



THE  
**BLACKOUT**  
REPORT

BY ONYX IMPACT

The Real-World Cost of  
**ERASING, DISTORTING, AND SUPPRESSING**  
Black Progress

OCTOBER 2025

# THE ~~BLACKOUT~~ REPORT

## OVERVIEW

Black history is American history. Black progress is American progress. Both are now at risk.

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**The current administration and its allies are waging a coordinated disinformation campaign to seize illegitimate control by eroding progress and rewriting history.** In the process, they are threatening our collective future. This campaign is not just about manipulating public opinion; it is a strategy to restrict Black access to power, capital, and influence. By erasing, distorting, and suppressing Black progress, those in power are working to undermine Black agency and block pathways to advancement.

**The scale and ramifications of this effort have not been fully exposed until now.** Onyx Impact's [research](#), the most comprehensive to date, documents how disinformation is being weaponized to justify actions and policies that harm Black Americans. By documenting the first eight months of this campaign, this report reveals its devastating, coordinated impact and the urgent risk to Black futures if it continues unchecked.

**This report exposes 15,723 distinct impact points—each one an instance in which Black opportunities, lives, or histories have been directly attacked.** This staggering number points to the scale of the campaign's damage, making clear that these are not isolated incidents but a coordinated assault on Black progress. This documentation is central to Onyx Impact's mission to empower Black communities by exposing and countering information threats that undermine Black progress. The findings in this report are the result of in-depth research conducted between May and September 2025, reflecting Onyx Impact's commitment to rigorous, data-driven advocacy and truth-telling.

### Why this matters now

The harm is concrete and undeniable. Black businesses and entrepreneurs are being pushed out of jobs and contracts. Students are learning warped and incomplete history. Protections against discrimination are being slashed. Pathways to health, education, and opportunity are being blocked.

Specific harms include:

- **Historic employment reductions** starting in February 2025, resulting in the [highest Black unemployment rate](#) since 2021. **306k** Black women have [lost jobs](#). This stems from cuts in both federal agencies and the private sector.
- **Cuts and freezes of \$3.4B+ in grants** for programs and research serving HBCUs, Black entrepreneurs, and Black communities, including **\$9.4M** in sickle cell disease research slashed.
- **6k+ federal datasets distorted**, including data about maternal mortality, sickle cell disease, and other healthcare issues that disproportionately affect Black Americans. These deletions have wiped out critical information and years of understanding and research.

For all Americans, this campaign to deny truth and narrow talent pipelines means weaker civic trust, poorer public health, and less economic vitality.

## It's time to defend the record

Onyx Impact, a nonprofit research, education, and digital innovation hub that fights the spread of harmful information impacting Black communities, conducted this work to document the breadth and depth of the coordinated attack on Black progress. This report provides communities, journalists, and allies with a framework to track and counter these attacks. If they are not combatted, significant economic, social, and civil rights progress may be lost for generations.

## THE 3 DISINFORMATION TACTICS

This report distills the findings contained in [THE BLACKOUT REPORT Index](#). The report, like the index, explores the breadth, depth, and impact of three distinct tactics that give rise to this disinformation campaign. Those are the efforts to:

- **ERASE** Black history and excellence from public memory—by removing stories, physical items, and achievements that document Black contributions and injustices in America.
- **DISTORT** the truth—by rewriting, manipulating, or sanitizing information, datasets, and funding, making it harder to recognize injustice and warping the reality of Black experiences.
- **SUPPRESS** into silence or compliance—by pressuring and intimidating institutions (such as state and local government, schools, and businesses) using threats, investigations, and policy changes.

*Note: In this report, the term 'IMPACT POINT' refers to a single example in [THE BLACKOUT REPORT Index](#).*

Onyx Impact has sorted each impact point into one of the three tactical categories for purposes of clarity. Not all examples, however, fit neatly or exclusively under one of the above tactics. In fact, some examples fit under or create spillover effects across all three.

→ **More on [METHODOLOGY](#) at pages 37–38**



### **TACTIC 1: ERASURE AT A GLANCE**

→ **1,362** [documented impact points](#).

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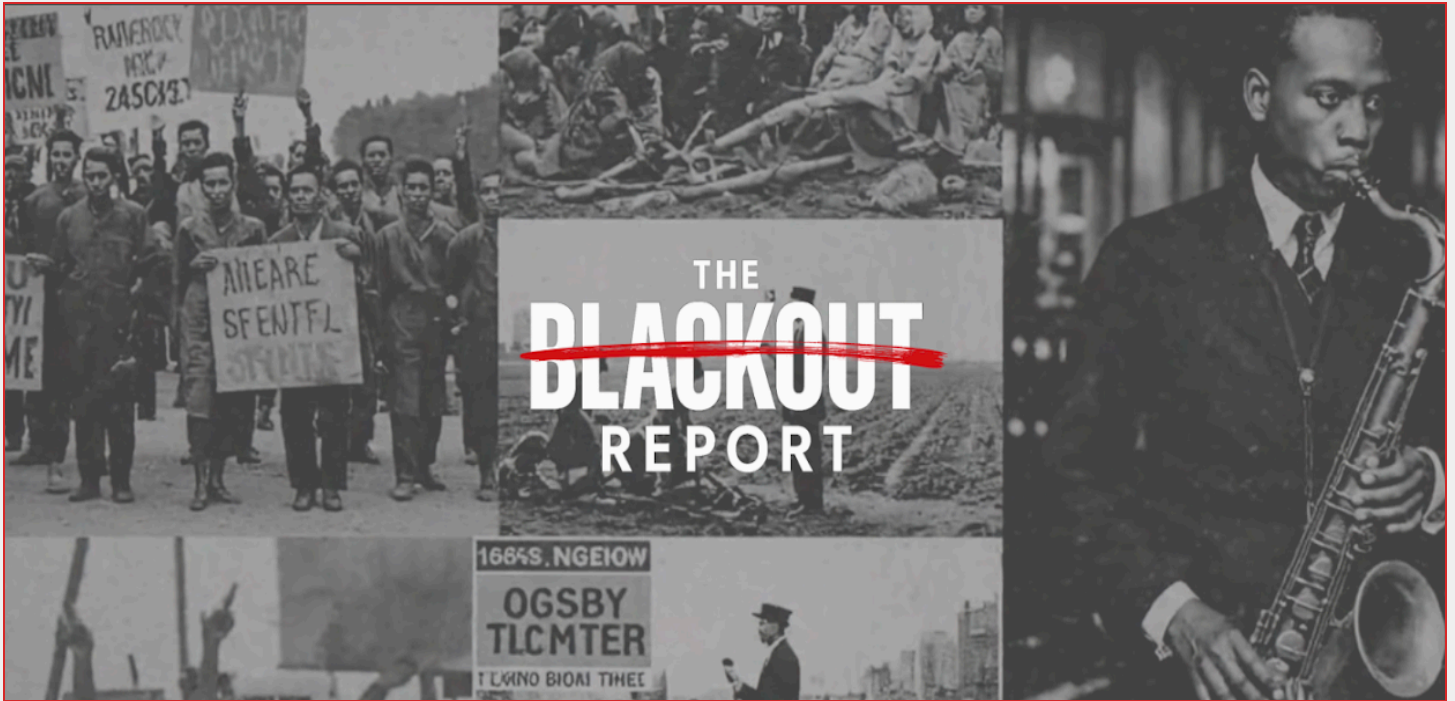
#### What it is

**ERASURE** aims to remove Black history, artifacts, and achievements from view. It eliminates stories online, from shelves, and in public spaces, narrowing what Americans learn and will remember. This tactic not only hides the record of Black excellence and struggle, but also obscures the connection between past events and future opportunities. When key historical documentation disappears, civic memory is diminished, and the next generation inherits a distorted and limited sense of what is possible. The removal of key Black figures and icons including veterans, athletes, and abolitionists from public spaces reduces access not only to knowledge, but also to power. This impedes Black talent, and erodes broader institutional trust in American society.

#### Why it matters

**ERASURE** is a strategy that diminishes the power of Black communities by severing their historical roots. This tactic undermines the potential for future leadership and innovation, fostering a culture that undervalues and ignores Black contributions. When civic memory fades, so does our motivation to challenge injustice and reclaim power. Erasure exerts control, seeks to impose limits on individual aspirations, and ultimately perpetuates systemic inequalities, allowing those in power to maintain their status by obscuring narratives that inspire resistance and resilience.

→ **More on ERASURE** at pages 11-16



### TACTIC 2: DISTORTION AT A GLANCE

→ **14,072** [documented impact points](#).

#### What it is

**DISTORTION** rewrites what communities can understand and build by manipulating information, datasets, curriculums, and funding. It swaps evidence for ideology, cuts essential grants, and disrupts data critical to measuring progress. In doing so, distortion directly harms Black health, education, jobs, and public policy. This manipulation alters decisions and reverberates into budgets and research agendas, warping outcomes now and in the future. The termination of funding for sickle cell disease research exemplifies how these distortions threaten essential funding and resource allocation, which in turn shapes the course and duration of human lives. The current administration has terminated at least **14** major federal grants, totaling more than **\$9.4M**, to fund research and treatment for SCD.

#### Why it matters

**DISTORTION** replaces factual evidence with biased narratives. This skews public policy and funding decisions, leading to inequitable resource distribution that further entrenches inequality. By controlling the narrative and data, those in power can dictate the terms of progress, leaving Black communities vulnerable to marginalization. When data is distorted, it becomes impossible to pursue honest results or accountability, diminishing efforts to achieve equity and justice.

→ **More on DISTORTION** at pages 17–26



### **TACTIC 3: SUPPRESSION AT A GLANCE**

→ **289** [documented impact points](#).

#### What it is

**SUPPRESSION** pressures institutions and individuals into silence or compliance through threats, investigations, and policy maneuvers. This creates a chilling effect: Universities, federal agencies, and organizations self-censor and retreat from equity initiatives, further narrowing public understanding and Black access. Fear spreads faster than facts; as risk-averse actors learn that any work toward the laudable values of equity, diversity, and inclusion invites sanction, pathways to opportunity constrict. Efforts to intimidate universities by ousting leadership, threatening future funding, and demanding demographic reporting on admitted students serve as key examples of this tactic. Suppression imposes great risk not only in how these schools act and educate today, but also in shaping what they will pass on to future generations of students, faculty, and American scholarship.

#### Why it matters

**SUPPRESSION** hinders the ability of Black communities to access resources essential for growth and empowerment. By creating an environment of fear, it stifles the diverse perspectives necessary for meaningful change, resulting in lost funding, diminished educational outcomes, and reduced support for vital programs. This not only limits the potential for equitable representation but also perpetuates a cycle of control that deters individuals and organizations from pursuing necessary reforms. Thus, suppression erodes the foundation of democracy, which depends on open discourse and the free exchange of ideas. The control exerted through suppression narrows pathways to opportunity, hindering progress for people and communities alike.

→ **More on SUPPRESSION at pages 27–34**




### WHAT'S NEXT?

→ *Three ways to defend the record and protect the future.*

This is not a culture war – it's a disinformation-fueled power grab. If allowed to continue unchecked, it threatens every American's access to the truth today, and to equitable possibilities in the future.

