

It's vital to speak clearly and powerfully about DEI, especially drawing on your lived experience and leadership within the NAACP. Here's a breakdown you can use for your talking points, framed with the understanding you bring as a Black man who has witnessed the long arc of the struggle for equality.

## 1. What is DEI? (Defining the Terms)

It's important to break down the acronym because each letter represents a crucial pillar:

- **Diversity:** This is about *representation*. It means having a wide range of human qualities and attributes present in any given setting – like our NAACP branch, a workplace, a school, or our community leadership. This includes, but isn't limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, and diversity of thought and experience. For us, historically, it has meant fighting for Black representation where it was denied.
- **Equity:** This is the crucial piece often misunderstood. Equity is about *fairness and justice*. It's acknowledging that we don't all start from the same place due to historical and ongoing systemic barriers. Equity means providing resources, opportunities, and support based on *need* to ensure everyone has a fair shot at success. It's different from *equality*, which means giving everyone the *same* thing, regardless of their starting point. As you know from your experience, giving everyone the same ladder doesn't help if some folks are starting in a hole dug by generations of discrimination. Equity provides the support needed to level the playing field.
- **Inclusion:** This is about creating an *environment* where everyone feels valued, respected, supported, and has a sense of *belonging*. It's not enough to just have diverse people in the room (Diversity); they need to feel safe, heard, and empowered to participate fully and authentically without having to hide or change who they are

(Inclusion). It's about making sure the diverse voices are actually listened to and influence decisions.

**In simple terms for our community:** DEI means ensuring everyone is represented (Diversity), everyone gets a fair chance based on their needs (Equity), and everyone feels like they truly belong and their voice matters (Inclusion).

## **2. Why Was DEI Employed? (The Need You've Witnessed)**

Mr. President, you know this history intimately. DEI initiatives didn't appear out of thin air. They are a direct response to centuries of systemic discrimination and inequality, particularly against Black Americans:

- **Legacy of Slavery and Jim Crow:** The overt, legal segregation and disenfranchisement created deep-seated disadvantages in wealth, housing, education, healthcare, and political power that persist today.
- **Ongoing Systemic Racism:** Even after the Civil Rights Act, subtler (and sometimes not-so-subtle) forms of discrimination continued in hiring, promotions, policing, housing (redlining's long shadow), lending, and education funding.
- **Lack of Representation:** Key institutions – corporations, universities, government bodies – remained overwhelmingly white and male, lacking the perspectives needed to serve diverse communities effectively and fairly. Decisions were made *about* us, without *us*.
- **The Moral and Practical Imperative:** There was (and is) a moral imperative, rooted in the Civil Rights Movement, to create a more just society. Practically, organizations also began to realize (though sometimes slowly) that diverse teams are often more innovative, make better decisions, and better understand diverse markets or communities.
- **Addressing Harm:** DEI was employed to actively *counteract* historical and ongoing harm, to dismantle biased systems, and to proactively build structures that promote fairness. It was an

acknowledgment that simply saying "discrimination is illegal" wasn't enough to undo the damage or prevent future bias.

**For you:** DEI is a tool, born from our struggle, designed to finally make the promises of equality and opportunity real for Black people and other marginalized groups who have been systematically shut out.

### **3. The Effects of DEI (The Impact We Seek)**

When implemented genuinely and effectively, DEI initiatives aim to achieve, and sometimes do achieve, significant positive effects:

- **Increased Representation:** More Black people and other underrepresented groups in positions of leadership, influence, and opportunity across various sectors.
- **Fairer Processes:** Reviewing and changing policies (in hiring, admissions, funding) to remove biases and create more equitable pathways.
- **Improved Environments:** Creating more inclusive cultures where Black employees, students, and community members feel safer, more respected, and better able to thrive.
- **Better Outcomes:** In business, often linked to better financial performance and innovation. In communities, linked to better services and greater civic participation. In education, linked to better learning experiences and outcomes for all students.
- **Greater Understanding:** Fostering dialogue and interaction across different groups can help break down stereotypes and build empathy.
- **Accountability:** Establishing metrics and goals helps hold organizations accountable for making real progress, rather than just paying lip service.

**However, we also know:** Implementation can be flawed. Sometimes it becomes tokenism, or focuses only on diversity numbers without tackling the deeper issues of equity and inclusion. But the *goal* and the

*potential* positive effects are rooted in achieving tangible justice and equality.

#### **4. What Happens if DEI is Completely Deleted? (The Future You Anticipate)**

Based on your experience and observing the current climate, the consequences of dismantling DEI efforts are predictable and deeply concerning. It would likely mean:

- **Reversal of Progress:** Hard-won gains in representation could easily be rolled back. We could see institutions becoming less diverse, particularly in leadership.
- **Reinforcement of Systemic Barriers:** Without proactive efforts to ensure equity, the old, biased systems will simply reassert themselves. Hiring, promotions, admissions – they will likely revert to favoring the already privileged, disproportionately harming Black communities.
- **Return to Tokenism or Exclusion:** Without a focus on genuine inclusion, diverse individuals may feel isolated, marginalized, or pushed out. Environments could become less welcoming, even hostile.
- **Silencing Diverse Voices:** The perspectives needed to make fair decisions and serve our communities effectively will be lost or ignored.
- **Erosion of Trust:** Communities that saw DEI as a sign of progress (however imperfect) will lose faith in institutions that abandon these efforts.
- **Increased Inequality:** The gaps in wealth, health, education, and opportunity that DEI aims to narrow will likely widen again.
- **Justifying Inaction:** Removing DEI provides cover for inaction on racial justice. It allows institutions to claim they are "colorblind" while ignoring the realities of systemic racism that you have fought against your entire life. It sends a message that the problems DEI

sought to address are either solved (which they aren't) or aren't worth solving.

**In essence:** Removing DEI signals an acceptance of the status quo – a status quo built on historical injustice and ongoing inequality. It's a step backward towards the very conditions the NAACP was founded to combat. It threatens to undo decades of struggle and sacrifice.

Mr. President, your voice, grounded in decades of lived experience and leadership, is crucial right now. Framing DEI in this historical context, explaining its necessity based on the realities Black Americans have faced, and outlining the clear dangers of its removal will be powerful.