faculty. This dominant ideology in society makes certain hegemonic values and ideas natural within the academy. Students in PWI classrooms are unaware of supremacist ideology because it is ubiquitous and invisible, nor can they recognize their complicit role in its' influence (Marx, 2004; Perry et al., 2009).

To be an effective educator within the context of a PWI, the naïve Black faculty member must have an endosseous understanding—a consciousness that resonates within one's bones—that the politics of difference permeates the academy. Further, Black faculty must fully absorb that the fight against marginality is not against resistant students but a pervasive and profound ideology that bolsters hegemony. Black faculty must comprehend that the battle is sociopolitical and not personal in nature, and one must uphold professionalism while maintaining self-assurance. As a strategy, Black faculty members must be cognizant that White students are more inclined to mimic the ideology of the bourgeois academy, act as surrogates for hegemony, and hold more power over Black instructors in society and in the PWI classroom. This new "second sight" (Itzigsohn & Brown; Jackson, 1999), or critical awareness about the politics of difference, affords Black faculty the wherewithal to endure hegemonic spaces in academia. Ultimately, Black faculty have two options: fall victim to students' psychic terror in the PWI classroom or learn how to respond with transformational teachings that will allow one to be an effective Black instructor in a climate of marginalization.

Level 2: Transformational Teaching

The classroom remains the most radical space of opportunity and struggle within the academy (hooks, 1994). The transformational teaching stage is differentiated from the first stage because it is within this existential space that one learns "how to be" in the academy. By the time the Black faculty member reaches this level, they have already undergone a shift in perspective or outlook about their institution's culture. They are now ready to find teaching and learning opportunities that may successfully attend to the learners in the PWI classroom. It is at this level of high perception that faculty of difference grasp that they can use their presence at PWIs as a conduit for change by engaging in shrewd pedagogical opposition full of optimism, truth, and creative scholarship. West (1993) declares that those of us who are highly critical of the PWI must try to subvert it from within the PWI. West argues that we must find creative ways within the context of our lives to resist the various forms of marginalization and embrace a new politics of difference; these artistic techniques may serve to counteract the hegemony in the PWI classroom.

As a tactic to soften the road for the inexperienced, the Black faculty member must wrestle with critical precepts about race. The line between surrendering and surviving in PWI classrooms is thin and requires serious contemplation. One can either linger in this ineffective angry state, not teach in a way that is full of integrity, offer a watered-down curriculum to pacify students, leave, or redirect this emotional energy into more profitable outcomes for one's students and career. As instructors who believe in advancing the human condition, we should always choose the latter.

Strategy #2: Leverage Whiteness as Pedagogy

Quite possibly, the theory of whiteness has surfaced in recent decades as the most compelling concept to address racism (Gorski & Parekh, 2020; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Mayor, 2018; Sleeter, 2017). Whiteness is not about the color of individuals or inciting guilt in mainstream society. Rather, *whiteness* is the "overt and subliminal socialization processes and practices, power structures, laws, privilege, and life experiences that favor the White racial group over all others" (Helms, 2017, p. 718). Whiteness is a way to critique issues of privilege and power by those who have it and those who remain at its mercy. This means university classrooms, where serious discussions about diversity transpire, should be natural places to unearth and dismantle racist systems designed to meet the needs of Whites (Cabrera et

al., 2017; Rogers-Ard et al., 2013). Situating whiteness, rather than racism, as the linchpin of anti-racism focuses attention on how White people's identities are shaped by a broader racist culture and brings to the forefront the duties of White people to tackle racism (Giroux, 1997).

In our passion for excellence and equity, Black faculty may inadvertently flout one of the very principles of diversity to which many of us subscribe: meet students where they are. It is important to teach in ways that support student growth and allow them to be reflective of their inherent biases through approaches that unpack whiteness. Black faculty must work within their context to "both interrogate the ways in which they are bound by certain conventions and to learn from and build on these norms and models" (West, 1993, p. 25). Over the years, there are five key experiences that I have exercised in my classroom space, which infused whiteness as a pedagogical tool.