By cataloging and analyzing this campaign, Onyx Impact hopes to serve three primary goals:

- **Raise public awareness** about what is taking place, and the concrete impact this disinformation campaign is having on communities. The only effective way to fight such a wide-ranging and fast-spreading campaign is to expose it and overwhelm it with accurate and complete information.
- **Encourage Americans to identify and report ongoing efforts** to eliminate Black representation, manipulate the stories of Black Americans, and intimidate civic institutions into taking part in the current Blackout effort. Speaking out and pushing back works: Some of the acts of erasure, distortion, and suppression identified in this report have been reversed, at least temporarily, in response to public outcry. Onyx Impact encourages readers to submit stories [here](#).
- **Push for accountability standards for journalists and academics** to treat claims of "equity"-based harm as audit triggers (to check facts, continuity, and consequences), verify every "restored" dataset, publish side-by-side comparison images, link archives in copy, and make explicit the link between lost data and real-world effects like slashed budgets or reduced staffing.



***“The effort to erase Black voices,  
ideas, art and history  
is the effort to erase Black lives.*”**

*Without Black history, we abandon our capacity to accurately assess the state of the republic or imagine a stronger one. ...*

*Without Black history, we forget how the civil rights movement created opportunities for other marginalized communities to secure equality and we limit our capacity to organize for justice now. Racial inequality remains real; if we are not able to understand it, tell its history, and honor those who have risked everything to solve it, then we lose our capacity to carry the legacy, brilliance and resilience of these freedom fighters in our lives and to future generations.”*

– NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

[APRIL 28, 2025](#)



# THE ~~BLACKOUT~~ REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

### Blackout: The Real-World Cost of Erasing, Distorting, and Suppressing Black Progress

**Black history is American history. Black progress is American progress. Both are now at risk.**

**The current administration, its allies, and compliant institutions across the country are waging a dangerous campaign that threatens devastating consequences for Black communities and the nation.** They have stripped thousands of information points and datasets about Black contributions from digital spaces, pulled hundreds of books from library shelves, and distorted what Americans learn about Black contributions in classrooms, museums, and national parks. The far-reaching damage to legacy and progress has been immediate—lost jobs and contracts, disappearing grants and scholarships, restricted curriculums, and chilled civil rights protections. These actions threaten the fight for justice and equality for generations to come.

This Blackout campaign is about more than just controlling what Americans know and believe. It is an aggressive effort to seize power and diminish Black opportunity. By blocking access to healthcare, education, and economic resources, those waging the campaign are manipulating who is likely to succeed and who is left behind. By removing books, censoring data, and narrowing curriculums, they are shaping a future where only certain voices and histories are allowed. These actions aren't just rewriting the past. They are inflicting concrete, immediate damage on Black lives and futures, consolidating power at the expense of Black communities.

At the heart of this strategy is a coordinated disinformation campaign—one designed to justify and conceal these harms while recasting our understanding of what is true, and what is possible.

## A modern campaign of disinformation

Disinformation campaigns targeting Black communities are not new. From efforts to distort Black history and suppress Black voices during Reconstruction and Jim Crow to today's digital onslaught, the goal has been the same: limiting Black power and progress.

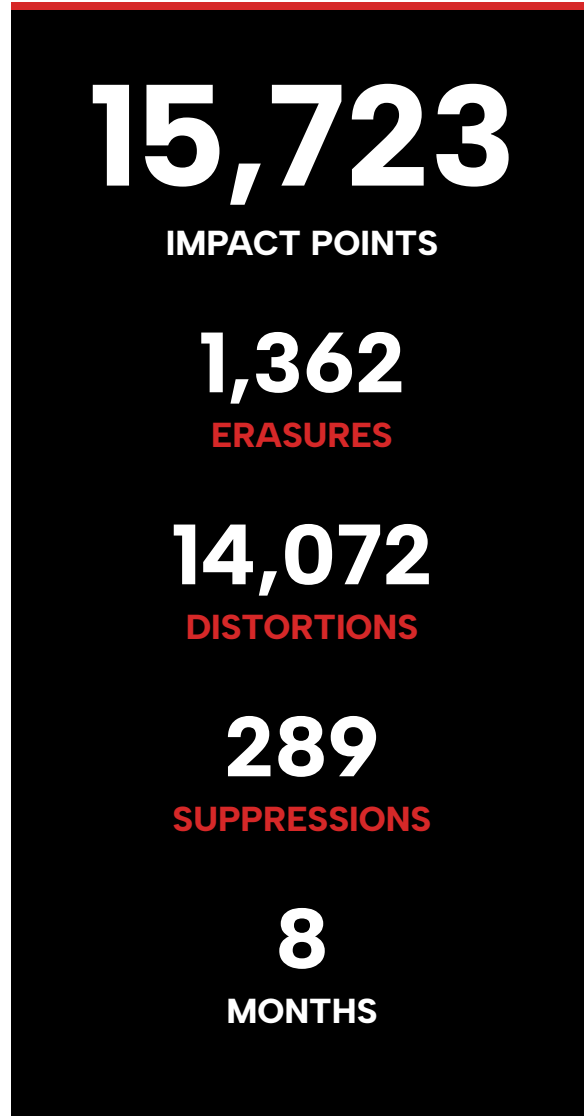
The disinformation campaign described here is coordinated and purposeful, propelled by the full power of the federal government. That government has been joined by allies: Some states have used the cover of federal action to rationalize and increase their own efforts. Private actors are also advancing the campaign, bowing to direct federal pressure or acting out of fear in an unstable political landscape.

At the core of this disinformation campaign is an effort to label any equity effort as discrimination by weaponizing the term "DEI," turning it into a Trojan horse for deploying harmful actions and policies. The strategy involves attempting to redefine DEI as a weapon used against, rather than for, civil rights, while spreading the lie that equity initiatives consist only of corporate webinars and bureaucratic red tape that

have not benefited Black communities. This false narrative threatens Black progress and closes off opportunities for advancement.

The best way to counter any disinformation campaign is to expose it, promote the truth, and protect access to accurate and complete information. Onyx Impact presents its findings in this report both to document the campaign and sound an alarm. The effects of the current efforts aren't merely symbolic. They are material and measurable: jobs lost, grants pulled, lessons banned, and penalties imposed for telling the truth. All are aimed at silencing Black voices and removing Black history as a part of the collective American experience. Even more importantly, they're

calculated to curtail the possibilities of racial justice and a truly representative democracy for generations to come.



## Reconstruction rewind: history's warning for today

The current campaign to erase, distort, and suppress Black history and opportunity echoes the tactics deployed in the post-Reconstruction era. This period is often glossed over in American classrooms, but it is crucial for understanding the potential impact of today's Blackout tactics. After

the Civil War, Reconstruction [promised a new birth of freedom](#) for Black Americans, with expanded rights, political participation, and efforts to build Black economic and educational power. Some [2,000 Black Americans](#) held public office at the local, state, and federal levels, [hundreds of thousands of Black men](#) registered and voted after the 15th Amendment, and Black communities [established](#) thousands of schools and dozens of colleges, often funding them with their own limited resources.

*Now, as then, those in power seek to **erase Black achievements** from public memory, **distort the truth** about Black experiences, and **suppress Black voices** through intimidation.*

This progress was met with fierce backlash: [violence](#), the rise of [Jim Crow](#) laws, and a coordinated effort to erase Black achievements from public memory. Textbooks rewrote history, monuments were erected glorifying the Confederacy, and Black voices were systematically silenced. The goals were clear—limit Black power, rewrite historical narratives, and reassert control.

Today's three-pronged Blackout campaign employs those same tactics, updated for our digital age. The

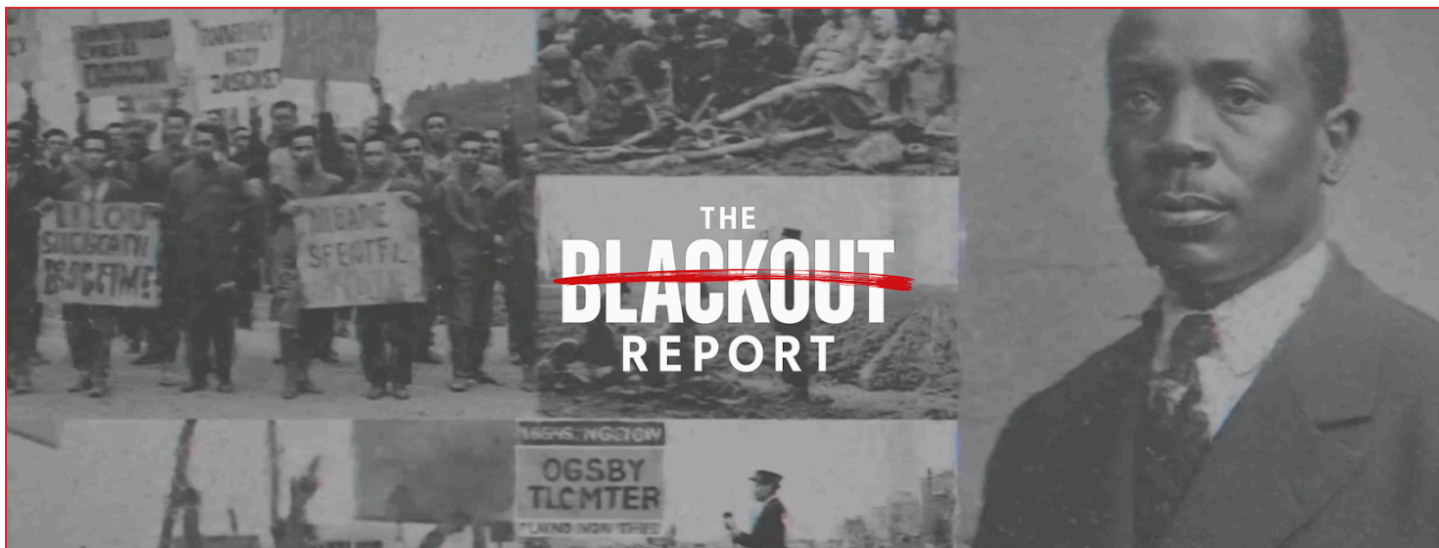
erasure of Black data, the removal of books, and the narrowing of school curriculums are direct continuations of the post-Reconstruction efforts to suppress Black progress.

Now, as then, those in power seek to erase Black achievements from public memory, distort the truth about Black experiences, and suppress Black voices through intimidation. During Reconstruction, false narratives about Black ineptitude and corruption were leveraged to justify rolling back rights and opportunities. Now, the weaponization of terms like "DEI" and the spread of lies about equity initiatives are used to do the same. It is crucial to connect the consequences of today's harmful efforts—lost jobs, slashed grants, and blocked opportunities—with the economic and social rollbacks that followed Reconstruction.

### From facts comes fallout

Erase. Distort. Suppress. These are not new strategies; they form the same playbook, updated and redeployed to consolidate power and limit Black advancement. If left unchecked, they will carry the same devastating impact on Black communities today as they did then.

