

Reflection Worksheet for Higher Education Professionals

Supporting Black Student Leaders Navigating Racial Battle Fatigue and Civic Engagement under Anti-DEI Legislation

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1. Background Summary

This handout is informed by the study titled “Navigating Expression: Understanding the Impact of Anti-DEI and Anti-CRT Legislation on Campus Civic Engagement.” The study investigates how Black student leaders, particularly those involved in campus organizations or activist spaces, navigate racial battle fatigue (RBF) in Florida and Georgia—two states with some of the most restrictive anti-DEI and anti-CRT legislation in higher education. These policies undermine identity-affirming programs, create confusion around language and institutional support, and exacerbate campus racial climates.

The study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF), first conceptualized by Smith (2004, 2007), which describes the cumulative psychological, physiological, and behavioral stress responses experienced by Black individuals in racially hostile environments. In higher education, this framework helps explain how Black student leaders encounter exhaustion, withdrawal, frustration, and emotional labor when forced to navigate environments that invalidate their identities and leadership efforts. Manifestations of RBF include anxiety, sleeplessness, hypervigilance, emotional disinvestment, and physical symptoms such as headaches or illness. These stressors are often compounded for students who must constantly advocate for DEI principles while being surveilled or penalized under anti-DEI laws.

By incorporating RBF into the study, the research captures how systemic barriers and policy landscapes directly impact students’ civic engagement, mental health, and access to leadership development. The project also draws on Critical Hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), emphasizing how students resist despair by building community, engaging spiritually, and redefining leadership through culturally grounded practices. Together, these frameworks provide a lens for understanding how students survive and resist in environments that simultaneously call for their engagement while restricting the platforms through which they lead.

This worksheet is designed to support higher education professionals, particularly those working in student affairs and leadership education, as they reflect on how anti-DEI and anti-CRT legislation in Florida and Georgia has shaped the civic engagement and well-being of Black student leaders. The questions below are intended to prompt critical reflection and action planning aligned with the findings from the study, “Navigating Expression: Understanding the Impact of Anti-DEI and Anti-CRT Legislation on Campus Civic Engagement.” Use this worksheet in team meetings, strategic planning sessions, or professional development programs.

2. Reflection Questions

1. How are we preparing students to engage civically in a restricted policy environment?
 - Consider what civic learning opportunities exist on your campus.
 - Do your programs teach students about local/state/federal policymaking and how they can participate?
 - How are historically marginalized students, especially Black student leaders, equipped to understand the impact of legislation on their rights and advocacy?
2. Are our student engagement and funding practices equitable across identity-based organizations?
 - Evaluate your funding policies: Are student organizations centered on racial or cultural identity receiving the same visibility, access, and support as others?
 - In the face of anti-DEI policies, how are you ensuring student leaders from these organizations remain supported?
 - Do your advising models address the distinct emotional and civic labor of students of color leading affinity groups?
3. What community partnerships or alumni networks can be leveraged to support Black student leadership and civic agency?
 - Consider partnerships with alumni, local civic groups, and national organizations focused on Black civic engagement.
 - How can these external supports supplement the erosion of on-campus DEI infrastructure?
 - Are there existing relationships with Black professionals, educators, or elected officials that could be brought into student mentoring programs?

4. How can we build peer mentoring and leadership capacity among students to navigate the impacts of anti-DEI legislation in higher education?
 - What peer mentorship structures currently exist on your campus for student leaders of color?
 - How can experienced student leaders support newer leaders in understanding institutional and policy dynamics?
 - How can mentorship models be adapted to center healing, solidarity, and leadership growth amid racially hostile climates?
5. How are we equipping student leaders with the capacity and efficacy to understand state anti-DEI legislation and federal executive orders—and to challenge miseducation with accurate civic learning?
 - Do your leadership and civic engagement trainings include accessible overviews of relevant legislation?
 - How are students supported in interpreting misinformation or misunderstandings about DEI and CRT?
 - What curricular or co-curricular interventions are in place to promote civic literacy, political education, and justice-informed leadership?

3. Civic Engagement Resources

- Campus Compact: www.compact.org
- NASPA Civic Learning & Democratic Engagement: <https://naspa.org/division/civic-learning-and-democratic-engagement>
- UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement: <https://naspa.org/division/civic-learning-and-democratic-engagement>
- AAC&U Civic Engagement Resources: www.aacu.org

4. References

Smith, W. A., Hung, M., & Franklin, J. D. (2011). Racial battle fatigue and the miseducation of Black men: Racial microaggressions, societal problems, and environmental stress. *Journal of Negro Education*, 80(1), 63–82.

Duncan-Andrade, J. M. R. (2009). Note to educators: Hope required when growing roses in concrete. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(2), 181–194.