

Will DEI End America—or America end DEI?



China: Enthusiastic 'Red Guards' wave copies of Mao Zedong's 'Little Red Book' Tiananmen, Beijing, c. 1966.

by Victor Davis Hanson

At the nexus of most of America's current crises, the diversity/equity/inclusion dogma can be found. The southern border has been destroyed because the Democratic Party wanted the poor of the southern hemisphere to be counted in the census, to vote if possible in poorly audited mail-in elections, and to build upon constituencies that demand government help. Opposition to such cynicism and the de facto destruction of enforcement of U.S. immigration law is written off as "racism," "nativism," and "xenophobia."

The military is short more than 40,000 soldiers. The Pentagon

may fault youth gangs, drug use, or a tight labor market. But the real shortfall is mostly due inordinately to reluctant white males who have been smeared by some of the military elite as suspected "white supremacists," despite dying at twice their demographics in Iraq and Afghanistan. And they are now passing on joining up despite their families' often multigenerational combat service.

The nexus between critical race theory and critical legal theory has been, inter alia, defunding the police, Soros-funded district attorneys exempting criminals from punishment, the legitimization of mass looting, squatters' rights, and general lawlessness across big-city America.

The recent epidemic of anti-Semitism was in part birthed by woke/DEI faculty and students on elite campuses, who declared Hamas a victim of "white settler" victimizing Israel and thus contextualized their Jewish hatred by claiming that as "victims," they cannot be bigots.

There is a historic, malevolent role of states adjudicating political purity, substituting racial, sex, class, and tribal criteria for meritocracy. They define success or failure not based on actual outcomes but on the degree of orthodox zealotry. Once governments enter that realm of the surreal, the result is always an utter disaster.

After a series of disastrous military catastrophes in 1941 and 1942, Soviet strongman and arch-communist Joseph Stalin ended the Soviet commissar system in October 1942. He reversed course to give absolute tactical authority to his ground commanders rather than to the communist overseers, as was customary.

Stalin really had no choice since Marxist-Leninist ideology overriding military logic and efficacy had ensured that the Soviet Union was surprised by a massive Nazi invasion in June 1941. The Russians in the first 12 months of war subsequently

lost nearly 5 million in vast encirclements—largely because foolhardy, ideologically driven directives curtailed the generals' operational control of the army. After the commissars were disbanded and commanders given greater autonomy, the landmark victory at Stalingrad followed, and with it, the rebound of the Red Army.

One reason why the dictator Napoleon ran wild in Europe for nearly 18 years was that his marshals of France were neither selected only by the old Bourbon standards of aristocratic birth and wealth nor by new ideological revolutionary criteria, but by more meritocratic means than those of his rival nations.

Mao's decade-long cultural revolution (1966–76) ruined China. It was predicated on Maoist revolutionary dogma overruling economic, social, cultural, and military realities. An entire meritocracy was deemed corrupted by the West and reactionary—and thus either liquidated or rendered inert.

In their place, incompetent zealots competed to destroy all prior standards as “bourgeois” and “counter-revolutionary.” It is no surprise that the current “people's liberation army,” for all its talk of communist dogma, does not function entirely on Mao's principles.

Muammar Gaddafi wrecked Libya by reordering an once oil-rich nation on Gaddafi's crackpot rules of his “Green Book.” At times, the unhinged ideologue, in lunatic fashion, required all Libyans to raise chickens or to destroy all the violins in the nation. I once asked a Libyan why the oil-rich country appeared to me utterly wrecked, and he answered, “We first hire our first cousins—and usually the worst.”

There were many reasons why the King-Cotton, slave-owning Old South lagged far behind the North in population, productivity, and infrastructure. But the chief factor was the capital and effort invested in the amoral as well as uneconomic

institution of slavery.

After the Civil War, persistent segregationist ideology demanded vast amounts of time, labor, and money in defining race down to the “one drop” rule—while establishing a labyrinth of segregation laws and refusing to draw on the talents of millions of black citizens.

Yet here we are in 2024, ignoring the baleful past as the woke diversity/equity/inclusion commissars war on merit. Institutions from United Airlines and the Federal Aviation Administration to the Pentagon and elite universities have been reformulated in the post-George Floyd woke hysteria. And to the delight of competitors and enemies abroad, they are now using criteria other than merit to hire, promote, evaluate, and retain.

The greatest problem historically with hiring and promoting based on DEI-like dogma is that anti-meritocratic criteria mark *the beginning, not the end*, of eroding vital standards. If one does not qualify for a position or slot by accepted standards, then a series of further remedial interventions are needed to sustain the woke project, from providing exceptions and exemptions, changing rules and requirements, and misleading the nation that a more “diverse” math, or more “inclusive” engineering, or more “equity” in chemistry can supplant mastery of critical knowledge that transcends gender, race, or ideology.

But planes either fly or crash due to proper operation, not the appearance or politics of the operator. All soldiers either hit or miss targets, and engineers either make bridges that stand or collapse on the basis of mastering ancient scientific canons and acquired skills, training, and aptitude that have nothing to do with superficial appearance, or tribal affinities, or religion, or doctrine.