**THE BLACKOUT REPORT** is meant to equip Black communities, journalists, and allies with understanding and actionable context. It documents a coordinated, three-part strategy to erase, distort, and suppress. These tactics erode information, opportunity, and representation for Black communities both present and future. The report contextualizes **15,723** impact points that occurred between January and September 2025, demonstrating how these harmful tactics translate into lost jobs, slashed grants, stripped data, restricted curriculums, and chilled civil-rights enforcement. What follows is a tactic-by-tactic accounting of the strategies, specifics, and stakes involved in this effort.



## TACTIC 1: ERASE

Erasing Black history and excellence from public memory—removing stories, physical items, and achievements that document Black contributions and injustices in America

### Overview

Large-scale erasure is the easiest to understand of the administration's three Blackout disinformation tactics. Because of the federal government's vast reach and influence, it has proven a devastatingly effective one.

Information about Black heroes and Black cultural contributions has vanished from digital and physical spaces—deleted from federal websites, pulled from bookshelves, removed from museum halls. The current effort to systematically erase Black history and Black stories, remove large quantities of previously accessible information from public view, and restrict knowledge shows no sign of slowing. Restricting access to knowledge is fundamentally at odds with the principles of a free society; it undermines individual liberty, stifles critical inquiry, and places the power to define truth in the hands of the few.

### ERASE

Onyx Impact has [documented 1,362](#) erasure impact points—**723** digital erasures across 10 agencies and **22** websites; **41** physical-site changes; and **591** book bans. These erasures have removed Black stories from the very platforms where the U.S. government speaks directly to the American people. Together, these erasures send the message that the contributions of Black Americans are not worth preserving or teaching.

Voices, struggles, and accomplishments from centuries of American history are being muzzled. The National Park Service alone has deleted information about [Black patriots in the Revolutionary War](#), [Harriet Tubman's](#) courage in the fight against slavery, the oppressiveness of

[Jim Crow segregation](#), and the [mobilization of Black activists](#) against AIDS. Meanwhile, the Environmental Protection Agency [pulled down a page](#) profiling current-day Black civil servants, and Arlington National Cemetery [removed links to](#) pages about the graves of distinguished Black Americans—including Colin Powell, Thurgood Marshall, and Joe Louis. Stories of Black service members, heroes, and everyday citizens alike have been expunged. The cumulative effect is to leave fewer places where Americans can access and understand accurate history.



Some information has been restored after public outcry. Those successes are worth celebrating, and they should encourage Americans to keep up the vigilance and pressure. But far more information has been removed without being reinstated. The sheer number makes comprehensive restoration or verification difficult. Citizens should not have to police their own government for basic historical accuracy.

**In all, Onyx Impact has identified 1,362 examples of the erasure tactic being deployed in 2025.** The stories of at least **35** key historical figures have been removed, and narratives spanning more than **250** years have disappeared—from before the Revolutionary War to present. Sometimes the information has been wiped out by direct federal action. Sometimes the government has choked off grant money for outside institutions, effectively ending programming or pulling content. And sometimes states or private actors have followed the administration's lead. Regardless of the mechanism, each case represents a voice unheard, a story untold, a lesson never learned. The cost of these erasures will be realized not only in present-day classrooms, museum halls, and communities, but also in future conceptions of what American progress and justice can and should look like.

Much of the erasure that has taken place to date has silenced Black Americans whose stories are not widely known. It is pernicious to [remove historical information](#) about well-known heroes like Harriet Tubman. When icons are targeted, the effect and loss is obvious. But there is a different, and perhaps even greater, cost to removing information about people like Doris Miller, [as the Pentagon did](#). A cook aboard the USS West Virginia when it was torpedoed at Pearl Harbor, Miller carried wounded fellow sailors to safety—then, with no training, manned an anti-aircraft gun to defend against dive-bombing Japanese planes. He was the first Black sailor given the Navy Cross. When profiles such as his vanish from official sites, future readers may lose them forever.

## Deletions of Black heroes and history

Online government-ordered deletions of the contributions and accomplishments of myriad Black American figures captured news headlines in early 2025. Examples include the [deletion of information](#) on military websites about Hattie Scott Peterson, the first Black woman to earn a civil engineering degree in the United States (seen in its archived form [here](#)), and [Emily Perez](#), the first Black female American officer to die in combat. The [National Park Service](#) deleted multiple references to slavery and Jim Crow-era segregation, including a lesson plan on ["Benjamin Franklin and Slavery."](#) Arlington National Cemetery [deleted education modules](#) on African American history and the Civil War from its website. These examples alone—and there are hundreds of others—demonstrate the sweep of the administration's erasure effort. People searching for trustworthy information about American history will miss vital context because the government has removed it in favor of an alternate narrative rejecting Black contributions.

Efforts to delete Black history online have been aimed at well-known figures as well as lesser-known individuals. Removing stories about lesser-known figures risks those stories being forgotten and disappearing entirely. World War II veteran Medgar Evers, whom the President once called "a great American hero," [has been erased](#) from a section of the Arlington National Cemetery website honoring Black Americans who fought in the nation's wars. Meanwhile, the [page for Pauli Murray](#), a Black, queer civil rights activist, legal scholar, and Episcopal priest who was the first African American to receive a JSD degree from Yale Law School—and a name familiar to far fewer Americans than Evers's—was removed from the National Park Service website.

### **SPOTLIGHT: Erasing Black military history**

No federal agency has been more aggressive in removing Black history content than the Department of Defense. The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps have all deleted historical information about the contributions of Black service members, and of those who fought for their country even before the military was integrated.

Onyx Impact has [documented](#) at least **31** examples in which the DOD deleted pages honoring Black military heroes. These included [Jackie Robinson](#), the [Tuskegee Airmen](#), and path-breakers like [Army Maj. Gen. Charles C. Rogers](#), the highest-ranking Black service member to receive the Medal of Honor. (The URL on Rogers's page was also briefly modified to include the letters "DEI.") Joint Force Quarterly, a publication of the National Defense University, [removed articles and entire editions](#), including a 2023 issue with a cover story on ["Black Soldiers and the Promise of America."](#)

The Secretary of Defense has openly encouraged this scrubbing of history [under the thin pretext](#) of creating a "color-blind" fighting force and eliminating "DEI" and "quotas." As a result, many young Black Americans will not see themselves represented in the armed forces past or present, obscuring the message that all Americans should be appreciated and recognized for their service.

The long-term impact of these erasures will carry forward, as successive generations are denied exposure to whole swaths of information about Black history and Black progress in this country. Every instance of erasure is a slice of history removed, one fewer experience or lesson passed on to future Americans.

### **SPOTLIGHT: Book bans at the Defense Department**

The executive order titled "[Restoring America's Fighting Force](#)" barred the Department of Defense and its schools from promoting "un-American" ideas, which it said includes diversity, equity, and inclusion, and anything that would suggest "that America's founding documents are racist or sexist." In compliance with the order, DOD schools banned a [long list of books](#), including the following titles: *A History of Racism in America*, *A Smart Girl's Guide to Race & Inclusion: Standing Up to Racism and Building a Better World*, *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*, and *Coping with Racial Inequality*.

## **Removing historical artifacts**

Just as it has scrubbed websites of Black history, the administration has also focused on removing important historical artifacts from physical spaces and institutions, especially museums. Seeing physical evidence of our country's history of race and racial discrimination is critical to teaching current generations and to building a stronger, more just future. History suppressed breeds repetition. In order to protect our future, the current political moment cannot be permitted to erase Black injustice and progress. These efforts to erase Black history are well illustrated by the administration's censorship of museum exhibits. The President [personally confirmed this attack](#) in a chilling social media post in August 2025 in which he ordered his lawyers to "go through the Museums," stating

that the Smithsonian Institution was "OUT OF CONTROL." He claimed such efforts were needed because the Smithsonian spent too much time focusing on "how bad Slavery was," among other criticisms.

At least **32** Black history artifacts previously on display at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture [have been removed](#), including Harriet Tubman's book of hymns and a first edition copy of the memoir *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. The efforts to eliminate Black history from physical spaces also extend beyond the well-known Smithsonian museums. Smaller institutions across the country have felt an even greater impact as they aim to tell less well-known, but equally important, stories. The administration rescinded two [federal grants to the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana](#), endangering the facility's ability to operate. The Whitney Plantation educates visitors on what life was actually like for enslaved people; in this instance, after news of the rescissions surfaced, the grants were restored. However, other museum exhibits across the country have been cut entirely, including [an exhibit](#) of Afro-Latino, Caribbean, and Black artists at the Art Museum of the Americas, and the exhibition "[Routed West: Twentieth-Century African American Quilts in California](#)," by the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. The attempt to erase Black identity from physical locations extends across the country. Onyx Impact found **48** erasures in **5** states and the District of Columbia. For example, the administration demanded the [removal of the Black Lives Matter street mural](#) in Washington, D.C. The Department of Government Efficiency listed the Alabama Bus Boycott location and Freedom Riders Museum for [sale](#) before backtracking amid public outcry. The National

Park Service reversed its previous decision to consider granting [historic landmark designation](#) to a site in St. John's Parish, Louisiana, noted for its complex history and the possibility of further research on unmarked graves of enslaved people at that site. These are just a few instances of the broad effort to restrict knowledge of American history across the country. Denying Americans access to these foundational pieces of our collective memory is an orchestrated attempt to sever the nation from its own roots.

## **Black books banned**

Access to the work of Black authors, thinkers, and artists is fundamental to an honest and complete understanding of American society. These voices do not just add "diversity"—they are central to the nation's intellectual, cultural, and historical fabric. Yet government-driven book bans are spreading across the country. This systematic removal of Black voices from libraries and classrooms is not a matter of administrative oversight or isolated incidents; it is a coordinated effort to restrict access to knowledge, limit the scope of public discourse, and undermine the agency of Black communities. The [sheer number and frequency](#) of these bans make it difficult to understand and document their full effects.

The U.S. Naval Academy [pulled 381 books](#) from its library shelves after the Defense Secretary ordered the removal of titles that "promote DEI." After public outcry, the Academy later restored many of those titles. Meanwhile, the Department of Defense schools banned [596 books](#), including [numerous books about race or racism](#). During the current administration, **21** states have

### **SPOTLIGHT: Turning a cold shoulder on Sally Hemings**

The Jefferson Memorial in Washington was scheduled to open a new exhibit in November 2025, the result of several years of planning, design, and curatorial work. The exhibit was [designed to include recognition](#) and explanation of the role that both Sally Hemings and slavery played in Thomas Jefferson's life. The research for the exhibit had been completed and the exhibit space cleared. Then the Trump administration halted funding for the update, stopping the addition of this new material to the much-visited memorial. The new exhibit space now sits empty. A prior exhibit remains, and includes no mention of Jefferson's participation in the slave trade or ownership of enslaved people.

engaged in **591** instances of banning books by Black authors and books discussing race, racism, and Black experiences. These books span fiction and non-fiction, youth and adult titles alike. Renowned author Toni Morrison has been the most-banned Black author in 2025 so far; the removal of her and hundreds of other works have left critical holes in America's educational system and libraries. In addition to undermining basic principles of free speech and the Constitution, these bans limit access to knowledge among readers of all races. These erasures stand to reverberate in the education and outlook of Americans taught at these schools for decades to come.



