



Illustration by Tessa Steele

DEI misinterpretation prevails in both educational policies and society

by **Ishita Gautam**



Living in a country that prides itself on being progressive, the growing resistance toward diversity initiatives raises a crucial question: when does seeking justice from a history of oppression and violence become politically inconvenient for others?

America has built its legacy on a democratic, freedom-based constitution promising equality for all. However, recently the nation has begun to seek to end movements that promote diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Black History Month is considered one of these, a key component of DEI notions, and has been facing great scrutiny from conservatives on certain lessons about race for a number of years. In 2025, the Trump administration initiated a systematic dismantling of DEI initiatives across both federal agencies and in education. The administration later scaled back several of these efforts in mid-January of this year; however, the Los Angeles Times claims that “the damage is done.”

According to PBS, efforts to reshape how American history is portrayed to this generation’s youth have been ongoing for the past decade. A significant amount of anti-DEI focus has been projected onto the education curriculum for both K-12

and universities. Some of which includes affirmative action in college admissions nationwide, reducing campus diversity and decreasing economic mobility for marginalized groups. In March 2025, the Trump administration issued an executive order that launched audits, targeting the National Museum of African American History and Culture, resulting in removal of artifacts and other pivotal items.

In February of 2025, a letter sent by the U.S. Department of Education to federally funded educational establishments stated that “institutions have toxically indoctrinated students with the false premise that the United States is built upon ‘systemic and structural racism.’” This statement stands in direct tension with well-documented aspects of American history, including the erasure of Native Americans and the exploitation of Black individuals through the institution of slavery. Anti-DEI statements like these risk removing the history of oppression non-white individuals have faced, changing the ways current students interpret the past.

State by state, the impact of anti-DEI notions varies greatly. According to The Educator’s Room, Alabama, Texas and Florida have already passed notions affecting DEI initiatives in their educational institutions. This leads to increased sentiments of alienation through the loss of access to student-led DEI groups. Spe-

cifically in Missouri, on Feb. 18 in 2025, Governor Mike Kehoe signed an executive order eliminating DEI programs in state agencies. This bars state funds from being given to these initiatives in order to prevent considering DEI in hiring decisions. Kehoe claimed that he wanted to create an “even playing field” for the Missouri residents.

The anti-DEI sentiment is also echoed through the University of Missouri’s (UM) policies. In 2015, a collective of Black student activists at Jesse Hall nonviolently protested the series of racist acts Black students had experienced at Mizzou, which captured national attention. One student, Jonathan Butler, launched a hunger strike and around 60 Black Mizzou football players threatened to stop attending all games in November of that year. This ultimately led to the former UM System President Tim Wolfe’s resignation. Since then, the Columbia Missourian reports that Black student applicants have decreased, and Mizzou has continued to implement policies aligned with broader anti-DEI efforts. Recently, Mizzou has canceled the Legion of Black Collegians’ “Black 2 Class” block party and dismantled the DEI division. These changes exemplify the anti-DEI rhetoric in the public university, leading to racial tensions continuing.

In light of Black History Month, it is important to recognize the current anti-DEI sentiment in the air. As the legacies of historical Black figures are pushed aside and the educational climate reshaped, it is crucial to restore emphasis on the systemically marginalized communities of America. DEI’s goal has always been to create an environment where everyone feels respected and has fair access to opportunities. There is a significant divide between these communities and the white population of America: treating everyone equally will not rectify this centuries-old issue. The only way to reach equality in our society is to ensure marginalized groups are given the voice they were denied before. Only then will the societal damage start to be repaired.



The Office of Institutional Equity is located in Jesse Hall. Photo by Ishita Gautam.