1. Vulnerable dialogues: To teach White students explicitly about privilege, power, and identity, it is important to begin the semester with relationship-building interactions. Students are more likely to engage in tough topics later in the semester when they have had an opportunity to get to know the instructor and trust you at the start of the semester. Through lectures that began with personal check-ins and short reflective assignments, I got a chance to know my learners and their fears about engaging in controversial topics. I also became vulnerable and shared stories about my children and partner. These little acts allowed my students to see me as a full human—mother, friend, wife, and educator. Additionally, I shared my missteps as someone who strives to be culturally competent. These adjustments allowed me to get to know my students and them me. Dialogues and assignments that hold space for vulnerability offer opportunities for the students and Black faculty to see each other as individuals. Kubota (2002), for example, shares this classroom tactic in the following way:

> I began to use my cultural and linguistic background as a tool for raising students' awareness that they must acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to successfully negotiate in our culturally and linguistically diverse society. In the beginning of a course, I disclose my cultural and linguistic background in as detailed as possible. I even mention some of the painful experiences I have had in interacting with students in the past. This strategy appears to accentuate the problematic of Otherness and marginality, but the important point is to appropriate this Otherness to our advantage. (p. 303)

2. News anchor approach: The field of multicultural education is littered with incredible DEI literature. When sharing these ideas with students in PWIs, place distance between the ideas and you.

Much like the Socratic discourse method (Knezic et al., 2010), the news anchor approach removes your passion for the subject and presents the diversity scholarship in systematic, objective, and dispassionate ways. In sharing the research, you might pose the content as, "According to researcher 'x'" or "What does scholar 'x' mean when s/he says…". Hill-Jackson (2007) suggests that objective or non-political pedagogical approaches in presenting course content can encourage independent student growth in a way that decreases their feelings of being attacked and removes you as the attacker. When well implemented, the news anchor technique allows you to confer a neutral stance to detach the message from the messenger (Amobi, 2007). This approach is not a co-option of one's teaching integrity but a reconciliation of the enormous need for intellectual compromise considering nefarious and hegemonic activities within the academy (See Weber and Mitchell (2002) and Milner (2005) for more on identity and teaching).

3. Mirror approach*:* Activities for students in a multicultural classroom at a PWI should not bring resentment or frustration with the content. Instead, the assignments should allow White students to reflect on their own culture while developing empathy for the experiences of others. For example, I use an assignment known as the identity wheel in which students characterize the persons in their everyday social circle. Students are required to unpack their social media contacts to determine the extent to which the members of their sphere of influence represent diverse relationships. It is sobering for students who espouse diversity to see how closely their well-meaning intentions champion real-life relationships. Self-reflection is the linchpin for advancing multiculturalism, which focuses students' attention on how their identities are fashioned by a larger hegemonic culture and brings to the forefront the obligation that White people should have to combat racism (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Giroux, 1997; Jardina, 2019).

4. Guest speakers*:* As a Black professor, there are certain topics that should be avoided in the multicultural classroom. Because students may transfer ill feelings about some diversity topics onto the Black professor (Jackson, 1999), students' normative gazes will quickly turn to levying poor teaching evaluations because of their ambivalence or outright hatred for the topic of multicultural education. Student evaluations of their courses severely impact a professor's career, but women faculty of color are particularly at risk (Shorter, 2023, para. 1). Bavishi et al. (2010) calculate the impact of a professor's ethnicity and gender on teaching evaluations:

> …students' perceptions of university professors are influenced by professors' department, gender, and ethnicity, suggesting that differ-

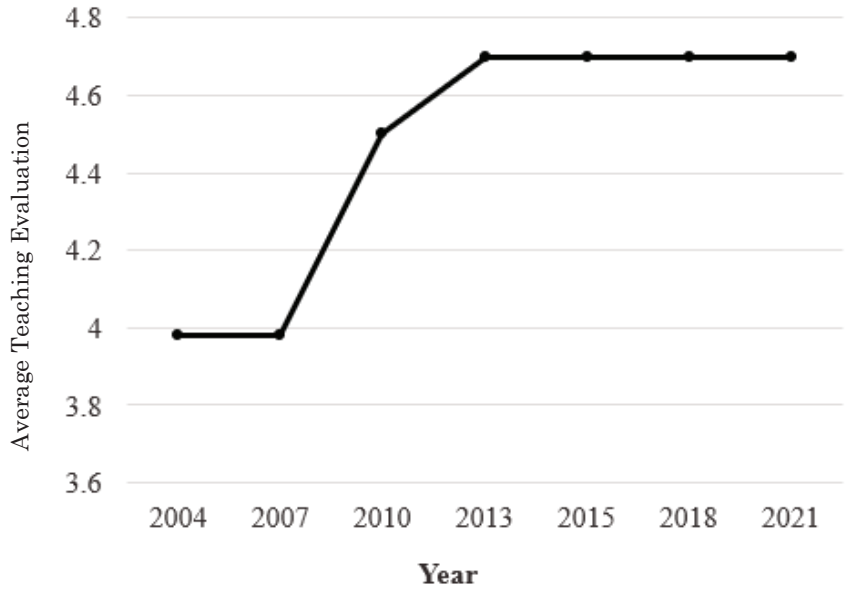
> ent groups may receive different treatments. Science professors were viewed in a significantly more positive light compared to humanities professors while African American professors were viewed as less competent and legitimate compared to Caucasian professors. These results therefore point to the challenges and obstacles that such groups and others may face in classrooms, research, and academia. (p. 9)

