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HOLLYWOOD INC.

## In Trump's second term, Hollywood sweeps DEI efforts under the rug



(Los Angeles Times photo illustration; Associated Press)

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It took only five years for Hollywood to backtrack on its big diversity push after the racial reckoning that followed George Floyd's murder by police in Minneapolis.

In the weeks since President Trump retook office, entertainment and media companies, like [much of corporate America](#), have quickly moved to water down and dismantle efforts to promote diversity, equity and inclusion — or DEI — both internally and in the content they produce.

This comes after Trump in January issued an [executive order](#) that tasked the U.S. attorney general with going after private-sector DEI programs that, in his view, constitute illegal discrimination based on race and sex. Not long after that, the Federal Communications Commission, led by Trump-appointed chairman [Brendan Carr](#), launched an inquiry into NBCUniversal owner Comcast Corp. to “[root out](#)” such initiatives.

As all this took shape, Paramount Global dropped staffing goals related to gender, race, ethnicity and sex; Warner Bros. Discovery rebranded its DEI activities as simply “[inclusion](#)”; and Walt Disney Co. [scrapped](#) a “diversity and inclusion” performance standard used to calculate executive compensation. Meanwhile, Disney continued to shift gears in the culture war, removing a trans athlete storyline from its Pixar animated series “Win or Lose.”

As my colleague Samantha Masunaga wrote recently, [this backpedaling](#) has been going on for quite some time. Although diversity initiatives aren't perfect, advocates for greater inclusion worry that gutting them will result in fewer opportunities for people of color.

In 2023, a raft of high-level media and entertainment executives in charge of diversity efforts resigned or were pushed out, leading experts to worry that the businesses' goals to make themselves more inclusive were just a passing fad. For companies, the writing has been on the wall since the U.S. Supreme Court gutted race-based affirmative action in college admissions.

Indeed, a recent study examining the highest-grossing films of 2024 determined that studios have started to backslide on representation when it comes to race.

Actors of color accounted for 25.2% of lead roles in the top theatrical films of 2024, down from 29.2% in 2023, according to the most recent [UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report](#). The number of films directed by people of color also dropped in 2024 compared with 2023. Directors of color accounted for 20.2% of 2024 movies, down from 22.9% for the previous year. People of color account for about 44% of the U.S. population.

On the corporate side, the rate of reduction in DEI roles in the film and TV industry outpaced the general decrease in employment, according to a review by workforce database company Revelio Labs, which tabulated jobs at Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Walt Disney Studios,

Warner Bros. Entertainment, Universal Studios and Amazon Studios.

The assault on DEI is just one front in Trump's ongoing fight with mainstream media institutions, which are trying to combat and cope with an ongoing erosion in audience levels and trust.

Trump is suing CBS News over edits to its "60 Minutes" interview with then-Vice President Kamala Harris. The FCC is [investigating](#) the network over the same issue. CBS and parent company Paramount are fighting both on [1st Amendment grounds](#). Paramount's controlling shareholder, Shari Redstone, has agitated for a settlement to help move along the company's pending merger with David Ellison's Skydance Media.

But as tempting as it is to blame Trump for the shift, there are various factors at play.

The backlash against companies doing anything "woke" exploded into the open as Disney [feuded](#) with Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis over anti-LGBTQ+ legislation governing schools and conservatives boycotted Bud Light over its social media activation with trans influencer Dylan Mulvaney.

Much of the entertainment sector has gone through a significant economic retrenchment after years of overspending during the so-called streaming wars, and diversity initiatives are often among the first things cut in such situations. That's despite the fact the executives often tout diversity and representation as being [good for business](#).

The most cynical take is that the studios were never all that serious about diversity, equity and inclusion to begin with, even amid the fervent calls for racial justice that broke out in 2020 with protests sweeping the U.S. The people and programs put in place to advance such goals weren't given the authority necessary to produce real change.

The most generous reading is that many of the recent changes that the companies have made to their internal policies are surface-level. Karen Horne, who previously oversaw DEI efforts at Warner Bros. Discovery, told The Times that many companies "are still doing the work, they're just not being as loud about it. They're just doing it quietly."

On the flip side, studios are not being shy about trying to cater more to red-state viewers in light of the country's cultural shift.

This goes beyond avoiding criticism of the Trump administration or highlighting topics that provoke the ire of conservatives, as outlets including [The Times](#) and [the Wall Street Journal](#) have pointed out.

A&E has announced a "Duck Dynasty" revival. Amazon on Monday said it's bringing episodes of Trump's reality show "The Apprentice" to Prime Video. "Shifting Gears," the latest sitcom from Trump admirer Tim Allen, is a hit for Disney-owned ABC.

In the Trump era, as in any other, Hollywood is going back to what it already knows how to do.