



DEI History and Backlash

FACILITATOR GUIDE



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Timeline of DEI in Policy, Corporate Responsibility, and Backlash

This timeline traces the evolution of **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)** from **Black Codes** to contemporary corporate distancing from DEI, illustrating how backlash to racial progress has historically aligned with an anti-Black, pro-white agenda.

1865-1866: Black Codes

- After the Civil War, Southern states enacted **Black Codes** to restrict Black Americans' freedom, reinforcing racial subjugation despite the abolition of slavery.
- These laws limited Black labor rights, movement, and economic opportunities, ensuring a racial hierarchy favoring white dominance.

1877-1965: Jim Crow Era

- **Jim Crow** laws legalized racial segregation and discrimination, upheld by **Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)** (“separate but equal”).
- Violence (lynchings, race massacres) enforced white supremacy, while disenfranchisement laws excluded Black voters.
- Corporate America largely mirrored these practices, benefiting from racial exclusion and exploitation.

1954-1965: Civil Rights Movement

- Civil Rights Act & Affirmative Action
- **Brown v. Board of Education (1954)** overturned segregation, leading to white backlash (e.g., school closures, private segregation academies).
- Civil Rights Act of **1964** outlawed racial discrimination in public places and employment.
- **1965 Voting Rights Act** ended racist voting barriers, and **Executive Order 11246** established affirmative action, requiring federal contractors to ensure workplace diversity.
- **Corporate America:** Pressured by civil rights activists and legal mandates, some businesses began diversifying workforces but faced white resistance (e.g., “reverse discrimination” claims).

1970s-1990s: DEI & Affirmative Action Under Fire

- **1980s:** Reagan-era policies weakened affirmative action and civil rights enforcement, aligning with a broader conservative movement framing DEI as “special treatment” for Black people.
- **1990s: California’s Prop 209 (1996)** banned affirmative action in public hiring and education, setting the stage for future anti-DEI efforts.

2010s-Present: Corporate DEI Growth & Backlash

2020: George Floyd Protests

- Corporate DEI Expansion
- The **murder of George Floyd (May 2020)** ignited a global racial justice movement, forcing corporations and nonprofits to confront systemic racism.
- Companies issued **anti-racist statements**, pledged billions to DEI initiatives, and expanded diversity hiring programs.
- **DEI & ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance)** investing gained momentum, reflecting a broader corporate responsibility push.

2021-Present: DEI Backlash & Corporate Retreat

- **Conservative backlash** grew, framing DEI as “woke indoctrination” and “anti-white.”
- **2023 Supreme Court ruling** dismantled affirmative action in college admissions, fueling calls to end DEI in workplaces.
- **State bans on DEI (e.g., Florida, Texas)** targeted corporate diversity programs, forcing rollbacks.
- **Corporate responses:**
 - Many companies, fearing legal and reputational risks, **quietly cut DEI budgets** and dissolved chief diversity officer roles.
 - Right-wing advocacy groups **pressured businesses** to distance from racial justice initiatives.

Present & Future: Project 2025 & the Anti-DEI Movement

- **Project 2025 (Heritage Foundation initiative)** aims to gut DEI policies in government, weaken civil rights protections, and erase discussions of systemic racism from federal agencies.
- This aligns with a **historical pattern:**
 - **Post-Reconstruction: Black Codes & Jim Crow reversed Black progress.**
 - **Post-Civil Rights Era: White backlash attacked affirmative action.**
 - **Post-George Floyd: DEI retrenchment follows initial corporate support.**

Conclusion: The Cycle of Racial Progress & White Backlash

- Every step toward **equity** has met an **anti-Black pushback** under the guise of “protecting white rights.”
- Corporate America often **adapts to pressure** rather than leading racial justice efforts.
- The future of DEI depends on resisting organized efforts to roll back civil rights gains under the false pretense of “ending divisiveness.”