Consider inviting a guest speaker, a White colleague, who is well-versed in topics such as White privilege to present controversial topics. I have found that students are more open to learning about a provocative issue when it is taught by a sincere and patient diversity educator who is also White. In the early years of taking on contentious topics in my multicultural class, my teaching average was about 3.9 on a 5.0 Likert-like scale (see Figure 2). Around year four, I implemented this tactic of outsourcing discussions on whiteness and privilege, and my average teaching evaluation score for this course increased to 4.2. On occasion, when I dare to take on tough topics in the classroom, then my evaluations are most assuredly impacted (Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2009; Gatwiri et al., 2021).

5. Tone*:* Topics related to DEI are difficult to teach but equally brutal for the uninitiated to learn. As instructors who seek to meet our

Figure 2

Average Evaluation for Teaching by Year for Hill-Jackson's Multicultural Foundations Course at a PWI, 2004-2021



learners where they are, it is important to consider their positionality and experiences by adjusting the overall attitude or tone of our course. I toiled and adjusted the tone of the course in two ways. First, not all multicultural textbooks meet the needs of White students. The content in many sources is perfect for advanced diversity audiences but may be delimiting for White students who are early in their multicultural journey. I identified multicultural literature and resources that are more suitable for my students' level of readiness. Paul Gorski's *Critical Multicultural Pavilion* (n.d.) is a well-resourced site to begin identifying and building your course library. Second, I adjusted my personal posture and temperament. I studied as a critical race theorist and brought that seriousness to my course early in my teaching career. I was surprised to learn, through feedback and course evaluations, my students felt personally attacked. In my arrogance, I dismissed such accusations but soon learned to validate their feelings. I softened my approach and (a) created a new climate that was warm and welcoming; (b) began each lecture with a joke that was focused on K-12 situations; and (c) learned to patiently respond to, and not react to, the rare student who questioned a reading or my authority. I learned that tone is a subtle but powerful form of effective communication (Lunenburg, 2010) for the multicultural classroom.

These measures may appear overly conciliatory, but cultural workers at this level reconcile the pain of teaching on the margins of a hegemonic system with the reality that their mere presence can exact meaningful change in the academy. They must perform work defined by normative accomplishments (i.e., high student evaluations) and acceptance. Black faculty must adapt our egalitarian teaching style to an accommodationist one, not for mere survival of one's career but to adjust to students' readiness to engage in diversity issues. This does not mean that our courses lose integrity or thoroughness. In so doing, the Black faculty member chooses to redirect a focus from one's survival in the academy to a new commitment to the learners and their needs.

Level Three: Belvedere

The etymology of the word belvedere is quite interesting: "bel" derives from the word beauty, and "vedere" means view. The belvedere or beautiful view level combines the sensibilities of the transformational teaching stage with a renovated mindset. The belvedere represents a well-earned vantage point that is merited by making plenty of mistakes but refined by years of experience. At the belvedere or highest level, the Black faculty member commands a fine view of the multicultural landscape at PWIs. One usually arrives at this point after many

years of intentional teaching to counteract deficit thinking and serious reflection on the classroom. It is at this juncture, 16 years into my time at a PWI, that the belvedere reveals two critical ideas: there exists a discreet politicization of Black faculty's identity and role and it is important to protect multicultural learners and learning.

