


# Chapter 5

## Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as a Shield in the War on Social Justice in Higher Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Social justice and higher education are deeply connected, with institutions playing a key role in fostering equity and inclusivity. However, the “War on Social Justice” seeks to dismantle DEI initiatives, particularly in education. States like Texas and Florida have passed legislation limiting DEI efforts, raising concerns about academic freedom. Culturally responsive pedagogy offers a strategy to counter these attacks by promoting inclusive teaching. Upholding DEI is essential for a just and equitable academic community.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The “war on social justice” focuses squarely on schools as a battleground for students’ ideological and intellectual souls. In Arkansas, Florida, and Texas, Republican-led legislation banning Black history, ethnic and gender studies, and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (Harris & Atler, 2022; Sargent, 2022; Levin, 2022) in schools both at the K-12 and higher education levels (Giroux, 2007; Fl. HB 7, 2022; Ida. HB 377, 2021; Ia. H.B. 802, 2021) position such material as “anti-white propaganda”. Critics argue this legislation is an attempt to silence and erase the experiences and contributions of marginalized communities, which undermine efforts to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students. Culturally responsive pedagogies can be a powerful tool for addressing anti-Blackness in college classrooms. By acknowledging and addressing the ways in which Black students and other marginalized groups have been historically excluded and marginalized within academia, educators can work towards a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Patricia Hill Collins notes that classrooms are sites of citizenship development (2009). The removal of information about the experiences and histories of minoritized populations then effectively dooms members of those groups to perpetual social and economic degradation and seeks to limit a widespread inclusive democracy (Giroux, 2022). Davis (2015) argues that enacting counter-resistance cannot solely rely on passing bills or legislation. Instead, she contends that the key to achieving substantial and lasting change lies in the proactive mobilization of movements. Davis emphasizes that historical transformations are brought about by the collective actions of regular individuals, underscoring the crucial role of the masses in effecting significant societal shifts (Davis, 2015).

Classrooms, then, especially those on college campuses, are important spaces of mobilization through education that permits political dialogue (Freire et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Smith, 2021). By employing culturally relevant pedagogy, classrooms support the formation of democratic student-citizens to address the continual significance of diverse perspectives and intellectual thought meant to develop more inclusive environments as sites of deep learning. In addressing the ongoing significance of culturally diverse perspectives and intellectual thought, the cultural transition of higher education plays a crucial role.

## **THE CULTURAL TRANSITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

The cultural transition of higher education has been a pivotal force in shaping classrooms that embrace diverse perspectives, foster democratic student-citizenship, and promote inclusive environments for sustaining cultural heterogeneity and di-

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