Let's break this down into **three key areas** for deeper analysis:

1. **Policy & Government: How DEI & Civil Rights Protections Have Been Rolled Back**
2. **Corporate Case Studies: The Pattern of DEI Expansion and Retraction**
3. **Project 2025: The Latest Push to Dismantle DEI & Civil Rights Protections**

I. Policy & Government: The Attack on DEI & Civil Rights Protections

Affirmative Action (1965-2023)

- **Civil Rights Act of 1964:** Prohibited racial discrimination in workplaces and public accommodations.
- **Executive Order 11246 (1965):** Required government contractors to **affirmatively** ensure equal employment opportunity.
- **Bakke v. UC Regents (1978):** First major ruling against race-based affirmative action.
- **Grutter v. Bollinger (2003):** Upheld affirmative action but set a **25-year limit** on its necessity.
- **Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard (2023):** **Struck down** race-based affirmative action in higher education, emboldening attacks on DEI.

State-Level Attacks on DEI (2023-Present)

- **Florida (SB 266, 2023):** Banned DEI programs in public universities and restricted race-related training in workplaces.
- **Texas (SB 17, 2023):** Ended DEI offices in public universities, with broader corporate effects.
- **Other States (Tennessee, Oklahoma, Iowa, etc.):** Passed or proposed similar anti-DEI laws.

Government Agencies Under Attack

- **Trump's 2020 Executive Order 13950:** Banned federal contractors from conducting racial sensitivity training (revoked by Biden in 2021).
- **Project 2025's Vision:**
 - **Dismantling federal DEI programs**
 - **Rewriting history education** to remove discussions of systemic racism
 - **Restoring Trump's DEI bans** in federal agencies and military

2. Corporate Case Studies: The Rise & Retreat of DEI

The George Floyd Effect: Corporate DEI Boom (2020-2022)

In response to the 2020 racial justice protests:

- **Companies pledged over \$340 billion** to racial equity initiatives (McKinsey estimate).
- **Diversity hiring goals increased**, and many corporations hired **Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs)**.
- **Financial investments:**
 - **Bank of America** pledged \$1 billion toward racial equity programs.
 - **Google & Apple** expanded DEI funding.
 - **Netflix & Disney** pledged funds to Black-owned businesses and diverse content.

2023-Present: Corporate DEI Retraction Amid Backlash

After the **Supreme Court ruling on affirmative action (2023)** and state-level DEI bans:

- **Major corporations scaled back DEI efforts** quietly.
- **CDO positions were eliminated** (many lasted less than three years).
- **Right-wing boycotts and shareholder pressure** (e.g., Bud Light, Disney) led companies to distance themselves from DEI.

Examples of Corporate DEI Retrenchment:

<i>Company</i>	<i>DEI Commitment (2020-2022)</i>	<i>Backlash & Retraction (2023-Present)</i>
Wells Fargo	\$50M for Black-owned businesses	Scaled back DEI hiring programs after lawsuits.
Google	DEI hiring goals and racial justice donations	Laid off DEI staff, shifted messaging.
Disney	Pledged to promote diverse content	Under political attack (Florida) and scaled back inclusion efforts.
McDonald's	Set goals for diverse franchise ownership	Faced lawsuits for race-based policies.
Adidas & Nike	Strong racial justice marketing	Quietly reduced DEI efforts under legal pressure.

Why the Retreat?

- **Legal Risks:** Companies fear lawsuits over “reverse discrimination.”
- **Political Pressure:** Conservative groups frame DEI as anti-white.
- **Economic Shifts:** Recession fears make DEI budgets vulnerable.

3. Project 2025: The Latest Attack on DEI & Civil Rights Protections

What is Project 2025?

A **Heritage Foundation** initiative to reshape the U.S. government under a future Republican administration (especially if Trump wins in 2024). Its “**Mandate for Leadership**” plan includes:

- **Eliminating DEI programs** in federal agencies, military, and schools.
- **Defunding “woke” corporate initiatives** that promote racial equity.
- **Expanding state control over curricula** to block teaching about systemic racism.

How This Aligns with the Historical Anti-Black, Pro-White Agenda

- **Post-Reconstruction (1877):** Black Codes & Jim Crow dismantled Black political and economic gains.
- **Post-Civil Rights Movement (1970s-90s):** “Reverse discrimination” narratives undermined affirmative action.
- **Post-George Floyd (2023-Present):** Conservative backlash pushed companies and institutions to abandon DEI.

Corporate & Policy Future: What’s Next?

- **Legal fights over corporate DEI policies** are increasing.
- **States may expand bans on affirmative action in hiring.**
- **2024 election** will determine whether DEI is permanently weakened or reinvigorated.