First, the major institutions of society—including the academy—replicate the reality of systemic racism. The PWI, as an American enterprise, embodies centuries-old conventions around race and racism. "Clearly, for the U.S. system of racial oppression to last for centuries the white racial frame's ideas, images, and emotions had to become deeply imbedded in the everyday operations of the important organizational and institutional structures of society" (Feagin, 2013, p. 161). The White racial frame or whiteness ideology that validates and reinforces racial oppression manifests in every aspect of the academy—including the multicultural classroom. The realization of whiteness as a lens through which the Black professor is perceived is important in creating a counter-Black frame that will ensure your productivity in the professor's role (Thomas & Asunka, 1995).

Second, Black faculty at PWIs represent the next generation of cultural workers. As cultural workers or bridge-builders, we have been conscripted to continue the fight for civil rights. As Black faculty, we have an incredible opportunity to activate multicultural philosophies among our White sisters and brothers. The most difficult places to perform diversity pedagogy are at once the same places for which these teachings are most needed. If Black faculty are to have a positive impact on our students, then we must recalibrate the aim of our multicultural foundations course and avoid the trap of trying to develop diversity allies in one semester. Rather, our chief responsibility is to introduce a new way to appreciate DEI issues and help them unlearn inaccurate definitions and assumptions that will stay with our students for years to come.

As Black faculty, it appears counter-intuitive to protect your students when you find yourself under attack. By shifting your efforts onto the students' well-being and frame of thinking, you are also protecting course objectives as well as improving your teaching efficacy in the PWI classroom. It took about a decade into my tenure teaching the multicultural foundations course, but I learned to love, welcome, and empathize with my White students by realizing that they have been sheltered and socialized in a uni-perspective way (Hill-Jackson et al., 2007). Consequently, I enjoyed a precipitous rise in my students' evaluations of my teaching from an average score of 4.2 to 4.7 on a 5.0-point scale. If we are to be effective in our teachings, then democratic concepts must resonate in students' hearts and minds over time and cat-

apult these learners to live out egalitarian principles in unimaginable ways. White students are the largest demographic in society, and these large numbers intimate a potential for them to be major influencers in American society. The multicultural classroom, therefore, is a widely available and revolutionary space to advance short- and long-term DEI ideas (Hu-DeHart, 1993, 2000).

Strategy #3: Yield to the Long Game

Resist the urge to look for swift instructional gains and rest in the assurance that our pedagogical labor will have long-term returns. The Black faculty member must have stamina and patience for the long game—the hope and potential to influence students' respect of, or appreciation for, diversity as a crucial component of American society. Since our White brothers and sisters occupy spaces of institutional power and change, we must use our interactions with them as opportunities to bring them along in the underappreciated meaning of an inclusive society (Tatum, 1994; Thompson & Tyagi, 1993).

As cultural workers who struggle silently in academe, this remains our charge in the ongoing fight for civil rights. Marginality, on the surface, appears and feels restrictive for the Black faculty member. But hooks (1994) points to the possibilities for marginalization and proposes that:

> Marginality is much more than a site of deprivation: in fact…it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of marginality one wishes to lose—to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center—but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds. (pp. 149-150)

West (1993) reasons that with a revived commitment to weather the assault from the status quo, the rebirthed intellectual can emerge with revamped self-assurance and political astuteness. West concludes:

> The most significant theme of the new cultural politics of difference is the agency, capacity and ability of human beings who have been culturally degraded, politically oppressed and economically exploited ……This theme neither romanticizes nor idealizes marginalized peoples. Rather it accentuates their humanity and tries to attenuate the institutional constraints on their life-chances for surviving and thriving… the new cultural politics of difference affirms the perennial quest for the precious ideals of individuality and democracy by

> digging deep in the depths of human particularities and social specificities in order to construct new kinds of connections, affinities and communities across empire, nation, region, race, gender, age, and sexual orientation. (p. 29)

Black professors in the ivory tower must continue to find a way to strive for self-protection and excellence within a system that never was intended for their inclusion.

Concluding Thoughts and Implications

In the face of such calculated or benign resistance in the multicultural foundations classroom, Black faculty must progress—armed with counterhegemonic strategies that form your shield of protection in the PWI classroom. The Levels Theory as a construct underscores the complex nature of the Black faculty member's experiences in a multicultural foundations course at a PWI. In this way, the marginalization that engulfs the Black faculty member's experience is no longer a condition of disadvantage but becomes one's superpower.

