

The diversity overcorrection in the workplace

Megan McArdle _ 1 Dec 2025 _ *The Washington Post*

- 5 Everyone in media, academia and entertainment knew it was happening. A number of them had qualms. Almost none spoke up. I am talking about how for years, at many institutions, there was a hiring preference for anyone but White, straight men. As Jacob Savage argues convincingly in a recent essay, this most affected one group: younger White men who hadn't had time to gain the skills and experience.
- 10 Savage cites data that suggest extreme declines in the number of White males getting entry-level jobs at some elite institutions — junior screenwriters going from 48 percent White male to 12 percent, from 39 percent of tenure-track humanities positions at Harvard University to 18 percent. This happened over the last decade. You may be tempted to argue that this reflects demographic shifts in the hiring pool, but no, demographics don't change that fast. In 2020,
- 15 White Americans remained over half the population of early-career workers.
- Young White males were about a quarter of college graduates in 2022, so we'd have expected them to average about a quarter of new hires for various elite professions. They dropped because employers started discriminating against them to make their institutions "look like America."
- 20 If you want to understand the backlash to diversity, equity and inclusion, you need to understand how bad that math was for a certain class of educated millennial men. For some mysterious reason, people consistently overestimate the minority share of the population, which made the Whiteness of newsrooms, Hollywood studios and academic departments look more unfair than it was. To be clear, there was plenty of unfairness — Black people and women
- 25 were less likely to be hired in past eras than White men, regardless of qualifications, and that discrimination is reflected in those organizations today. But even if that hadn't been the case, newsrooms, writer's rooms and classrooms would have been very White because most Americans born in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were White. I suspect people forgot about these cohort effects because so much of the DEI¹ discourse came up around college admissions, where
- 30 diversity can be achieved relatively speedily: admit a racially balanced class four years in a row, and voilà, you "look like America." But a large corporate employer often has a workforce spanning 40 years, not four. Rebalancing that through representative hiring would take decades. The DEI champions didn't want to wait that long. So the correction turned into an overcorrection. Upper management too White and male? Offset that with new hires who are
- 35 neither. But of course, offsetting a few decades worth of employees with a few years' worth of hiring meant the share of young White males had to fall by a lot.
- Repairing the legacy of slavery and sexism is a hard problem, and sometimes hard problems have unfair solutions. People who know how hiring decisions were made during the "Great Awakening" nonetheless imply that this is all the fantasy of mediocre White men who can't
- 40 admit they didn't measure up.

(524 words)

¹ Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)