Final Thoughts: The Cycle of Racial Progress & Backlash

Every moment of racial progress—**Reconstruction, Civil Rights, George Floyd-era DEI**—has triggered **white backlash** under the guise of “fairness” or “neutrality.” **The retreat from DEI today is part of that cycle.**

Case Study: Target

Target Corporation has recently faced significant scrutiny over its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, particularly concerning its hiring practices for formerly incarcerated individuals and its broader DEI commitments.

Hiring Practices for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

In 2014, Target proactively removed the criminal history question from its employment applications nationwide. This change aimed to ensure that candidates were evaluated based on their qualifications and experience before considering criminal backgrounds. The company stated that it would gather criminal background information in the final stages of the hiring process to provide a fair opportunity for all applicants. corporate.target.com

However, in 2018, Target settled allegations that its criminal background check policy disproportionately affected African-American and Latino applicants. The settlement led to Target agreeing to work with experts to adopt valid guidelines for using criminal records in hiring decisions, aiming to eliminate barriers for qualified individuals with criminal histories. naacpldf.org

Commitment to DEI and Recent Rollbacks

Following the 2020 racial justice protests, Target, like many corporations, expanded its DEI initiatives. The company set goals to increase Black employee representation, enhance Black customer experiences, and support Black-owned businesses. However, in January 2025, Target announced it would conclude several DEI programs, including its Racial Equity Action and Change (REACH) initiatives, by 2025. The company cited the evolving external landscape and insights shaping its strategy as reasons for these decisions. apnews.com

Public Response and Calls for Boycott

Target’s rollback of DEI initiatives has led to public backlash. Organizations like Twin Cities Pride have terminated Target’s sponsorship, emphasizing their commitment to LGBTQIA+ inclusion and equity. Progressive activists have also called for boycotts, urging consumers to support minority-owned brands directly. However, Black-owned brands associated with Target have expressed concerns that such boycotts could negatively impact their businesses, potentially leading to decreased sales and removal from Target shelves. nypost.com

Conclusion

Target's journey with DEI initiatives reflects the broader challenges corporations face in balancing inclusive practices with external pressures. While the company has made efforts to support marginalized communities and implement equitable hiring practices, recent rollbacks have sparked significant debate about the role of corporate responsibility in promoting diversity and inclusion.

Call to Action: Advancing Justice Through Meaningful Action and Systemic Change

As we confront the backlash against Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), we recognize that the fight for justice must evolve beyond rhetoric into actionable, measurable change. The need for fairness, access, inclusion, and representation (FAIR) is not just a corporate responsibility—it is a moral and spiritual obligation.

We call upon business leaders, policymakers, faith communities, and everyday citizens to move beyond performative commitments and embrace values-aligned solutions that produce real, measurable outcomes.

1. From Performative DEI to Outcomes-Based Justice

We demand measurable progress—not just statements of commitment, but clear data showing improvements in hiring, pay equity, promotion rates, workplace safety, and opportunities for marginalized communities.

We reject empty gestures and instead support policies and practices that drive systemic change, ensuring that equity is not just a checkbox but an institutional reality.

2. From Individualized Responsibility to Systems-Focused Change

Instead of relying solely on self-education and awareness, we call for structural solutions that embed equity into policies, leadership incentives, and workplace norms.

Organizations must design for inclusion at scale—rewarding inclusive leadership, reimagining hiring processes, and ensuring equitable career advancement for all employees.

3. From Division to Coalition-Building for Collective Justice

Justice is not a zero-sum game. We challenge leaders to build broad, multi-stakeholder coalitions that center fairness while engaging all who benefit from more equitable workplaces and communities. We call on corporate and faith leaders to reject false narratives that pit groups against each other and instead create environments where justice is seen as a shared benefit, not a threat.

4. From Token Representation to True Fairness and Accountability

We demand workplaces and institutions that reflect fairness in action—where policies proactively prevent bias, create accountability, and ensure equal access to resources, leadership, and economic opportunity.

We call on businesses, nonprofits, and faith organizations to embrace data-driven strategies that reveal disparities and actively correct them.

Final Charge: Justice Must Be More Than a Slogan

The backlash against DEI is not just a policy debate—it is a continuation of a long history of resistance to Black progress and justice. But history has shown that justice prevails when people of conscience stand firm.