At level one of the Levels Theory, the Black faculty member is naïve and overcomes their innocence with an acute awareness of the pervasive and pernicious nature of white supremacy. If one expects hegemony, you know how to prepare for it mentally and practically. At the transformation level, the Black faculty member exercises a heightened consciousness about hegemony by operationalizing whiteness as an innovative strategy to effectively teach students at PWIs. I have discovered that it takes an astute scholar endowed with second sight to move from a stage of aloofness to political self-actualization. When whiteness is used as a pedagogical strategy that privileges such teaching tools as vulnerability, self-reflection, objectivity, guest speakers, and tone, the once tense classroom space can be transformed into a place of possibility for students and productivity for Black faculty. West (1993) advises that "the new cultural politics of difference consists of creative responses to the precise circumstances of our present moment" (p. 5). The overarching theme of the transformation level impresses upon Black faculty to consider one major idea: to meet White learners where they are.

Finally, the last stage or belvedere level of the Levels Theory, is characterized by those of us who understand that our teachings in multicultural foundations courses must transcend the boundaries of our classroom. We find vindication in knowing that DEI outcomes have a life cycle longer than one semester. The belvedere level signifies a lengthy vision—one that seeks to include allies for the long term as opposed to a course that alienates students for the short term. Ulti-

mately, the Levels Theory may help marginalized instructors deconstruct classroom resistance to productively navigate the treacherous teaching terrain of multicultural courses at PWIs. As I reflect on 16 years of teaching a multicultural foundations course at a PWI, I can honestly convey that the perspective from the belvedere level is full of hope. The belvedere level, after the difficulties encountered at the naiveté and transformation levels, ultimately afforded me a beautiful view and an instructional vision to support my students who found their way to my classroom. As one who has achieved a belvedere mindset, I embrace my charge to be a freedom fighter in the ivory tower.

At the same time, I still worry for Black faculty and other instructors of difference caught in West's (1993) double-bind, who teach DEI-related courses at inconsistent rates when compared to their White peers (Jimenez et al., 2019), forced to evaluate the structural and cultural inadequacies of PWIs for which their livelihood of research, service, and teaching are professionally dependent. In the midst of nationwide anti-DEI legislation that seeks to restrict diversity offices and coursework (Bryant & Appleby, 2023), misplaced hysteria about culturally relevant pedagogy (Ray & Gibbons, 2021), and challenges to Affirmative Action through the United States Supreme Court's ruling in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard University* (2023) to strike down affirmative action and other racial and ethnic preferences in college admissions, never before have the lives and livelihoods of Black Faculty been more threatened. The urgency of now is clear: There is a critical need to critique multicultural foundations classrooms at PWIs as a sociopolitical backdrop in which power and meaning are consistently negotiated. The multicultural foundations course serves as another site for calculating the politics of difference with the hope to elevate remedies to support Black faculty. Instructional guidance is crucial as the presence of Black faculty in higher education remain disproportionate when compared to the larger society (NCES, 2022) and as attrition among faculty of color is on the rise (Dolezal, 2022)—a potentially tragic loss of the talent and expertise (DeWitty & Murray, 2020). The ways the PWIs function for all faculty often contribute to a culture that further marginalizes faculty of color (Dolezal, 2022), and these experiences do not end at the door of the university classroom for Black faculty.

In my personal teaching experiences with hundreds of college students over the years, I learned to teach from the margin while navigating the pitfalls and not just survive but thrive at a PWI. As I ponder those early years of my teaching career, I would tell my immature self to be patient and that it is alright if you do not reach all students within the confines of your PWI classroom. I would implore

my inexperienced self to heavily mentor those who get it, make concessions for those who do not care to get it, and model patience and care for those who need time for the seedlings of DEI to blossom. I would advise my novice self to practice what I preach and meet my White learners where they are, as these students in my PWI classroom may someday become partners in the fight for justice—so teach with rigor, resourcefulness, but most of all, teach strategically so you can live to fight another day. As a final point, I would share the email from my student who wrote to me nearly a decade after taking my multicultural foundations course. It is fitting to give my former student, my unlikely ally in DEI, the last word in this article: *"I wanted you to know that I am now pursuing my Ph.D. from [redacted university name] with a focus on social justice and equity within the classroom…. forgive my attitude as an undergrad."*

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