Enslavement and the Foundations of Human Resource Development: Covert Learning, Consciousness Raising, and Resisting antiBlack Organizational Goals

Abstract

Extant historical writings focused on Human Resource Development have generally centered white perspectives and have failed to substantively grapple with the historical experiences of racially minoritized people, leaving the field without an adequate foundation from which to address recent calls for racial inclusivity. This paper begins the process of addressing these concerns by analyzing autobiographical writings of Fredrick Douglass, a formerly enslaved African American. We situate this examination in both the broader historiography of U.S. enslavement and relevant HRD theory regarding race, diversity, and Black experiences in the workplace. The purpose of this paper is to initiate a discussion on the relevance of the institution of U.S. slavery to the history of HRD; we argue that studying formally enslaved people offers valuable lessons about resisting dehumanization in contemporary workplaces.

Introduction

While members of the HRD community have long worked to establish historical narratives for the field, these writings favor white U.S. perspectives, and to a lesser extent white European perspectives, and are generally limited to discussions of recent happenings within academic HRD programs, the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD), and publications in HRD books and journals (Watkins & McLean, 2016). Some have attempted to discuss broader historical phenomena that shape HRD practice; however, the majority of these

publications center white perspectives (i.e., Ellinger et al., 2016; Gosney & Hughes, 2016; Kuchinke, 2009; McLean, 2016; Ruona, 2016; Ruona, 2001; Russ-Eft, 2016; Short, 2016b Stewart & Sambrook, 2012; Swanson & Holton, 2008; Torraco, 2016; Watkins & McLean, 2016). Notable exceptions to this trend are Alagaraja & Dooley (2003) and Wang et al. (in press) who foreground HRD histories from the Global South and the history of HRD in China respectively. To date, no historical writing in HRD has primarily focused on the experiences of racially minoritized peoples in the U.S., leaving the field without an adequate foundation from which to address recent calls for racial inclusivity (AHRD Board of Directors, 2020) that have come in response to high profile acts of racial violence in the U.S.

This paper begins to address gaps in the U.S. based history of HRD literature regarding racial injustice by providing analysis of autobiographical writings of Fredrick Douglass, a formerly enslaved African American. We situate this examination in both the broader historiography of U.S. enslavement and relevant HRD theory regarding race, diversity, and Black experiences in the workplace. The purpose of this paper is to initiate a discussion on the relevance of the institution of U.S. slavery to the history of U.S. HRD; we argue that studying formally enslaved people in the U.S. offers valuable lessons about resisting dehumanization in contemporary workplaces. Given that HRD has the potential to cultivate organizational spaces for resistance, considering historical examples of enslaved Africans in the U.S. can help contemporary HRD practitioners to envision new forms of resistance to organizational injustice both within and beyond company-sponsored DEI initiatives.

Our discussion draws on the history of the institution of U.S. slavery, formally abolished in 1865, and key concepts from Afropessimism, which maintains that an afterlife of slavery

(Hartman, 1997) persists as a series of social relations (Wilderson, 2020) shaping the contemporary racial landscape. This perspective on enslavement allows scholars to explore continuity between white supremacy in past enslavement and enduring iterations of antiBlackness (Dumas, 2016). Such an analysis offers important implications for HRD diversity scholarship and practice, which are often couched in *diversity management* and *business case for diversity* perspectives rooted in instrumental views of difference (Noon, 2007; Zanoni et al., 2010); views which fail to recognize the psychological need to resist oppressive systems (Bell, 1992/2018).

The institution of slavery propelled the rapid development of U.S. capitalism (Baptist, 2018; Beckert & Rockman, 2016; Robinson, 1983) while commodifying enslaved people, defining them as resources, and providing a system in which enslavers developed the earliest deployments of scientific management (Roediger & Esch, 2012; Rosenthal, 2016). HRD, however, has yet to grapple with how enslavers' systematic efforts to improve the agricultural output of enslaved people represented some of the earliest HRD interventions in U.S. history. We contend that enslaved people's resistance to depraved organizations represents the early roots of contemporary concepts such as workplace antiracism (Bohonos & Sisco, 2021), radical HRD (Collins, 2019), and organizational social justice (Byrd, 2016).