## Takeaways

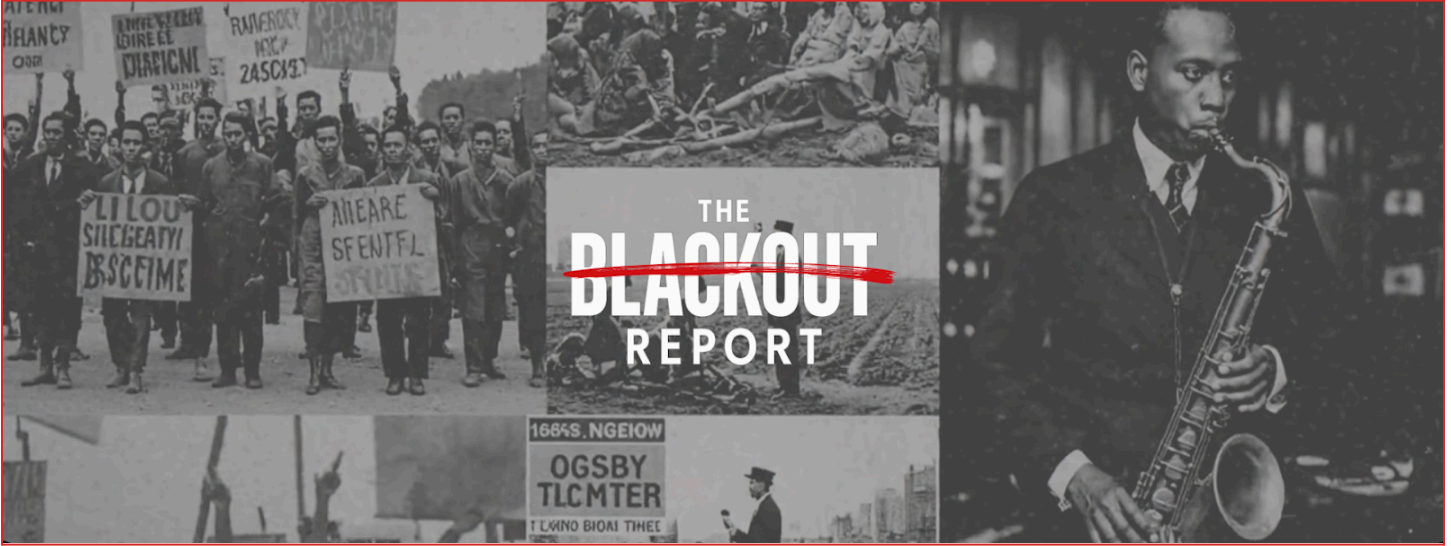
The erasure tactic seeks to fundamentally alter the nation’s historical record. Black stories, Black heroes, and Black achievements are being erased *en masse* from American government, education, and culture. Icons of Black American history, such as [Harriet Tubman](#), [Medgar Evers](#), and the [Tuskegee Airmen](#), have not been spared. Nor have countless other historical figures whose stories of resistance, heroism, and advocacy will now be harder for Americans to discover and learn. The administration and its allies are executing a concerted effort to erase this information from digital and physical spaces across the country.

The administration has premised these efforts on claims that it is rooting out “DEI” and striving for a “color-blind” society. In reality, these policies function as a direct repudiation of Black contributions, signaling that Black history is not only expendable but unworthy of preservation

or recognition. These efforts constitute an active campaign to excise Black narratives from government websites, museum collections, school curricula, and public libraries.

Today’s erasures repeat a known pattern: After periods of Black advancement, powerholders rewrite the record and remove proof of progress to justify reversal. Rewriting history doesn’t change the truth of what happened, but it does deprive Americans of full knowledge of their shared past. Erasing Black stories is also the first step toward excluding those voices from the American dialogue. This process impoverishes the collective memory, leaving future generations with a distorted sense of identity, possibility, and belonging. The erasure of Black history is not just an attack on the past—it is a threat to the integrity and potential of our shared future.





## TACTIC 2: DISTORT

Distort the truth by rewriting, manipulating, or sanitizing information, datasets, and funding, making it harder to recognize injustice and warping the reality of Black experiences.

### Overview

The distortion tactic is part of a focused campaign to distort both what is remembered about and what is possible for Black communities. Policies are then shaped by false or incomplete information, impairing Black

#### DISTORT

Onyx Impact has [documented](#) at least **14,072** distortion impact points, including **6,769** federal datasets removed, **5,054** digital distortions, and **\$3.4B+** in federal grants cut or frozen across health, research, and education fields that impact Black communities. The effect of these distortions is immediate: worse health outcomes, fewer grants and scholarships, missing data that blocks accountability, and economic and employment losses concentrated among Black workers.

progress. Through this tactic, the current administration and its allies are undermining the Black community's pursuit of justice and opportunity.

The administration has eliminated billions of dollars in federal science and health grants to tackle health inequalities. It has terminated grants and resources meant to improve Black communities and save Black lives. Researchers seeking to understand racial disparities—in the economy, healthcare, public safety, and environmental justice, to name a few—have suddenly lost access to relevant data and the funds to continue collecting important information. The administration has selectively warped access to this information to minimize Black achievement and hide needs.

Targeted excerpts and phrasing of web content have also been obscured or moved, making it harder to find or understand. The

administration, states, and individuals have simultaneously manipulated the teaching of American history in schools. These actions don't just distort the past—they threaten Black futures by deepening systemic barriers and making it even harder to fight for justice and progress.

These acts of distortion are not just attempts to rewrite history—they are calculated moves to strip Black communities of power, voice, and opportunity. The result is a world where Black lives are rendered invisible, accountability is blocked, and the fight for equity is made even harder. But the consequences do not stop there: When the truth is distorted and opportunity is denied to any community, the entire nation suffers. Weaker civic trust, poorer public health, and diminished economic vitality follow—threatening the very possibility of a just and representative democracy.

## Defunding critical grants and programs

The administration is systematically withholding funding, education, employment, and accurate information from Black communities. It has cut at least **\$3.4B** in grants focused on minority health, education, environmental disparities, and representation. The [National Science Foundation](#) and the [National Institutes of Health](#) have each canceled hundreds of grants for Black communities. In [ruling some of the NIH cuts illegal](#), one Republican-appointed federal judge who has been on the bench for 40 years noted he had “never seen government racial discrimination like this.”

Two life-or-death crises for Black communities demonstrate the stakes of these cuts. First, Black maternal mortality remains highly elevated: Black women are **3.5x** more likely than white women to die during childbirth. In the face of this disparity,

### **SPOTLIGHT: Terminating funding for sickle cell disease research and treatment**

Sickle cell disease (“SCD”) is a genetic disorder that destroys normal red blood cells, causing severe, unpredictable pain and shortened life expectancy. **Ninety percent** of people with SCD in the United States are Black. The current administration has targeted and terminated or frozen at least **13** federal grants—totaling over **\$9.4M** in needed funding—that supported research and treatment. In addition, the administration all but [eliminated a division](#) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that focused on blood disorders and oversees the only national SCD data collection initiative. In attempting to explain these terminations, the National Institutes of Health stated that [“amorphous equity objectives”](#) are incompatible with scientific inquiry.

The current administration explicitly misuses “DEI” as the basis for these blatantly discriminatory and racist cuts to rare disease research. Protecting the health and lives of Black Americans is not an “amorphous equity objective.” It is the very foundation that allows Black communities to continue to achieve financial, physical, and emotional well-being. Without federal funding, SCD patients will suffer and die needlessly. By cutting funding and patient services for SCD research and blocking data collection to support upcoming research, the administration is removing critical support for patients who badly need it. That is not health care equity. It's a targeted attack on Black health that will reverberate into individuals' and our country's future.

## SPOTLIGHT: Cuts to federal spending threaten Black communities

Policymakers are dismantling programs that safeguard Black communities from flooding, contaminated water, and polluted air. This not only neglects these neighborhoods, it actively undermines Black progress. Funding attacks like these exemplify the strategic scapegoating of the term “DEI” as a smokescreen to restrict Black advancement.

Cuts include:

### → **\$68.5M** for projects that prevent flooding in predominantly Black neighborhoods

Decades of redlining pushed many Black families into low-lying, poorly drained areas. Multiple national [analyses](#) show these neighborhoods face higher flood [risk](#) and [costs](#) today. Cutting flood defenses means more homes, schools, and streets damaged and underwater.

### → **\$31M** to address high asthma rates for Black kids and reduce air pollution in Black communities

Black children are **60%** more likely to suffer from asthma due to higher pollution levels. [Studies](#) show that Black children are 2-3 times more likely to be hospitalized and nearly **4x** more likely to die from asthma. Cutting air-quality programs will serve to increase these emergencies.

### → **\$23.7M** to fix unsafe drinking water and reduce childhood lead exposure in Black communities

Lead exposure damages children’s brains, learning, and behavior. Old lead plumbing—still common in Black neighborhoods—are a major source. The CDC has confirmed the health [risks](#) of such contamination and the [link](#) to outdated infrastructure.

the current administration terminated at least **18** NIH grants – totaling **\$42M** – dedicated to addressing this crisis. Second, Black men face a disproportionately severe cancer risk. They are [twice](#) as likely as white men to die from prostate cancer, and **40%** more likely to die from colon cancer. Yet the administration has terminated at least **16** NIH grants totaling **\$37M** for research into these kinds of cancers focused on Black men.

Funding cuts have also extended to historically black colleges and universities. According to Onyx Impact’s research and analysis, HBCUs have lost at least **\$210M** in grant funding in just the first eight months of these attacks. The NSF alone eliminated more than **\$11M in grants** at Howard University, the only HBCU classified as a Level 1 research university, indicating the highest level of research activity. More than **\$2.9M** of [funding for a center](#) at Morehouse College focusing on improving the health of Black pregnant women was canceled, as was **\$1.2M** of funding to [increase Black enrollment](#) in the marine sciences at Hampton University. These cuts not only affect students and researchers today, but also erode upcoming discoveries and opportunities to expand Black communities’ access to better health, education, and economic mobility.

Cuts to environmental justice efforts that directly impact Black communities have also been severe. Grants aimed at protecting Black children in Missouri [from lead poisoning](#) (**\$1M**), [reducing the pollution inhaled](#) by low-income Black communities, as well as their white and Hispanic neighbors, in North Carolina (**\$500k**), [providing shelter](#) to Black communities in the event of climate disaster like Hurricane Katrina (**\$20M**), and [repairing sewers](#) and homes in a disproportionately Black town in Georgia (**\$20M**) were [all wiped out](#). At the same time, the administration’s signature policy act to date [has denied](#) money to federal food, education, and health programs that strengthen and support Black

communities. Meanwhile, government cuts in funding and jobs have [disproportionately affected](#) Black workers.

Each of these cuts serves to limit resources and undermine racial justice. Collectively, these funding reductions create an America where Black progress is impeded and Black communities face reinforced barriers to advancement. Canceling or reducing grants meant to improve the lives of Black Americans is a dismissal of the truth that deep racial inequalities persist across the United States in health care, education, child development, environmental impact, and employment. By slashing any grants that fall under its broad attack on “diversity,” the government sends the message that addressing such inequalities is no longer a priority. The administration is making clear its position: any attempt to examine or address racial disparities is now being miscast as discriminatory— a distortion that not only misrepresents the work of principled scientists and researchers committed to progress, but also signals that the pursuit of equity and advancement for Black communities is no longer valued or protected at the federal level.