The common denominator of critical theories, from critical

legal theory to critical social theory, is toxic nihilism, which claims there are no absolute standards, only arbitrary rules and regulations set up by a privileged, powerful class to exploit "the other." Yet, not punishing looting has nothing to do with race or class, but everything with corroding timeless deterrence that always has and always will prevent the bullying strong from preying on the weak and vulnerable.

Defunding the police sent a message to any criminally minded that in a cost-to-benefit risk assessment, the odds were now on the side of the criminal not being caught for his crimes—and so crime soared and the vulnerable of the inner city became easy prey.

Another danger of DEI is the subordination of the individual to the collective. We are currently witnessing an epidemic of DEI racism in which commissars talk nonstop of white supremacy/rage/privilege without any notion of enormous differences among 230 million individual Polish-, Greek-, Dutch-, Basque-, or Armenian-Americans, or the class, political, and cultural abyss that separates those in Martha's Vineyard from their antitheses in East Palestine, Ohio.

Moreover, what is "whiteness" in an increasingly intermarried and multiracial society? Oddly, something akin to the old one-drop rules of the South is now updated to determine victims and victimizers—to the point of absurdity. Who is white—someone one half-Irish, one half Mexican—who is black—someone one quarter Jamaican, three-quarters German? To find answers, DEI czars must look to paradigms of the racist past for answers.

Moreover, once *any* group is exempted and not held to collective standards by virtue of its superficial appearance, then the nation naturally witnesses an increase in racism and bigotry—on the theory that it is not racist to racially stigmatize a supposedly "racist" collective. And we are already seeing an uptake in racially motivated interracial

violence as criminals interpret the trickle-down theory of reparatory justice as providing exemption for opportunistic violence.

Throughout history, it has always been the most mediocre and opportunistic would-be commissars that appear to come forth when meritocracy vanishes. If there was not a Harvard President and plagiarist like Claudine Gay to trumpet and leverage her DEI credentials, she would have to be invented. If there was not a brilliant, non-DEI economist like Roland Fryer to be hounded and punished by her, he would have to be invented.

The DEI conglomerate has little idea of the landmines it is planting daily by reducing differences in talent, character, and morality into a boring blueprint of racial stereotypes. Punctuality is now “white time” and supposedly pernicious. The SAT, designed to give the less privileged a meritocratic pathway to college admissions, is deemed racist and either discarded or warped.

In its absence, universities are quietly now “reimagining” their curriculum to make it more “relevant to today’s students” and, of course, “more inclusive and more diverse.” Translated from the language of Oceania, that means after admitting tens of thousands to the nation’s elite schools who did not meet the universities’ own prior standards that they themselves once established and apprehensive about terminating such students, higher education is now euphemistically lowering the work load in classes, introducing new less rigorous classes, and inflating grades. In their virtue-signaling, they have little clue that inevitably their once prized and supposedly prestigious degrees will be rendered less valued as employers discover a Harvard, Stanford, or Princeton BA or BS is not a guarantee of academic excellence or mastery of vital skill sets.

Toxic tribalism is also, unfortunately, like nuclear

proliferation. Once one group goes full tribal, others may as well, if for no reason than their own self-survival in a balkanized, Hobbesian world of *bellum omnium contra omnes*. If our popular culture is to be defined by the racist hosts of The View, or the racist anchorwoman Joy Reid, or members of the Congressman "Squad," or entire studies departments in our universities that constantly bleat out the racialist mantra, then logically one of two developments will follow.

One, so-called whites in minority-majority states like California will copy the tribal affinities of others that transcend their class and cultural differences, again in response to other blocs that do the same for careerist advantage and perceived survival. Or two, racism will be redefined empirically so that any careerist elites who espouse ad nauseam racial chauvinism—on the assurance they cannot be deemed racists—will be discredited and exposed for what they've become, and thus the content of our character will triumph over the color of our skin.

Finally, do we ever ask how a country of immigrants like the United States—vastly smaller than India and China, less materially rich than the vast expanse of Russia, without the strategic geography of the Middle East, or without the long investment and infrastructure of Europe—emerged out of nowhere to dominate the world economically, financially, militarily, and educationally for nearly two centuries?

The answer is easy: it was the most meritocratic land of opportunity in the world, where millions emigrated (legally) on the assurance that their class, politics, religion, ethnicity, and yes, race, would be far less a drawback than anywhere else in the world.

The degree to which the U.S. survives DEI depends on either how quickly it is discarded or whether America's existential enemies in the Middle East, China, Russia, and Iran have even worse DEI-anti-meritocratic criteria of their own in hiring,

promotion, and admissions—whether defined by institutionalized hatred of the West, or loyalty oaths to the communist party, or demonstrable obsequiousness to the Putin regime, or lethal religious intolerance.

Unfortunately, our illiberal enemies, China especially, at least in matters of money and arms, are now emulating the meritocracy of the old America. Meanwhile, we are hellbent on following their former destructive habits of using politics instead of merit to staff our universities, government, corporations, and military.

Our future hinges on how quickly we discard DEI orthodoxy and simply make empirical decisions to stop printing money, deter enemies abroad, enforce our laws, punish criminals, secure the border, reboot the military, regain energy independence, and judge citizens on their character and talent and not their appearance and politics—at least if it is not already too late.

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