HRD's failure to engage with the history and legacy of enslavement runs parallel to what Cooke (2003) termed *the denial of slavery in management studies*. A key difference, however, is that history of management scholars have begun the process of responding to Cooke by publishing scholarship exploring how enslaver-capitalists approached management (Baptist, 2016; Rosenthal, 2016), technological innovation (Rood, 2016), and finance and accounting

(Rosenthal, 2018; Martin, 2016; Rothman, 2016). To date, HRD has denied the history of slavery, constituting an act of erasure necessitating attention if HRD is to live up to AHRD's recent commitment to antiracism. That is, if Black lives matter to HRD, the field must value Black history—beginning with confronting the influence of enslavement and antiBlackness in the foundations of the field.

Literature Review

Historical Writing on U.S. Enslavement and Educational Pursuits Therein

We situate this manuscript within the broader historiography of U.S. enslavement, which has seen significant shifts since the country legally outlawed the institution with the ratification of the 13th Amendment after the Civil War. Early on, historians promulgated a *happy slave* narrative that depicted enslaved Africans as having been delighted, docile, and loyal to their enslavers (Phillips, 1918). This representation worked to deemphasize enslavement's brutality and enslavers' dehumanizing treatment of Black people. These perspectives served an instrumental role in legitimizing enslavers' actions to justify their exploitation of enslaved Africans and the social, political, and economic advantages enslavers created for themselves (Jordan, 1968), privileges evident today in the afterlife of slavery (Hartman, 2007). Such views continued decades later with nominally progressive studies of enslavement (e.g., Genovese, 1972) that asserted the intellectual complexity of enslavers in contrast to the alleged ineptitude of their chattel property (Anderson, 1976).

As civil rights and Black power movements surged in the U.S., historians grew increasingly critical of such antiBlack views. New emphases centered on the nature and organization of enslaved families, and first attempted to rescue Black masculinity from what

historians viewed as an emasculating discourse in the extant historiography (Blasingame, 1972; Elkins, 1959; Gutman, 1976). A focus on bondswomen followed (Camp, 2005; White, 1999), highlighting the ways value systems within enslaved families differed from dominant white groups (Stevenson, 1997).

A vast body of historical writing has focused on learning in U.S. enslavement, unequivocally documenting that enslaved Africans' efforts to learn were persistent, constant, and important parts of their lives (Bullock, 1967; Moss, 2010; Williams, 2005). These efforts were largely clandestine, as most slave states prohibited teaching literacy to bondspeople, assembly of the enslaved for the purpose of learning, and a variety of other educational practices. Slave codes, for example, prohibited whites from teaching them to read (Morris, 1999). These workplace learning constraints likely constituted the first state-level HRD policies across the U.S. South. Historians have underscored the *self-taught* (Williams, 2005) nature of knowledge acquisition practices in which bondspeople relied primarily on themselves rather than the arbitrary benevolence of their enslavers, and the considerable risks bondspeople took to pursue learning.

Race-Centered Historical Methodology & Frederick Douglass

This article deploys a race-centered historical methodology (James-Gallaway & Ward Randolph, 2021). Contributing to an emerging CRT methodological discourse (DeCuir et al., 2019), this research approach is constructed upon CRT premises, which centrally aim to examine white supremacy's dominance, the racial oppression of people of Color, and the structural and institutional manifestations of racism with an eye toward racial justice (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Matsuda et al., 1993). Race-centered historical methodology diverges from more traditional

historical methods, which, in contrast to similar humanities or social science research approaches, are less likely to include substantive articulations of a study's theoretical framework (Butchart, 2011; Gottesman 2019). These conventional approaches to history tend to employ the "Eurocentric masculinist knowledge validation process" (Collins, 1989, p 751) by narrating the past through an "objective" lens upholding race neutrality (James-Gallaway & Ward Randolph, 2021). In contrast, race-centered methodology reflects "a critical approach to history that centers race and racism alongside other categories of intersectional identity" (pp. 333-334), and it seeks to deepen examinations of race's salience across social systems of the past, connecting these insights to the present. Because CRT forms the crux of this methodology, we began analysis expecting to uncover indications of racism's endemic nature in both U.S. enslavement and the broader workforce, as both represent enduring sites of institutional, structural, and systemic antiBlack oppression (Bell, 1992/2018; Ray, 2019). By exploring linkages between antebellum enslavement in the U.S. and contemporary workplaces, we expand upon Hartman's argument regarding the *afterlife of slavery* (1997).