## Hiding data about Black communities

A core goal of the Blackout campaign is data distortion: removing numbers removes the proof of inequality and systemic disadvantage. So far in 2025, at least **6,769** federal datasets, tools, and quantitative pages have been deleted, all tied to Black health, education, jobs, housing, and justice.

Thousands of relevant webpages vanished in an [early sweep by the administration](#). Regulatory guidelines on [increasing diversity in clinical trials](#) suddenly disappeared, as did a

## **SPOTLIGHT: Targeting Black women in the federal workforce and beyond**

Between February and August 2025, **306,000** Black women have lost [employment](#). Black women [face a 6.7% unemployment rate](#)—the highest such rate since 2021. Black federal employees, and Black women in particular, have been disproportionately harmed by widespread layoffs of government workers at the hands of the current administration. Cuts by the Department of Government Efficiency, supposedly aimed at eliminating waste, have targeted agencies heavily staffed by Black civil servants. For example, Black workers [constitute 36%](#) of workers at the Department of Education, [compared with 18%](#) of the overall federal workforce. [Almost half](#) of that department’s employees have been fired, and the administration [seeks to abolish](#) the department altogether. At the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, employees have [sounded the alarm](#) about layoffs that target Black workers. The federal cuts also follow multiple executive orders eliminating DEI programs in the federal government, education system, and beyond, under the guise of “protecting” workers from diversity initiatives.

Concern is rising that anti-equity fervor and DOGE cuts have [created an “antagonistic posture against the Black workforce.”](#) Economists [point out](#) that the federal cuts have contributed to the rise in unemployment among Black Americans, and particularly among Black women. The rise in the unemployment rate for Black women comes as overall U.S. unemployment has held relatively steady.

To make matters worse, the current administration has [removed public data](#) on the current and historical diversity of the federal workforce, making it harder to hold the administration accountable for disproportionate firing of Black federal employees, now or going forward. Taken together, the anti-equity initiatives, DOGE cuts, and stripping of data show an administration hostile to Black civil servants, especially Black women—and bent on rolling back decades of progress in combating race-based discrimination in the workplace.

## SPOTLIGHT: Stripping Black businesses of support

Black-owned small businesses across the United States create jobs, help communities thrive, and pump [more than \\$200B](#) into the national economy. Yet they still face [racial disparities](#), receiving a [notably smaller share of contracting dollars](#) than their representation among eligible businesses. Black-owned firms are also more likely to be deemed a credit risk and rejected for loans. For decades, the federal government has acknowledged these injustices and sought to correct them. Now the administration is dismantling that work and denying Black-owned businesses the support they need—support that other small businesses receive.

In January, the Small Business Administration [slashed its commitment](#) to Black and minority-owned businesses. In recent years, the agency had set a goal of awarding 15% of federal contracting dollars to historically disadvantaged businesses. The current administration cut that goal to 5%—the minimum allowed by law. In March, the administration also [gutted the Minority Business Development Agency](#), which for half a century has helped Black-owned businesses overcome discrimination and close the racial wealth gap. In 2024 alone, the agency helped create or save 23,000 jobs and [helped minority-owned businesses secure almost \\$5B in capital and contracts](#).

The administration [claims it's eradicating "discriminatory DEI programs"](#) that "pick winners and losers." In fact, it is denying the truth about persistent inequalities in our economy. Starving Black-owned businesses of support will weaken Black communities, discourage the next generation of Black entrepreneurs, and make it harder for Black Americans to build wealth. Rather than working to create a level playing field, these changes will deepen the persistent racial wealth gap, creating even higher barriers in the years to come.

page from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on [addressing racism as a driver of health disparities](#). [State-level data on hate crimes](#) was also temporarily unavailable. Only seven months later did the administration agree, under legal pressure, to [restore a small number of webpages](#) related to science and health.

This affects lives, not just [links](#): without maternal-mortality breakdowns, Black mothers lose leverage for hospital safety reforms. Without workforce diversity data, Black women lose a key proof point against further discriminatory layoffs. Without environmental data, Black communities can't quantify exposure to lead and other environmental pollutants that disproportionately harm their communities.

Each dataset acts as an ecosystem. Deleting one component can undermine an entire program or effort to remediate. In 2025, these removals hit [datasets](#) about health outcomes and disparities, including maternal mortality rates, research on sickle cell disease, and numerous parameters around [clinical diversity](#). Among the thousands of datasets and points that have been removed is [significant demographic information](#) that helps illuminate the effects of illnesses and health outcomes in Black and other communities. Entire [visualization tools](#) allowing community-level understanding and analysis of dangerous environmental impacts have vanished. In some cases, private funding and workers may need to take on research and work that the administration has distorted through deletion or defunding. With so much gone so quickly, it is impossible to fully quantify the impacts of these distortions. Future years will illustrate the harm their absence brings.

It also now falls to outside entities and individuals to ensure the administration complies with court orders requiring the return and ongoing maintenance of datasets and points that it deleted or discontinued collecting. Verifying that thousands of webpages have been accurately restored will be no easy task, and in the interim, researchers have lost valuable time. There is also an ongoing risk that similar deletion of datasets will happen again, or that such data simply will not be collected going forward.

Deleting data doesn't change reality. It hides evidence, slows treatment, and starves communities of the tools they need to prevent and mitigate harm. Restoring truth means restoring datasets—fully, publicly, and permanently.

## Controlling the narrative of race and Black history in schools

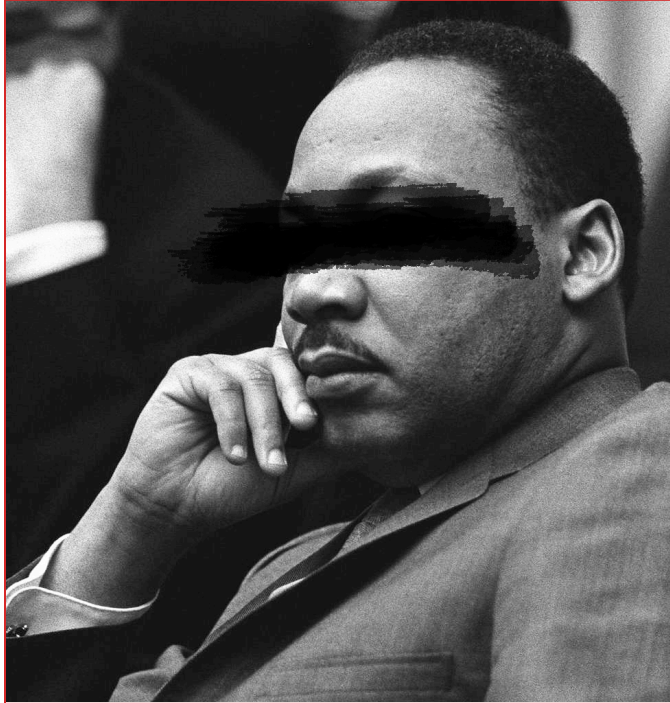
The distortion of history has filtered down to our public schools, ensuring that legions of American children are being taught a sanitized version of their nation's story and their own shared heritage.

The administration set the tone shortly after it resumed power in January 2025 with an [executive order](#) purporting to end "radical indoctrination" in K-12 schools. Instead, the administration insists on what it calls "patriotic education," including a "unifying, inspiring, and ennobling characterization of America's founding," which it seems to view as mandating an upbeat through-line of "progress" toward the nation's highest ideals, at the expense of a truthful recounting of more difficult moments in American history. The executive order threatens to withhold federal money from school districts promoting "discriminatory equity ideology" in their curriculums. The Department of Education



[followed up by eliminating more than \\$600M in grants](#) meant to train teachers on topics such as diversity and social justice activism, and the Justice Department [warned](#) that certain equity training for teachers may violate the law. Teachers already faced a chilling climate. In recent years, dozens of state legislatures have [taken up or passed bills](#) to interfere with the accurate teaching of Black history; Florida is a [notable example](#). In 2025, some states went further to make more teachers think twice before any discussion of race in the classroom. Oklahoma partnered with a conservative nonprofit to create an [ideological screening test for new teachers](#) from out of state; Idaho [banned](#) racially inclusive "Everyone Is Welcome Here" signs in classrooms on the grounds that they were "political." The teaching of warped history extends even to the youngest children: At an elementary school at Fort Campbell,

Kentucky, teachers had to remove bulletin board material celebrating Black History Month, Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, and Rosa Parks, [according to a local news report](#)—the result of Defense Department guidance banning “monthly cultural observances.”



By censoring and distorting Black history, those in power are not just erasing stories—they’re cutting off access to knowledge and the tools needed to build strong, self-aware communities. Black students are denied the chance to see their achievements reflected in the classroom, while all students lose out on the full truth of what has shaped this country. These distortions are about more than curriculum—they’re about who gets to define what matters, whose story gets told, and who gets to shape the future. When the facts are hidden or twisted, it becomes easier to ignore Black contributions, silence Black voices, and limit Black opportunity. The long-term result is fewer resources, less representation, and a generation less equipped to claim their opportunity and power in American life.

## Systematic changes and removal of Black language and imagery

The current administration is also pushing the distortion tactic with pervasive changes to individual words, phrases, and images.

This includes digital distortions—of which Onyx Impact has documented **5,054**—that are warping online information about Black contributions and impact. These tweaks to verbiage and available pictorial representation will negatively reshape how Americans understand themselves, their communities, and the nation’s collective past

Federal websites are being scrubbed of more than **350** targeted words and phrases, according to a [list kept by PEN America](#), including scores related to race. On the banned word list are “Black,” “racism,” “people of color,” “disparity,” “social justice,” and 14 terms deriving from the concept of diversity alone, including “diverse communities” and “diversity in the workplace.” Similarly, The Associated Press [reported on a database of more than 26,000 images](#), including many [featuring Black service members](#), that have been flagged for removal as the military works to purge DEI content.

Distortions are also occurring in offline spaces. At the Smithsonian Institution, the artist Amy Sherald, most famous for painting the portrait of former First Lady Michelle Obama, [pulled her entire retrospective](#) from the National Portrait Gallery. She took this step after one of her paintings, *Trans Forming Liberty*, depicting a Black, transgender woman as the Statue of Liberty, was slated for removal from the show because museum officials were trying to avoid angering the president. A White House aide



[told Politico](#), in chilling language, that the Statue of Liberty “is not an abstract canvas for political expression.”

Each of these changes matters. Each distortion, each censored image, is part of a coordinated effort to rewrite the public record and limit Black influence—it deletes the language needed to name, confront, and solve injustices.

Removing images of Black service members and censoring Black art sends a clear message about whose stories are allowed to be seen and valued. This

campaign is about controlling the narrative, controlling memory, and ultimately controlling who gets to belong and who gets to lead. The result is a country where truth is harder to find, and where Black communities are pushed further to the margins.