To corporations:

If you once claimed to stand for equity, now is not the time to retreat. Align your values with meaningful, systemic solutions that withstand political pressure.

To policymakers:

Do not bow to fear-based narratives. Instead, champion policies that advance fairness, access, inclusion, and representation.

To the faith

community: Our scriptures demand that we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Neutrality is not an option when injustice is at our doorstep.

To the people:

Hold institutions accountable. Demand more than words—demand action, outcomes, and real justice.

The work ahead is clear. Will we rise to meet the challenge?

Talking Points for Black Clergy on DEI, Justice, and Liberation

1. Commitment to DEI as a Continuation of America’s Progress Toward Equality

- “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is not a trend—it is a moral imperative and a continuation of the unfinished work of justice in America.”
- “Our nation has a covenantal obligation to right the historical wrongs of slavery, segregation, and systemic discrimination. DEI is a tool to ensure that every individual has access to opportunities, dignity, and fairness.”
- “From Reconstruction to Civil Rights, progress has always been met with backlash. The attack on DEI today is no different from the resistance to Black progress we have seen throughout history.”
- “We do not just support DEI; we declare that it is essential for the moral and economic prosperity of this nation. To attack DEI is to attack the very principles of ‘liberty and justice for all.’”

2. Calling Out National Leaders & the White Supremacist Nature of Anti-DEI Rhetoric

- “Let’s be clear: The attacks on DEI are nothing more than a modern-day version of Black Codes—laws meant to suppress Black advancement and maintain white supremacy under the guise of neutrality.”
- “When politicians and corporate leaders dismantle DEI programs, they are reinforcing racial disparities, not eliminating them. It is an intentional move to preserve privilege and power.”
- “To those who claim DEI is ‘divisive’ or ‘anti-white,’ we ask: Why does equity scare you? Why does inclusion threaten you? The only reason to oppose fairness is if you benefit from injustice.”
- “Project 2025 and other efforts to erase DEI are a direct attack on Black progress, just as Jim Crow laws were designed to undercut the gains of Reconstruction. We will not be silent while history repeats itself.”
- “As clergy, we challenge every leader—whether in government, business, or the church—to stand for what is right. Silence in the face of injustice is complicity. Neutrality in the face of oppression is alignment with the oppressor.”

Closing Charge: A Call to Action

- “We call on businesses, nonprofits, and faith communities to remain steadfast in their DEI commitments, even as some retreat in fear.”
- “We urge policymakers to reject laws that erase racial progress and to champion policies that advance equity.”
- “And we remind our people that God is always on the side of the oppressed. Our work is not done until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream (Amos 5:24).”

Sermon Outline: “The Fight for Justice is the Fight for Righteousness”

Scripture: Amos 5:24 – *“But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”*

I. Introduction: The Call to Stand for Justice

- Open with a **reflection on the moral responsibility of the Church** in times of injustice.
 - Remind the congregation that **every major movement for Black liberation—from abolition to Civil Rights—has been rooted in faith and led by the Black Church.**
 - Pose the question: **If Jesus walked among us today, would He stand with those fighting for justice or those tearing it down?**
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II. Commitment to DEI as a Continuation of America’s Moral Progress

Key Scripture: Proverbs 31:8-9 – *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”*

- **Historical context:**
 - After the Civil War, Reconstruction sought to integrate freed Black people into society.
 - **The backlash:** Black Codes, Jim Crow, and voter suppression laws rolled back progress.
 - **Today’s anti-DEI movement follows the same pattern**—silencing Black voices, limiting Black advancement, and reinforcing inequality under the guise of “fairness.”
 - **Moral framing:**
 - DEI is **not just about hiring practices or education—it’s about justice.**
 - Just as the Civil Rights Act sought to correct past wrongs, **DEI initiatives are necessary to correct the racial disparities that persist today.**
 - To **oppose DEI is to oppose justice itself.**
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III. The Biblical Call to Repair What Has Been Broken

Key Scripture: Luke 19:8-9 – Zacchaeus repays those he has wronged, showing that **true repentance requires action.**

- **The Bible teaches that when harm is done, repair must follow.**
- **Systemic racism has harmed Black communities for generations.** It is not enough for America to simply say, “We are past that.”
- **DEI policies are one way to do the work of repair**—ensuring fair access to jobs, education, and economic opportunity.