Frederick Douglass' life offers a generative opportunity to apply this methodology to a U.S. enslavement and HRD context. For evidence, we focused on Douglass' perspective of his experiences, drawing primarily from his first and most widely read autobiography (1845). To deepen our analysis of this material, we contextualized it within readings of his other two autobiographies (1855, 1881) and secondary historical literature. We analyzed evidence for indications of multiple, simultaneous forms of social oppression, such as racism as shaped by male privilege or patriarchy (Crenshaw, 1989), throughout Douglass' life. This process allowed

us to identify and critically interrogate claims of race neutrality integral to CRT (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Douglass was born into enslavement in Maryland, escaped bondage, and rose to national prominence as a leading abolitionist in the 19th century. In addition to being a celebrated orator, he published three widely read autobiographies (1845, 1855, 1881). These types of firsthand accounts from formerly enslaved individuals represented a popular genre of literature in the antebellum era. Seeking support to ban enslavement, abolitionists used these autobiographies to promote understandings of the institution's evils. Douglass' body of work was—and remains—among the most celebrated and frequently analyzed in this genre. An examination of his work illustrates, for instance, slavery as a labor system, the efforts of enslavers to sustain the mis-development of their labor force, and the determination of the enslaved to find meaning in their struggles for education, development, and, ultimately, freedom. Douglass' personal narrative portrays the significant restrictions he navigated as a bondsman.

Analysis of *The Narrative Life of Fredrick Douglass*

The following analysis begins with an exploration of how Douglass' enslavers' attempts to thwart his learning represented a form of human resource mis-development that reflected broader trends across the U.S. antebellum South. The subsequent discussion explores Douglass' resistance to the wills of his enslavers and his resilience throughout as he directed his own learning and his work as a teacher of other bondspeople.

Human Resource Mis-Development as Enslaver Policy and Practice

Douglass highlights many instances of whites working to thwart Black attempts at gaining education. Paying respect to the pioneering work of Woodson (1933), we describe these

efforts as *mis-development*, which we derive from Woodson's concept of mis-education. This process sought to manipulate African Americans' thinking and promote in them feelings of inferiority, thereby controlling their actions and convincing them to accept a subordinated social status. We apply this concept to HRD by highlighting the violent, dehumanizing *mis-development* enslavers imparted upon the enslaved, *mis-development* intended to prepare Black people for subordinate positions at work and in society. These *trainings* are highly relevant to HRD because they were *strategically deployed* in workplace settings.

The first account we explore is from Douglass' first autobiography (1845) and transpires in Douglass' early childhood as the mistress, Mrs. Auld, to whom he is assigned, undertakes to teach him to read. This woman's husband, Mr. Auld, catches her in the act, and Douglass recounts his reaction:

> Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. To use his own words, further, he said, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now," said he, "if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy." (Douglass, 1845, p. 29)

Mr. Auld's insistence that slaves should "know nothing but to obey his master" and that education "would forever unfit him to be a slave" is a clear articulation of the enslaver's commitment to human resource mis-development. Limiting Douglass' development was not an act of personal spite but a clearly conceived policy designed to manufacture a servile, easily manageable workforce; this effort maintained the broader systems of slavery and capitalism

while bolstering Mr. Auld's strategic vision. The Aulds' commitment to HR mis-development demonstrates congruence between individual action (restricting access to education), organizational strategy (maintaining a workforce "fit" for slavery), and state-level regulations prohibiting the teaching of literacy to the enslaved. This shows how literacy education prohibitions functioned as public-private partnerships to perpetuate repressive labor conditions. Characteristic of racialized organizations (Ray, 2019), the mis-development of slaves required action and the macro (state), meso (organizational /household/plantation), and micro (individual) levels.