## Reviving tributes to the Confederacy and supplanting Black legacies

One of the clearest examples of the administration’s distortion of Black history is the restoration and glorification of prominent symbols and figures from the Confederacy. This effort aims to undo recent efforts to confront the legacy of slavery and the Civil War. It conveniently sidesteps the underlying truth of the Civil War, and risks reversing the modern reckoning that



followed the murder of George Floyd in 2020. The administration has been clear about what it hopes to accomplish in encouraging such reinstatements. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, for example, has enacted plans to [restore a memorial to the Confederacy](#) that was previously removed from Arlington National Cemetery at the recommendation of Congress—saying the monument “never should have been taken down by woke lemmings.”

Some of the publicly stated justification for these restorations has

been more deceptive. At least 9 U.S. military installations have [reverted to previous names](#) that honored Confederate generals, but the military contrived a thin pretext for the changes. Fort Lee in Virginia, for example, originally honored Confederate General Robert E. Lee. It was rechristened Fort Gregg-Adams in 2023, honoring [Arthur Gregg](#), the Army’s first Black lieutenant general, and [Charity Adams](#), the first Black woman to serve as an officer in the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps. Under the current administration, the base has reverted to the name Fort Lee—but with a different purported namesake. The administration disingenuously claims the name now honors the far less-known Pvt. Fitz Lee, who fought in the Spanish-American War. This is an attempt to circumvent a bipartisan 2020 law that required the removal of

# THE BLACKOUT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

TACTIC 1: ERASE

**TACTIC 2: DISTORT**

TACTIC 3: SUPPRESS

WHAT'S NEXT?

Confederate names from bases, but the administration admitted the truth in an [interview with Fox News](#), boasting that the military was actually “restoring” the old names. The Pentagon is also [restoring a 20-foot portrait of Robert E. Lee](#), which includes a depiction of an enslaved person guiding Lee’s horse, to the library at West Point. As the Southern Poverty Law Center [has noted](#), the movement to remove or rename Confederate monuments has slowed sharply since 2020. The administration is now putting its full weight behind not only continuing that slowdown, but outright restoring monuments and depictions that had already been deemed inappropriate.

At the same time, the federal government is supplanting the recognition of Black heroes and accomplishments. The Navy is [considering renaming ships](#) that currently honor Black American heroes, including the USNS Thurgood Marshall, the USNS Harriet Tubman, and the USNS Medgar Evers. The Defense Secretary ordered the military to [stop recognizing Black History Month](#).



(This led to the cancellation of a parade honoring Frederick Douglass in Maryland after the Maryland National Guard said it could no longer participate, citing Pentagon guidance that it must decline events that celebrate “individuals based

all or in part on immutable characteristics.”) And the White House failed to issue a proclamation honoring Juneteenth, the federal holiday commemorating the end of slavery. At other points in 2025, however, the White House has seen fit to issue proclamations celebrating [National Ocean Month](#), and [National Physical Fitness and Sports Month](#).

The pattern across these various distortions is clear: The government is imposing its own revisionist, fictional

vision of history, valorizing one of the ugliest chapters in American history at the steep cost of omitting the progress Black communities have made, and the hurdles they have had to overcome to get there. This rewriting of public memory distorts the nation’s understanding of its own past and paves the way for a future where Black excellence is dismissed and rendered invisible.

## Takeaways

The current campaign to distort information, history, and opportunity is not just about rewriting the past—it is about shaping who has power, resources, and visibility in America today and tomorrow. By systematically erasing datasets, censoring language, and withdrawing funding, those in power are obscuring patterns of inequity and dismantling the infrastructure needed to combat that inequity. Distortion is not incidental or symbolic; it is a calculated tool to undermine agency and consolidate control over resources and opportunity.

The removal of grants and federal datasets, the manipulation of school curriculums, and the censorship of Black art and achievement are not just about history—they are about who gets to be seen, who gets to lead, and who gets access to resources. At the same time, all Americans lose out on the full picture of Black excellence, innovation, and resilience.

The consequences are immediate and concrete. They include the elimination of **\$3.4B+** for Black health initiatives and Black students; the removal of thousands of federal datasets that once made racial disparities visible and actionable; and the loss of jobs and opportunities for Black workers and entrepreneurs. These actions are not simply about controlling the narrative. They are about controlling our path forward. Distortion is a direct threat to Black advancement and the nation's long-term stability. If left unchecked, this tactic will entrench inequity, weaken democratic participation, and ensure that the next generation inherits a country where truth, progress, and Black achievement are gravely devalued.





## TACTIC 3: SUPPRESS

Pressure and intimidate institutions—such as state and local government, schools, and businesses—into silence or compliance, using threats, investigations, and policy changes.

### Overview

The first two tactics in this report exploit the direct power of the federal government and its allies. As the administration erases Black contributions from public memory and distorts the truth about Black experience, it relies on its own broad authority—ordering that a military base be renamed or a government grant canceled. The third tactic in the Blackout campaign, suppression, extends the reach of their efforts. Rather than acting alone, the administration pressures other institutions—universities, private companies, state governments, even the public at large—into taking their own steps that blunt Black progress.

The administration suppresses Black advancement by coercing and intimidating other actors into silence or compliance. Since the day it resumed power, the administration has made clear that standing up for diversity and equity now comes with considerable risk, be it political, personal, legal, or financial. Institutions have learned quickly

that the safer path is to fall in line with the administration’s ideological aims, or at least avoid drawing attention. Thus a university, eager to retain federal grant funding, may decide that its most prudent course is to dismiss an inclusive leader. A corporation, eyeing a merger opportunity and mindful of the need to stay on regulators’ good side, may decide the safest move is to eliminate its diversity office.

### **SUPPRESS**

Onyx Impact has [documented](#) at least **289** policies, orders, and efforts to suppress Black advancements and progress in America. This includes **63** government threats and investigations, **21** laws passed in 2025 limiting what is taught in schools or available on library shelves, and **32** instances of corporate roll backs to equity policies. Collectively, these instances of suppression establish the parameters for a less inclusive future, where Black progress is not only ignored, but thwarted.

## **SPOTLIGHT: The weaponization of 'DEI' as smokescreen**

Understanding the administration's assault on Black progress requires understanding its manipulation of the term "DEI." Those initials apply to a range of initiatives, employed in a variety of organizations across the public and private sectors. Their general purpose is to make sure all individuals within an organization are treated equally and represented fully, regardless of their backgrounds.

The current administration, however, has sought to strip "DEI" of its original meaning, [arguing instead](#) that equity initiatives are themselves a form of discrimination.

Under direction from the administration, agencies [across government](#) have vowed to uproot equity initiatives and pressed recipients of federal funding to do the same. As one news account [explained](#), the effects could include "forcing universities to end ethnic studies programs, media companies to stop paying for staffers to attend journalists of color conferences or nonprofits to cease programs studying health disparities." The administration has used this framing to intimidate outside institutions, including [corporations](#) and [universities](#), into scrapping their own equity programs. States have followed suit: At least **12** states have passed **15** pieces of legislation in 2025 alone addressed at limiting or eradicating equity initiatives.

The administration also uses "DEI" as a smokescreen for anyone or anything it wishes to suppress or explain away. Programs meant to encourage equality and justice are recast as unfair and inequitable. Highly qualified Black public servants who may not share the administration's ideology [are belittled](#) as "DEI hires." In an especially shameful example, when an Army helicopter collided with a passenger plane in January, killing 67 people, the president [suggested](#) that equity efforts in air-traffic control could be to blame, and the defense secretary vowed to end "the era of DEI" at the Defense Department.

At their core, equity efforts are about removing barriers that have long held Black communities back, not about giving handouts or lowering standards. The goal is to ensure everyone has a fair chance to succeed, free from the weight of discrimination. By twisting the meaning of "DEI," the administration is fueling distrust and division, and rolling back hard-won progress for Black communities.

The result is a far-reaching chilling effect, a climate of fear and uncertainty that cuts off progress and erodes equal protection under the law. As the writer Nikole Hannah-Jones [explained it](#) in *The New York Times Magazine*, civil rights leaders now have reason to fear a future in which "institutions will be afraid to admit too many Black students, hire too many Black staff members or put scientific, medical or economic resources toward alleviating the singular disparities Black people still face across American life."

To suppress institutions and even individual action, the administration uses political pressure, funding restrictions, and outright threats. But its most useful tool by far is its attack on "DEI," a term the administration has seized, redefined, and weaponized as a smokescreen to dismantle civil rights.

## **Attacking equity in higher education**

The administration is aggressively seeking control of the country's institutions of higher education. Rather

than encouraging academic freedom and valuing a diverse range of perspectives, the administration seeks to impose its own ideology on colleges and universities across the country—and is using the power of the executive office to pressure them into compliance. In its first week, the administration [rescinded a 2021 executive order](#) “advancing racial equity and supporting underserved communities.” Since then, university presidents who supported equity efforts have been targeted and pushed out.

From April to June 2025, the [Justice Department sent seven letters](#) to the University of Virginia, requesting increasingly detailed information and accusing the university of violations of federal mandates banning DEI and race-based admissions preferences. The DOJ expressed to university leaders that it lacked confidence that Jim Ryan, the university president, would “be willing and able to preside over the dismantling of DEI.” Behind the scenes, according to [news accounts](#), the DOJ demanded that Ryan be dismissed to help resolve the investigation. As a result of the intense pressure, [Ryan ultimately resigned](#)—in the hope, he said, of saving the school from a costly battle with the federal government.

Similarly, the DOJ and the Department of Education [have filed multiple complaints](#) against George Mason University and Gregory Washington, the university’s first Black president. The DOJ alleges that the university is violating federal law through a series of diversity programs, from admissions to faculty



hiring. In response, the George Mason faculty published a resolution supporting their president and the university’s efforts to support diversity. The DOJ then said it would [investigate the faculty](#) as well. The DOJ is leaving no doubt that public support for diversity programs will be met with government investigation.

In February, the Department of Education [notified](#) educational institutions of all levels that they must “cease using race preferences and stereotypes as a factor in their admissions, hiring, promotion, compensation, scholarships, prizes, administration support, sanctions, discipline and beyond.” The department further announced that it would [withhold](#) federal funds from public schools that have DEI programs. The funding at risk includes student loans, state funding for curriculum development, free or reduced lunch programs, and support for students with special needs.

Separately, in August, the administration signed a [memorandum requiring](#) that all colleges

participating in federal-aid programs share detailed admissions data with the federal government to “verify” that they are not unlawfully considering applicants’ race. In settlements with various universities, the administration [has also routinely sought](#) to collect and evaluate data about individual students, their demographics, and their political actions and beliefs.

The administration’s message is clear: Any educational institution that supports diversity and fails to acquiesce to the administration’s revisionist ideology will face federal investigation and risk the removal of federal funds. With the exact requirements unclear, many universities are [concerned](#) that they are being set up to fail. They fear that the administration’s end game is to wield the admission of some unspecified threshold of Black students as evidence of impropriety and unfair advantage, reversing decades of advances toward equity in education.