- **Illustration:**
 - If someone stole your land, used it to grow wealth, and then, years later, told you, “Let’s just move on,” would that be justice?
 - **God calls us not to just acknowledge injustice but to correct it.**
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IV. Calling Out National Leaders: The White Supremacist Nature of Anti-DEI Efforts

Key Scripture: Isaiah 10:1-2 – *“Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed.”*

- **Project 2025, DEI bans, and the attack on affirmative action are not about fairness—they are about power.**
- **These efforts mirror Black Codes and Jim Crow laws:**
 - Just as Black Codes restricted economic and social mobility for freed slaves, anti-DEI policies restrict access to opportunity for Black and marginalized communities today.
 - Just as Jim Crow framed segregation as “separate but equal,” today’s leaders claim “race neutrality” while reinforcing racial disparities.
- **“Fairness” is a deception when the starting lines are unequal.**

Call to Action:

- **We must name this for what it is: modern-day white supremacy.**
 - **We will not allow history to repeat itself.**
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V. Closing Charge: A Call to Action

Key Scripture: Micah 6:8 – *“What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*

- **To the Church:** We must not be silent. Faith without works is dead. **We must push back against policies designed to erase progress.**
- **To corporations:** If you pledged support for Black lives in 2020, **your commitment should not fade just because the cameras are gone.**
- **To elected officials:** We demand policies that advance justice, not return us to a time when Black progress was criminalized.

Final Declaration:

“We will not be moved. We will not be silenced. We will not go back. Justice must roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

Certainly, to enrich your sermon with historical context and current data on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) trends, consider the following points:

Historical Context of DEI Initiatives:

- **Origins in the Civil Rights Movement:** The foundation of DEI initiatives can be traced back to the mid-1960s, coinciding with the Civil Rights Movement. During this period, the introduction of equal employment laws and affirmative action policies aimed to address systemic discrimination and promote workplace diversity. [ndnu.edu](https://www.ndnu.edu)
- **Evolution Over Decades:** Over the years, DEI programs have evolved from basic compliance measures to comprehensive strategies integral to organizational culture. This evolution reflects a growing recognition of the importance of fostering inclusive environments that value diverse perspectives. [cooleaf.com](https://www.cooleaf.com)

Current DEI Trends in Corporate America:

- **Employee Support for DEI:** A Pew Research Center survey indicates that a majority of employed U.S. adults (56%) view DEI efforts in the workplace positively. However, opinions vary across demographic lines, with higher support among women and minority groups. [pewresearch.org](https://www.pewresearch.org)
- **Corporate Commitment Amid Challenges:** Despite political pressures and recent executive orders aimed at dismantling DEI programs, several major companies, including JPMorgan Chase and Costco, have reaffirmed their commitment to DEI initiatives. They emphasize that fostering diversity and inclusion is essential for innovation and attracting top talent. [businessinsider.com](https://www.businessinsider.com)
- **Shifts in DEI Incentives:** Recent data shows a decline in the inclusion of DEI goals in executive compensation metrics. In 2024, 29 members of the S&P 500 removed DEI objectives from executive pay considerations, reflecting a broader trend of reevaluating DEI commitments in corporate America. [wsj.com](https://www.wsj.com)

Incorporating These Insights:

- **Highlight the Historical Struggle:** Emphasize that DEI initiatives are rooted in the long-standing fight for civil rights and equality, serving as modern extensions of efforts to dismantle systemic racism and promote inclusivity.
- **Acknowledge Current Challenges:** Recognize the contemporary challenges DEI programs face, including political opposition and internal corporate reevaluations. Stress the importance of steadfast commitment to these initiatives as a continuation of the moral and ethical pursuit of justice.
- **Call to Action:** Encourage congregants and community members to support organizations that uphold DEI principles and to advocate for policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in all spheres of society.

By weaving these historical examples and current data into your sermon, you can provide a comprehensive perspective that underscores the enduring significance of DEI efforts in the ongoing pursuit of justice and equality.

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These sources provide historical context, current trends, and insights into the evolution and future of DEI initiatives. Let me know if you need them formatted in a specific citation style (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.).