Mr. Auld's words made an impression on Douglass, who believed his enslaver had been honest and transparent in explaining education would make him unfit for enslavement:

> These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. (Douglass, 1845, p. 29)

This was a moment of what critical race theorist Bell describes as racial realism, the idea that Black subordination—not just racism—is endemic to the U.S. racial calculus (Bell, 1992, 2018). For Douglass, this occasion helped clarify his enslaved status and was the starting point of his life-long engagement with race radical texts. Based on this new clarity, he reacted to Mr. Auld's narrative of enslavement by repositioning it as a counternarrative (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018) of hope and liberation; he did so by seeking out knowledge forbidden to him by the mis-development policy and practice on which the institution of slavery depended. For the remainder of his first biography, Douglass treats literacy as a one-to-one equivalent to what

Freire (1970) later named conscientization. That is, when Douglass expressed that the pursuit of literacy had the potential to bring about "special revelation" and "call[ed] into existence an entirely new train of thought" (p. 29) that would lead to emancipation, he was describing the liberatory consciousness raising to which Freire's term referred. Thus, Douglass' engagement with literacy represented a subversive form of radical workplace learning that directly violated organizational policies and legal statutes. Thus, Douglass learned the enslaved could not rely on enslavers to be honest about their willingness to help them, coming to realize enslavers pedaled damagingly paternalistic forms of 'help'—like when Mr. Auld told his wife that denying Douglass an education was in Douglass' best interest— that went hand-in-hand with the alleged contentment of bondspeople (Phillips, 1918). Both lies represented prototypes of *diversity branding* (Byrd, 2018) in which organizations promote images of diversity while failing to live up to their espoused social justice ethos.

Masculinized workspaces, the journey to literacy, and emancipatory learning

Douglass learned to write his first letters while working odd jobs in the masculinized workplace (Collins, 2013) context of shipbuilding.

> The idea as to how I might learn to write was suggested to me by being in Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard, and frequently seeing the ship carpenters, after hewing, and getting a piece of timber ready for use, write on the timber the name of that part of the ship for which it was intended. …I soon learned the names of these letters, and for what they were intended when placed upon a piece of timber in the ship-yard. I immediately commenced copying them…. (Douglass, 1845, p. 37)

Construction sites tend to exclude women while allowing limited and provisional access to Black men (Bohonos, 2021a); thus, Douglass' opportunity to acquire literacy by observing ship carpenters at work was contingent on his gender. Douglass' literacy approach is also raced

because he had to protect his Blackness (Sisco, 2020) by shaping potentially hostile white workers' perceptions of him. Had these whites discovered Douglass was pursuing emancipatory learning on their worksite, it is likely they would have responded with physical violence at the micro-level (which Douglas would encounter in shipyards later in his life); they may have also appealed to meso (owner/organization) or macro (judicial) entities to protect their relative privilege over potential Black male rivals as white male workers (Du Bois, 1935).

Developing skills and independence in a masculinized industry

Towards the end of Douglass' career as a slave, his enslaver hired him out at a shipyard to learn the trade of caulking. Douglass expressed his earnest desire to learn this valuable skill; however, for the first nine months, he was only assigned menial duties, preventing him from learning his trade. Douglass explained that white shipbuilders felt threatened by Black people—both enslaved and free—who were progressing in their trade. White men's protectiveness of their privileged positions over Black men within occupational hierarchies (Bohonos, 2021a; Du Bois, 1935) spurred labor unrest, including violence against Douglass, in the shipyards. For Douglass, this unrest manifested death threats and physical attacks, cumulating in his nearly lethal beating at the hands of a white mob. Afterward, Douglass' enslaver hired him out to another shipyard, where he eventually learned his trade as a caulker. Although tumultuous, these events illustrate an affordance of Douglass' gender in his pursuit of emancipatory learning given his ability to learn the masculinized craft of shipbuilding (Davis, 1981; Hartman, 2019).

Developing Black people beyond the white gaze

Douglass found the greatest meaning in his work when he was engaged in activities that involved his own and his communities' conscientization (Freire, 1970). Just as Douglass learned to read and write, he began a Sabbath School[1] where he secretly taught Black people basic literacy skills, a practice common among African Americans who acquired a measure of literacy (Bullock, 1967; Williams, 2005). Though Black persons who attended risked 39 lashes if discovered, Douglass described teaching members of his community as the "delight of my soul" (Douglass, 1845, p. 71) and emphasized the sense of love and community that developed as an integral aspect of this emancipatory learning environment.