## Stifling Black business ownership, employees, and programming

The administration is extending its reach into the private sector, targeting Black businesses. These actions disregard persistent economic inequalities and pressure business leaders who seek to address them. The Federal



Communications Commission is exerting its approval power to force companies to align with the administration’s objectives. As part of its recent oversight and approval of the proposed merger between SkyDance and Paramount, the FCC required that the combined company appoint a [“bias monitor.”](#) to review any complaints of bias or other concerns regarding

CBS News, a subsidiary of Paramount. As part of the approval process, [Paramount also agreed](#) to eliminate its diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, including scrapping all DEI messaging from its internal training programs and removing equity objectives in its compensation plans. Billions of dollars were at stake in the merger, and the

federal government seized the opportunity to abuse its regulatory power and impose its ideology on the operations of a private company.

This campaign has extended beyond companies or transactions over which the federal government has a current opportunity to exercise its regulatory authority. The chilling effect of the government’s oversight is influencing business decisions across the country. At least **11** major corporations including Amazon, Google, IBM, McDonald’s, Meta, Target, and Walmart have [scaled back or dismantled a wide range of DEI initiatives](#), often citing political pressure and fear of government scrutiny. These

companies and at least **21** major American law firms are bowing to this pressure despite [evidence](#) that increased diversity makes businesses more competitive. Disney [deleted content warnings](#) that automatically played on its Disney+ service before classic movies with racial stereotypes, including *Dumbo* and *Peter Pan*. The warnings had alerted viewers to “negative depictions and/or mistreatment of people or cultures” and added: “These stereotypes were wrong then and are wrong now.” The warnings had been in place at Disney for at least five years but were removed within the first few months of the current administration.

The administration’s actions make clear that it is targeting efforts to advance equity and support Black business ownership, with consequences that reach far beyond individual companies. When policies and programs designed to address longstanding barriers are dismantled, opportunities for Black entrepreneurs and employees are limited, and the overall competitiveness and innovation of the American economy are weakened. These pressures shape business decision-making and reinforce narratives that frame equity as a threat rather than a strength. The future of American business should include continued commitment to fair opportunity and resistance to political intimidation. That is the best way to ensure that all communities participate in and strengthen economic progress.

## Intimidating Americans at work and in their communities

The administration is also trying to deputeize citizens across the country in its suppression campaign. Following the president’s March [executive order](#) “Restoring Truth and Sanity to

American History,” the Interior Department [required new signage at all national parks](#) encouraging tourists to report any information that is “negative about either past or living Americans.” Voicing the frustration of many, National Parks Conservation Association President Theresa Pierno issued a [statement](#) in response, asking, “Should rangers at Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument avoid speaking negatively about slavery? ... This new order sets a dangerous precedent of prioritizing nostalgia over truth at our parks.”

Administration officials further [instructed](#) NPS staff to report gift shop items with content that “inappropriately disparages Americans past or living” or that includes

“matters unrelated to the beauty, abundance or grandeur” of a natural feature in its description.

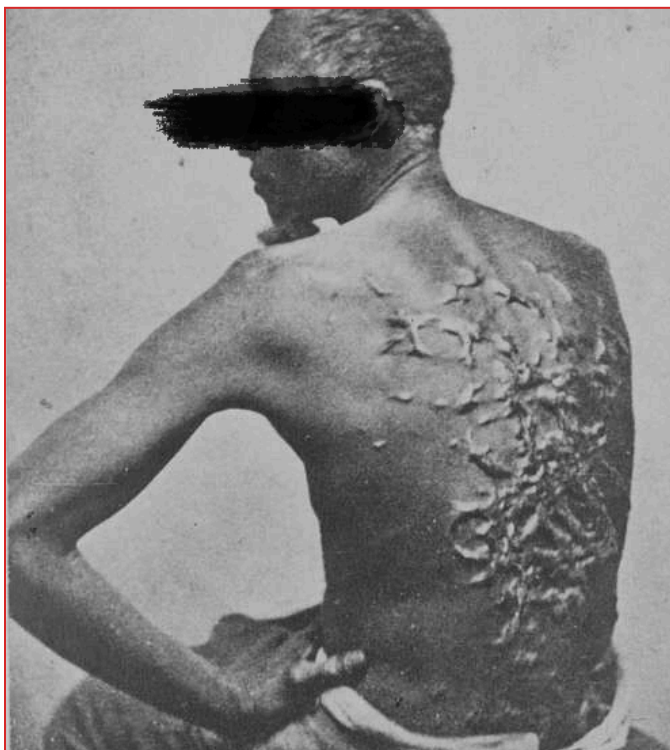
Much of the [content identified for review](#) by the NPS addresses the struggle for equality of Black Americans, from slavery to the civil rights movement. As just one example, a [Park Service official noted](#) that the text on a plaque at the

*“Should rangers at Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument **avoid speaking negatively about slavery?** ... This new order sets **a dangerous precedent of prioritizing nostalgia over truth** at our parks.”*

**THERESA PIERNO**  
PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PARKS  
CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION



Stones River National Battlefield in Tennessee, the site of one of the bloodiest conflicts of the Civil War, “addresses slavery as the primary cause of the American Civil War.” The official noted, “[t]his is both historically correct and legislatively mandated, but we ask for further review to confirm it is aligned” with the executive order. NPS employees should not fear retribution for accurately representing American history. In September 2025, the administration [began identifying](#) the specific NPS items and verbiage it wished to censor—and the initial list, unsurprisingly, focused on material related to slavery, racism, and historical accuracy. Notably, this included the indelible [image](#) of an enslaved man named Peter Gordon, titled “The Scourged Back.”



Meanwhile, at school districts across the country, community members have been emboldened to file complaints alleging that Black affinity groups and other support programs for Black students violate civil rights laws. In Ithaca, New York, a

conservative group called the Equal Protection Project filed a complaint [alleging](#) that the annual “Students of Color United Summit” discriminated against white students. The same Equal Protection Project also [filed a civil rights](#) complaint asserting that a scholarship for Black students at the University of Alabama constitutes discrimination; in response the university took down the scholarship designation. At two California schools, a conservative parents’ group filed a civil rights [complaint](#) against enrichment programs that provided Black history education and mentoring by Black male teachers for Black boys.

In February 2025, the Department of Education established an [“End DEI” reporting portal](#), aiming to enlist parents, teachers, and students across the country to report programs advocating diversity, equity and inclusion. The department failed to explain what made DEI illegal; anyone can submit a complaint, whether or not it’s relevant or truthful, and the burden is placed on the school district to expend the time, money, and energy needed to respond and defend itself. As one president of a state educators association [explained](#), “There’s such a profound chilling effect that’s happened right now because of the orders coming out of Washington. ... I don’t think any school or district wants to talk about it for fear that that’s going to get weaponized and used against them to potentially take away federal funding.”

## Removing civil rights protections

The administration’s approach to civil rights is to uproot and invert the entire project, repudiating 60 years of progress. The current federal government is refusing to enforce the hard-fought fundamental rights of Black Americans, while also undoing those protections

in the false name of “eliminating” discrimination. As part of the administration’s efforts to dismantle the Department of Education entirely, a significant portion of the department’s Office for Civil Rights staff was laid off. The administration [closed 7 of OCR’s 12 regional offices](#), reducing the department’s ability to process and investigate civil rights complaints arising in the nation’s schools. The seven closed offices oversaw nearly 60k public schools and more than 30M K-12 students. The department has yet to fully comply with a federal court order requiring the agency to [restore](#) OCR to “the status quo” so it can “carry out its statutory functions.” While the administration has [slashed](#) the number of civil rights investigators at the Education Department, it has also [increased](#) the number of inquiries into programs that administration officials claim unfairly support Black students.

The administration is denying environmental justice protection as well. In April, it [announced](#) the termination of a historic settlement aimed at improving wastewater treatment in majority-Black communities in Alabama that have been harmed by raw sewage. The administration called the agreement “illegal DEI and environmental justice policy.” Again weaponizing the term “DEI,” and again targeting the environmental well-being of Black communities, the federal government [declared](#) that it would no longer “push ‘environmental Justice’ as viewed through a distorting, DEI lens.”

In February, the Justice Department [shut down](#) the National Law Enforcement Accountability Database, the first nationwide database tracking misconduct by federal police officers. It plans to [end consent decrees](#) meant to curb police abuse in more than **20** cities and [drop investigations](#) into several major police departments. [Additionally](#), in police accountability and

eliminating racial discrimination in policing, the Department of Justice [requested](#) a token one-day sentence for the officer convicted of violating the civil rights of [Breonna Taylor](#), who was shot to death in her apartment in Kentucky during a botched police raid. The federal judge in the case [rejected](#) that request, imposing a sentence of 33 months.

In addition to failing to do its job enforcing civil rights, the current administration is actively seeking to reverse and eliminate civil rights protections, falsely alleging that these protections constitute illegal discrimination. As one example, the administration [ended a 44-year-old legal agreement](#) that barred a civil service exam for federal jobs, reviving a practice once held discriminatory. Separately, the Department of Housing and Urban Development is turning away from programs and initiatives that help create equal housing opportunities, especially for people who have been systemically excluded from access to resources. HUD has [canceled grants](#) for nonprofit organizations that investigate claims of housing discrimination and [issued new rules](#) that gut the agency’s commitment to fair housing practices.

As a last illustration, the Department of Education has opened an [investigation](#) into the Chicago Black Student Success Plan, developed by Chicago Public Schools to address historic inequities and help Black students thrive academically. The plan includes strategies like increasing the number of Black teachers, reducing disciplinary actions for Black students, and promoting culturally relevant curriculums. The administration has labeled these efforts as racial discrimination, disregarding the plan’s initial purpose to advance civil rights and address longstanding inequities.

