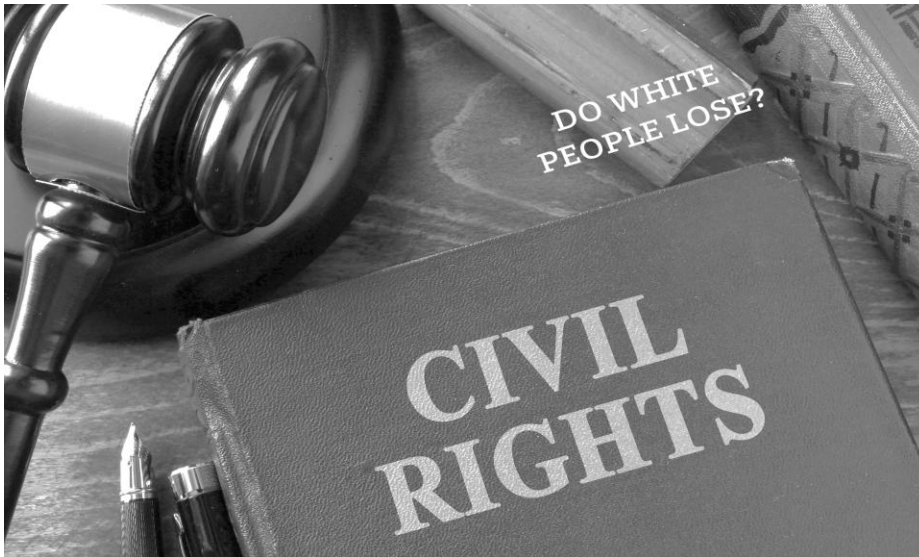


## DO WHITE PEOPLE LOSE WHEN CIVIL RIGHTS WINS?



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Speaking to the New York Times on January 7, President Donald Trump claimed that the Civil Rights movement of 1964 led to white Americans being “very badly treated,” and that they are real victims of discrimination. The claim comes on the heels of an invitation Vice President JD Vance made the previous week, encouraging white men at work to sue their employers if they feel they were discriminated against.

The irony here, if it is not evident, is that President Trump and his surrogates claim efforts to create greater opportunities for underrepresented groups are a plot intended to rob white people of the power and advantages they experience in U.S. society. Meanwhile, the administration continues to enact the strategies of Project 2025, many of which are designed to ensure that power and advantage in U.S. society remains in the hands of a few who are almost all white, and almost all men.

This tactic has been used so often by the Trump administration that an acronym has been developed to explain it: DARVO – Deny (in this case, the premise that non-white people in the U.S. experience systemic discrimination), Attack (anti-discrimination measures, in this case the Civil Rights Act and DEI programs), and Reverse (roles where whites are cast as the Victims of civil rights activities and, presumptively, non-white people are the Offenders.)

By attempting to rewrite history in ways that ignore unsavory truths and the societal impacts of multi-generational white supremacy and by claiming there is no such thing as systemic racism or sexism (Critical Race Theory) and trivializing advocacy for equality as “woke,” the current administration has created a perfect environment to assert that the only people who can claim to be victims of civil rights are white people.

The President’s views on race in the U.S. have become less nuanced and more overt. In fact, [evidence of the President’s racism](#) stretches back 52 years, to 1973 when the U.S. Department of Justice filed a major civil rights lawsuit against him and his father, Fred Trump, for violations of the Fair Housing Act. Today, there is clear evidence of his real attitudes about race when he refers to countries where the dominant population is composed of black or brown people as “s\*#thole countries” or when he [bemoans a lack of immigrants](#) from majority white countries.

The President's assertion that white people have been very badly treated as a result of civil rights is rooted in a different but valid complaint; disparities in income and economic opportunity impact all but the wealthiest Americans, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc. The Civil Rights Act demanded a mindset and behavioral shift towards the fair and equal treatment of people from all groups. Many white people continue to struggle to see their own biases and the impacts of those biases, or they reject the premise entirely.

**When the dominant group in any culture experiences something like the Civil Rights Act, the requisite behavior changes driven by the Act, or the equalization of rights for people in other groups, it's normal for them to feel restricted or inconvenienced by the changes.** This feeling is often rooted in the psychological discomfort of losing an *unearned* systemic advantage, not in the experience of true discrimination or malice. In other words, some white Americans don't subscribe to the concept of unequal treatment and, therefore, think civil rights only apply to people from underrepresented groups and offer nothing for whites.

The Civil Rights movement was fundamentally about the expansion of rights and justice to those who had been systematically denied them, not the systematic oppression of others. The President's comments and stance on the topic misrepresent the historical purpose and legal impact of one of America's most necessary social and political transformations.

Furthermore, the strategy of attacking DEI or other similar approaches while simultaneously championing the use of a "true meritocracy" is a ruse. It's based on a false premise that the current social and economic playing field is already level, implying that all individuals start with equal access and opportunity. They don't, and by now, almost every American should know that.

The maneuver paints equity and anti-bias initiatives as obstructions to fair competition, and if we buy into that belief, we can then buy in to the belief that the group MOST negatively impacted by the advancement of fairness in any society is the dominant group. In reality, a "true meritocracy" cannot exist until the pervasive, demonstrable effects of historical and ongoing systemic inequality—such as wealth gaps, unequal access to education, and unconscious bias in hiring—are neutralized. Programs promoting non-discrimination are not the opposite of merit; they are the essential prerequisite for merit to be genuinely and equally recognized. To criticize them is to advocate for the maintenance of an unequal status quo under the guise of fairness.

The Inclusion Allies Coalition is a coalition of organizations and practitioners committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion within their organizations and society. We provide resources, advocacy, networking, and webinars for dialogues across differences to promote inclusion. We are obliged to challenge narratives about the history of discrimination, civil rights, justice and the tangible value of diversity and inclusion that are factually inaccurate, misleading or incomplete.