Enslavement's fundamental goal of dehumanization meant these literacy development, community building, and conscientization efforts signified a form of bottom-up HRD in which members of a racially subordinated group worked collaboratively to share valuable skills, resist mis-development, and foster joyful, loving relationships essential to both community and individual survival (Camp, 2005; Griffin, 2021; Williams, 2012). The learning community to which Douglass contributed operated outside the organization's sponsorship and facilitated learning that resisted organizational goals (Moss, 2010). Situated beyond the white gaze (Rabelo et al., 2020), this learning community eschewed the surveillance of white leadership and strategically decoupled Black development initiatives from the wider organization.

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[1] Sunday was generally the only day of the week where the enslaved were afforded any free time away from the supervisions of enslavers.

Implications

The study of Douglass' narratives and secondary literature relative to enslavement leads to several important conclusions for HRD, these include the need to encourage linking workplace learning to conscientization, respect antiracist organizing spaces which exist outside formal organizational structures, be wary of potentially antiBlack DEI interventions, advocate for legislation that provides increased protection for minoritized employees, find inspiration in the past for future radical change efforts, and pursue future research related to the histories of underrepresented groups.

Conscientization and HRD

Douglass' reflections equated literacy acquisition with what would later be named conscientization (Freire, 1970), but he did not see conscientization as ending with the acquisition of literacy. Rather, he indicated the importance of continued engagement with abolitionist texts to support his ongoing development as a self-emancipated slave and general laborer. This point exemplifies the enduring lessons contemporary HRD can learn from Douglass. In an era when racial justice advocates are promoting the abolition of the police, the prison industrial complex, and other racially oppressive institutions, workers need to engage with radical literatures based in these perspectives if HRD wishes to remain (or become) relevant to social justice efforts. Part of the process of moving the field of HRD towards greater engagement with radical concepts can begin with academic HRD programs responding to recent calls to include more critical and social justice content in their curriculum (Alfred et al., 2020; Bohonos et al, 2019).

Douglass and other enslaved people pursued liberatory workplace learning in opposition to their direct supervisors, organizational goals, and state regulations. This observation should compel members of the HRD community seeking to live up to social justice ideals to question whether or to what degree contemporary diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs can realistically be expected to contribute to Black liberation or broader social justice aims; contemplating such is imperative because DEI programs can advantage whites while reinscribing antiBlackness (Ray, 2019). We raise these questions not to suggest that well-conceived DEI efforts should be abandoned, but that those deeply committed to social justice should remain skeptical of organizational efforts, as they can obscure forms of organizational inequity (Edelman et al., 2001; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000) and are likely to be tainted by false generosity (Freire, 1970), interest convergence (Bell, 1980), and/or neoliberal logics.

A growing body of literature shows ways that DEI practices can be harmful to people of color, including Crenshaw's (1989) classic argument that employment protection focused on either race or gender—rather than both intersectionally— sustains gendered racism in the workplace. Other studies have shown that efforts to facilitate interracial dialogue can unfairly expect people of color to educate whites on racism, precluding those perpetuating racism from meaningful engagement and taking accountability (James-Gallaway, 2020; Scott, 2018). Still, other strands of research document how organizations expect high levels of service from minoritized employees relative to diversity while undervaluing the effort these initiatives require (Brisset, 2020; Davis et al., 2020; Joseph, 2010). Additionally, Hartman's (1997) research documenting the labor enslaved individuals expended performing gaiety or enacting what she

terms "contented subjugation" should alert HRD professionals concerned with racial injustice to the emotional labor required of Black employees who feel pressured to feign feeling included and engaged at work—pressures organizations can amplify when reactively establishing DEI efforts in response to internal reporting or external scrutiny. Hartman's work also provides historical perspectives on Byrd's (2018) contention that promotional images of happy people of color mock the lived experiences with organizational racism faced by minoritized employees. Hence, to minimize the risk of doing harm while trying to advance social justice goals, HRD researchers and practitioners need to critically assess the DEI initiatives they are requested to support or endorse.