## Takeaways

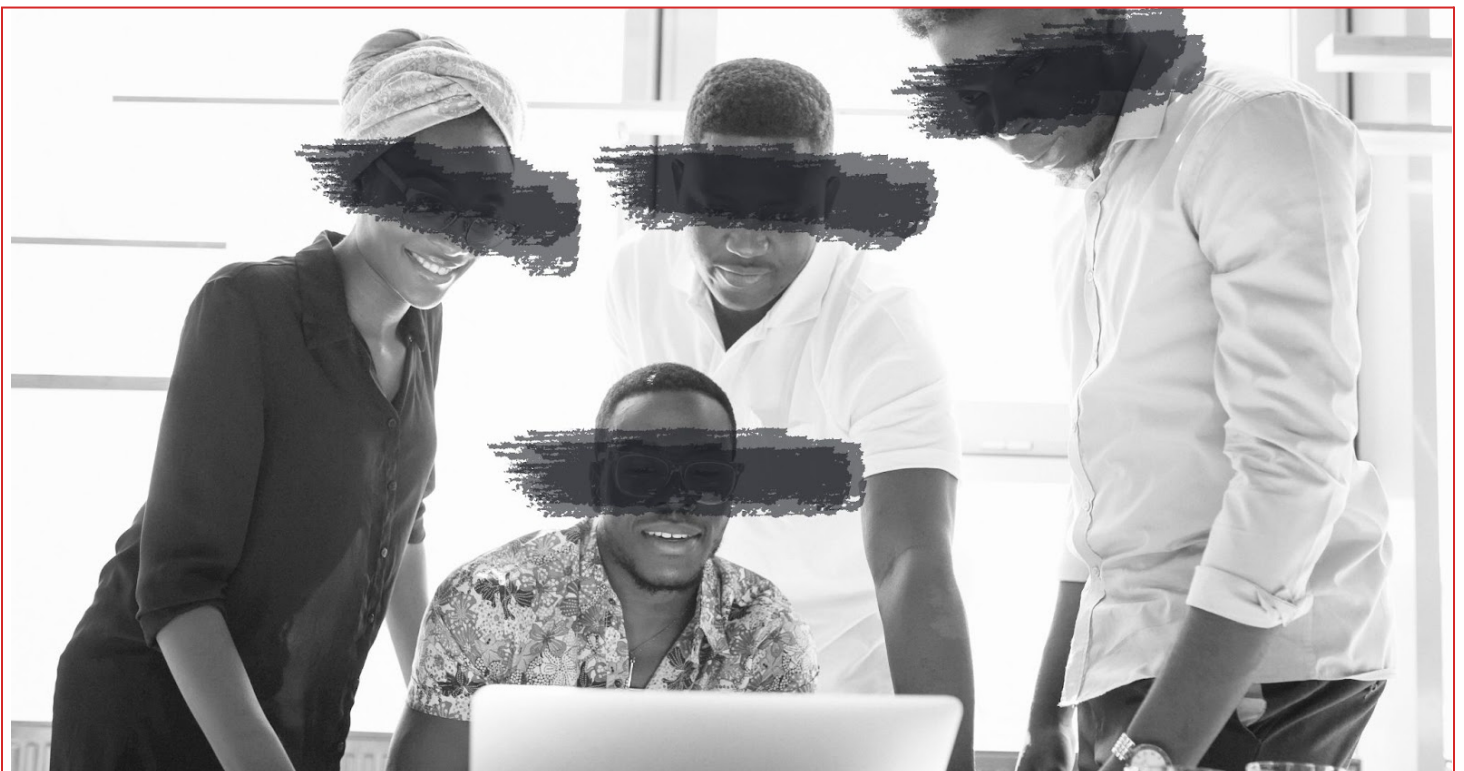
The suppression tactic has extended the reach of both the erasure and distortion tactics by creating a broader environment of fear and uncertainty.

The administration has used funding restrictions, political pressure, and threats to coerce entities far beyond government into undermining Black communities. Such a climate discourages direct engagement with Black history and Black experience. It also discourages commitments to building a better future for Black communities.

Universities and businesses are following the administration's lead, buckling under federal pressure or acting out of fear in an uncertain political landscape. When universities are afraid to stand up for Black students, those students are left with fewer pathways to success. When businesses abandon support for equity and justice in the face of threatened government retribution, barriers to opportunity go up and economic inequality persists.

Meanwhile, as institutions acquiesce, the administration's disinformation campaign extends its reach. Fewer voices are left to speak in favor of diversity, fair play, and full representation. The lie that these ideals actually constitute discrimination gradually takes hold.

The administration's campaign against DEI and civil rights protections is a primary tool in this effort. Efforts to dismantle equity initiatives and civil rights directly threaten equal opportunity, financial success, and the ability of Black communities to shape their own progress. By framing equity programs as illegal, racist ideology, the administration is radicalizing and rejecting the fundamental concepts of inclusivity and equal opportunity. Abandoning the principles of civil rights not only puts Black lives and futures at risk, but also undermines the foundation of democracy and justice for all.





## WHAT'S NEXT?

This is not a culture war—it is a power grab. We must defend the record to protect our future.

**Erasure, distortion, and suppression are not rhetorical tactics. They are tools to seize control.**

The aims of the Blackout campaign are clear: delete the record, defund the remedy, and discipline the resisters. Over a period of eight months, Onyx Impact has documented **15,723** impact points that convert a targeted disinformation campaign into lasting harm. This includes hundreds of thousands of Black jobs cut, **\$3.4B+** in grants slashed, and at least **6,769** datasets removed.

**Remember Reconstruction: These strategies have devastating consequences.** After every era of Black advancement, a counter-effort moves to rewrite history so efforts to erode that progress look “reasonable.” First, they erase evidence of what’s been overcome; then distort equity as the threat; and finally suppress those that refuse to comply.

If we don’t name these strategies, tomorrow’s debates will start from a false record in which missing stories, data, and grants never existed. Deleting the evidence removes the obligation to repair, and creates license to repeat the harm. Our future depends on an accurate, honest record.

### TACTICS THAT AIM FOR POWER AND CONTROL

- **ERASE** to shrink memory →  
Recognizing fewer harms
- **DISTORT** to rig evidence →  
Undermining claims for adequate budgets, infrastructure, and accountability
- **SUPPRESS** to chill dissent →  
Fewer institutions willing to resist

### IMPACT

- **HEALTH:** Canceled data on lead pollution, sickle cell disease, and maternal health means worse health outcomes and preventable deaths for Black families.
- **EDUCATION:** Grants cut and curricula rewritten mean programs halted at HBCUs, fewer Black teachers hired, and less research focused on and for Black communities.
- **WORK:** Purges of Black workers and data mean **>306k** fewer Black women [employed](#).

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The last eight months have demonstrated how much there is to lose, and how quickly it can disappear. If information is deleted, it must be restored—and the new version verified.

### COMMUNITIES & ADVOCATES:

- Submit observed impact points via the [Blackout Evidence Form](#)
- Use [THE BLACKOUT REPORT Index](#) to advocate locally
- Insist on public logs for any deletion, or “restoration.” If information is removed, it must be restored—and the new version verified.

### JOURNALISTS & ACADEMICS:

- Compare current information with what has been deleted
- Verify every “restored” dataset
- Link archives in copy
- Tie dataset losses to budget and staffing changes
- Treat claims of “equity” based harm as audit triggers (to check historical facts, ongoing maintenance of information, and consequences like funding cuts)

### PUBLIC OFFICIALS:

- Adopt ‘no-deletion’ standards
- Capture archival snapshots
- ensure machine-readable continuity
- retain version history
- require public 90-day notice for edits

### PHILANTHROPY & ALLIES:

- Fund programs hit hardest – including Black archives
- Preserve data and log impacts
- Engage in legal efforts to ensure accountability
- Require open data and coding as part of grant terms

## For Editors and Reporters

**Much of the current coverage is falling short in documenting the scale of harm.** Both-sides framing, stenographic reporting of “restorations” without later confirming the remedies, and issue-by-issue fragmentation (“a single book list,” “one website”) all hide intent and downplay overall effect. Moving forward, any story touching the Blackout campaign should include:

### 1. COUNT:

**Specifics about what was erased**

### 2. CONTINUITY:

**How this is tied to a broader pattern of distortions, to past policies of erasure, only including verified claims of restoration**

### 3. CONSEQUENCES

**Who loses jobs, care, money, or access**

If those three topics aren’t adequately reported, the public is left underinformed and powerless to shore up future progress. Neutrality is not accuracy. Verification of the timeline and consequences is.

Black history is American history. Black progress is American progress. And the American story must be told in full. A just and equal future must include an honest assessment of the past and the present. **The only acceptable outcome is the reversal of erasures, distortions, and suppression, and the rebuilding of a record strong enough that no administration can again seek to render an inaccurate and incomplete version of the American story.**

## Overlapping tactics

In this report, Onyx Impact has [sorted examples](#) into the three tactic categories—Erase, Distort, Suppress. Not all examples, however, fit neatly or exclusively under just one tactic. In fact, some examples fit under all three. For instance, as discussed above, in May 2025, the Secretary of the Interior [issued an order](#) requiring national park employees and visitors to report content and exhibits that “disparage” Americans. This request spanned not only signage and museums within the national park system, but [also everyday spaces](#) including gift shops and park signage. This order and the request that followed was an act of *suppression* that led to multiple acts of *erasure* and *distortion*. After the order, employees and park visitors subsequently [reported items](#) to NPS. In September 2025, the administration announced it [would be following up](#) on these reports, both by erasing imagery (including a renowned photo of a Black man with deep whipping scars on his back) and by distorting information available to the public (including limiting the books and memorabilia for sale at park gift shops).

Another example further illustrates interactivity across the Blackout tactics: The Food and Drug Administration in January removed draft guidance aimed at making sure drug trials include people from diverse backgrounds. That was an act of *erasure*, which expunged a resource for doctors and medical researchers. It was also an act of *distortion* because federal regulators were ceasing to acknowledge the plain fact that, as [Stat News noted](#), “some drugs do work differently in people of different backgrounds.” And it was an act of *suppression* because it sent a clear message to drug companies and medical research teams, which depend on government approval and funding,

about how they should and should not conduct their research and testing. The three tactics here again overlap and interlock. They are tools used together to further erase Black history, silence Black voices, and narrow Black advancement.

Some examples in this report may be familiar to readers because they have drawn media attention. But as Onyx Impact’s analysis shows, these high-profile cases are often connected to larger and further-reaching harmful efforts, some of which have escaped public view. For example, the military [removed videos and an article](#) about 2nd Lt. Emily J.T. Perez, whose death in Iraq in 2006 made her the first Black female officer in U.S. military history to be killed in combat. This rightly made news, but it was only a small part of a larger campaign of *erasure* and *distortion*. The Associated Press [reported in March](#) on a database of 26,000 images flagged by the military for removal from its platforms, a purge that “targets women and minorities, including notable milestones made in the military.” These actions also stemmed from an act of *suppression* – a lesser noticed but insidious and dryly worded [Pentagon memo](#) from February ordering the deletion of all Defense Department articles, photos, and videos that “promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” including any that “focus” on race. Such an order stands to reframe, for decades to come, how the military presents itself to the public it serves. Young Black Americans will be less likely to see themselves represented in the armed forces. All Americans will be less likely to know about Black military heroes. And the military will obscure the message that all Americans should be proud to serve, now and in the years to come.

## Methodology & Acknowledgements

What started as scanning government websites to detect and document removal of content related to Black history and contribution ended as a much larger open-source research project to capture where the deletion of content, programming, and supports related to Black Americans extended in both online and offline spaces. To perform this task, researchers relied on keyword searches and public news reporting as well as framing, research, and databases from the [NAACP](#) and the [NAACP-LDF](#), the [Congressional Black Caucus Foundation](#), The [Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#), [National Urban League](#), [PEN America](#), the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), [Contraband Camp](#), [Grant Witness](#), [Tracking Government Information](#), and [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), among others.

Researchers used at least eight public databases tracking legislation, government grants, and book bans. They set up approximately two dozen news alerts and conducted twice-daily manual media monitoring to track examples of state and local parallels to national news stories related to the erasure of Black history, celebrations, research contributions, education, funding cuts, business support, and more.

Given the magnitude of what Onyx Impact has observed and documented, it is safe to assume there are relevant impact points missing from its [Index](#) and analysis. However, Onyx Impact is confident that completing the full picture of actions taken to erase, distort, and suppress Black contribution and progress would only signal more, not fewer data points telling the same story. In the months to come, many additional instances are likely to emerge.

The effort to defend the record and shore up both Black and American progress cannot be done by one person, one organization, or one media outlet. Each contribution is essential if we are to combat this dangerous disinformation campaign and so much else that threatens equality and justice in our nation.

# ~~BLACKOUT~~

The Real-World Cost  
of Erasing, Distorting, and Suppressing Black Progress

**ONYX**IMPACT

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