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Editorial

As the Pendulum Swings

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1. Introduction

In creating this Special Issue, we set out to reclaim both the language and the academic ability to account for the existence and influence of race. This is not to say that the previous landscape of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) removed the broad and long-standing influence of race on the people, policies, or structures within higher education. Rather, the pendulum of public and political opinion was simply more willing to swing in a direction which acknowledged that racism exists and at least made a show of reducing its effects. In spite of the limited success of these initiatives, the landscape that permitted DEI also created space for various conversations and perspectives regarding racism, discrimination, and other cultural differences. Conversely, efforts to eliminate DEI also include policy and social restrictions that promote and maintain racism by preventing anyone from acknowledging its existence and impact. In doing so, the pendulum has moved to uphold racism and other forms of discrimination because it is no longer safe to discuss these concepts (Connelly 2025).

2. Overview of Contributions

The articles in this Special Issue directly acknowledge and examine ways that race continues to influence higher education environments and how people experience them. These articles look at racial issues in academic settings in Canada, the U.K., and the U.S. Additionally, these articles share an emphasis on race as an element of identity that affects how institutions treat both individuals and members of subordinated populations. They also consider the ways in which other characteristics intersect with and influence how institutions address people's experiences of race. These intersections include how race affects students' academic identities; the additional barriers that it creates for students with disabilities; how race shapes the professional identities and environments maintained at colleges and universities; and predictions and suggestions as to where this retrograded racial climate will lead us in the future.

3. Recommendations for Future Scholarship

Each of the articles reminds us that racism is neither new nor easily defeated. Indeed, DEI and under-represented became part of the lexicon of anti-racism and social justice after terms and policies such as affirmative action, quotas, and desegregation became divisive and drew criticism from those seeking to protect the status quo (McGovern and Newton 2026). As such, future examinations and discussions of race will likely need to devise new (or recycle and forgotten) terminology to reference these issues. As difficult and uncomfortable as it may be, race-persons and scholars may also need to spend the next few years focusing on addressing discrimination and bias without significant political

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or popular support. This may include more grassroots or even private efforts as public policies and institutions step away from or fully abandon initiatives that directly challenge racism or seek to reduce its influence on students and professionals. Researchers have documented the existence and efforts of these groups, which provide examples of how to generate additional activities in this area (Engram 2023; Manchanda 2021; Mazzola 2026; Perolini 2022; Seikkula 2022; Turner 2021). Instead of constantly feeling trapped by what is wrong, self-constructed community groups and grassroots organizers can focus on where they are and customize approaches that will help move beyond some of the deficits connected to racism.

Accounting for Racism's Impact

Finally, scholars, activists, leaders, and others need to find methods of accounting for the negative influence of racism on both the oppressed and the oppressors. Although not exclusively attributed to changes in DEI and the federal government, Black unemployment remains high across the U.S. (Sidhom and Samuels 2026). This is directly relevant to recent college graduates who find themselves competing for employment against more experienced and educated persons displaced by changes in the labor market that occurred during the graduates' college enrollment (Fast and Gould 2026). Fears related to inflation, the job market, a desire for economic stability, and government policies (e.g., lack of paid maternity leave in the U.S. and the now defunct one-child rule in China) have also contributed to declining birth rates, especially as women who have more economic options and obligations are also more sensitive to inflation such as increased housing costs, leading them to embrace budget-minded life plans that may include deciding to have fewer or no children at all (Adesete and Piano 2026; King 2025; Schettini Kearney and Levine 2026). The declining birth rate replicates and expands economic problems by creating fewer people to attend schools, fill positions, and participate as consumers in the marketplace (Adesete and Piano 2026; Cameron 2025; Corichi et al. 2025; King 2025; Schettini Kearney and Levine 2026). The future labor market in the U.S. will heavily depend on its non-white and immigrant populations because these groups are having the most children (Corichi et al. 2025; Wessel n.d.). While not all Black unemployment is a direct result of racism, this unemployment remains an important factor that has economic and social consequences for the viability of the nation and its citizens. Anti-discrimination milestones, such school desegregation brought about by *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the elimination of gender discrimination in education (Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 2018), the education and minimal supports provided to students with disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004), and even the adoption of Juneteenth as a national holiday (Toness et al. 2023), were achieved because these changes provided political, economic, and social benefits for the nation and not simply for the targeted populations of these policy changes. This suggests that Canada, the U.K., the U.S., or any other western nation or political entity will return the pendulum and their attention to racism when to their advantage.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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