In addition to remaining vigilant for potentially harmful DEI efforts, HRD practitioners committed to racial justice should work to align themselves with social movements which carve out spaces of resistance, learning, and solidarity in or around their workplace. Then, change agents can use these spaces to push organizations' formal "leaders" to respond to their activism. This mirrors Freire's stance on reform (Horton & Freire, 1990): "the ideal is to fight against the system taking the two fronts…" (p. 203), one internal and one external. Applying this approach to contemporary DEI, spaces outside the system can cultivate certain types of innovation and advocacy while empowering advocates to take space inside the system—spaces Freire described as occupied territories within a subsystem. Horton related this form of praxis to "bootlegging" and illegality because "it's not proper, but you do it anyway" (p. 205).

A contemporary example of carving out spaces beyond the gaze of a racialized organization lies in Minnett and colleagues' (2019) insistence that organizations should *not* try to

operationalize a framework they developed to facilitate Black feminist solidarity, survival, and consciousness raising; instead, they argued, Black women might consider using the model to deepen informal mentoring relationships committed to developing radical resistance to racially oppressive organizations. To be clear, we are not calling for organizations to abandon all DEI efforts. But we are arguing that some efforts can and should be driven by actors who are outside of the formal control structures of racialized organizations.

Organizing for workplace racial justice should also emphasize legal reforms. After escaping from slavery, Douglass devoted much of his advocacy to legal reforms that would abolish slavery because he understood that racialized organizations could not be trusted to pursue social justice. Enslavers had been eager to build reputations as “uplifting,” “caring for,” and “educating” enslaved Africans; these paternalistic branding efforts, however, were grounded in deception that thinly masked the brutal and exploitative nature of U.S. enslavement. In our contemporary era, we see increasing numbers of organizations making claims about their commitments to concepts like DEI (Byrd, 2018), but these claims should be skeptically contemplated by racial justice advocates, given that they are not adequately backed by legal protections for minoritized workers (Ajunwa, 2021; Bell, 1985).

Black experiences in the workforce & the history of “diversity”

Over the last 15 years, the HRD community has developed a critical mass of scholarship on Black experiences in the workplace and antiBlack racism (Bass, 2009; Bohonos, 2021a; 2021b; Byrd, 2009; Henry, 2021; Hughes, 2014; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; Sparkman, 2017; Rosser-Mims et al., 2020; Rudel et al., 2021; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Sisco, 2020,

Sisco et al., 2021; Wicker, 2021). But none of these studies focus on the history of enslavement or its implications for contemporary practice despite calls from HRD thought leaders (Byrd, 2018; Hughes, 2016) for further historical contextualization of diversity and social justice in HRD.

While the HRD community has yet to study the history of enslavement, Marxist historians (i.e. DuBois, 1935; James, 1938; Robinson, 1983; Roediger & Esch, 2014) have advanced scholarship regarding enslavement with strong implications for diversity work within HRD that our scholarly community has yet to substantively grapple with. Roediger & Esch (2014), for example, trace the history of diversity management to its roots in what enslavers' trade journals referred to as "Negro management," and was later rebranded as "race management"[2] when industrial capitalists applied tactics pioneered in managing enslaved people from diverse African backgrounds to manage globally recruited workforces. The current term "diversity management" rose to prominence in the post-civil rights era when race was combined with other areas of difference to be managed under the label "diversity." While comparisons across historical periods must remain tentative, this should not prevent critical HRD scholars from seeking to contextualize contemporary concepts including *diversity management*, *business case for diversity*, and *diversity branding* relative to their historical antecedents by carefully reading Marxist historians, labor historians, and historians who focus on racially minoritized peoples. Historical research in these areas often provide rich analysis on racialized experiences in

[2] In this time period, the terms "race," "ethnicity, and "nationality" were generally treated as interchangeable; thus, diverse people groupings such as "Irish," "Nordics," "Mexicans," "Negros," "Chinese," and "Anglo-Saxons" were recorded as "races" in journals related to management as well as in organizational documents.

the workplace and can help HRD scholars to better understand the structural roots of contemporary inequities.

Historical research foregrounding enslavement provides an opportunity to deepen diversity management critiques, which argued these programs can pursue equity in one area while perpetuating inequity in others. Critiques also suggest these programs dilute civil rights era victories while serving corporate interests by obscuring many forms of organizational inequity (Berrey, 2014; Edelman et al., 2001; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). Additionally, scholars have argued that diversity programming primarily benefits whites by providing them opportunities to consume commodified versions of difference and thereby gain educational and organizational advantages (James-Gallaway, 2020; hooks, 1993; Hughey, 2012). Such efforts represent a nominal, rather than structural, expression of social justice in which a few tokenized people of Color are integrated into upper class circles. Afropessimist critiques suggested such "diversity" practices reinscribe antiBlackness (Ray et al., 2017). Critical race theory (CRT) views such acts of interest convergence, when gains for people of Color are made only when they benefit whites (Bell, 1980), as reinforcing misguided beliefs about racial progress (Bell, 2018).

Contemporary diversity rhetoric: false equivalencies to racism and homogenization of marginalized experiences

Scholars have pointed out that since the 1980s, diversity management has moved increasingly towards the paradigm of honoring differences (Kwon & Nicolaides, 2017) and away from emancipatory visions and the redress of historic inequities inspired by the civil rights movement (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). These movements have progressed lockstep with the

business case for diversity and an ever-expanding range of differences included under the "diversity" umbrella. The ever-widening scope of what counts as diversity can serve as a barrier to specific conversations about aspects of difference that map onto historical and contemporary inequity—leading to diversity activities that obscure issues of power. Afropessimist Wilderson (2020) points to an example of a diversity workshop in which U.S. whites, when tasked with discussing whiteness in relation to racist institutions, instead avoided the topic of race altogether by talking about differences in their home states. In this example, an aspect of human difference (location of previous residence) distracts from conversations about racism. Worse, by emphasizing one's previous state of residence in a discussion on racism, this group equated residence in particular U.S. states to racism. To the extent that diversity programming allows participants to treat mere differences in human experience as equivalent to the structural barriers created by racism, these programs are antithetical to the needs and aims of people of color and other groups whose social difference spurs social exclusion. DEI programs operating under broad definitions of diversity need to distinguish between differences disconnected from structural injustice (i.e., personality type or learning preferences) and differences centered on systemic forms of oppression (i.e., race, gender, and disability).

Wilderson (2020) also argues that, even in coalitions of racially marginalized people, the impulse to homogenize diverse experiences runs the risk of crowding out space for specific discussions about slavery and antiBlackness. Thus, an important takeaway is that marginalization manifests racism in different ways for different racialized groups. Attempting to homogenize these experiences (Swan, 2010), therefore, risks erasing specific details essential for understanding and implementing antiracist praxis.

Conclusions and future research

The purpose of this paper was to begin a discussion on the relevance of the institution of U.S. slavery to the history of HRD. Thus, our arguments regarding the need to remain vigilant and critical relative to organizationally sponsored DEI initiatives and the need for organizing outside the gaze of white organizational leadership should only serve as a starting point. Cook (2003) argued that canonical renderings of management history have done the ideological work of establishing the field's "social and cultural legitimacy" (p. 1896) by associating the emergence of management practice with the completion of western railroads which is "often represented as heroic" (p. 1896) insofar as expanding the western frontier. This denial of enslavement's centrality, which worked in tandem with the violent dispossession of land inhabited by Indigenous peoples, in the history of management insulates the field from post-colonial, settler-colonial, Marxist, and antiracist critics. Prominent HRD figures have used history in a similar way by seeking to establish the Training Within Industry (TWI) activities conducted in support of America's interests in WWII as a modern starting point for HRD. In considering enslavement as foundational to the development of HRD, we are forced to contend with the reality that enslaver-capitalists and their organizations were deeply committed to the mis-development of their enslaved labor force, provided trade-based training to profit the enslaver and sow division among the enslaved, and promoted the myth of the *happy slave* (Phillips, 1918). It also opens up transdisciplinary connections for HRD scholars to engage with race-radical literature from across the arts and sciences. Moving HRD towards engagement with

race-radical literature must include reading the race-conscious scholarship produced by members of the HRD community and also advancing the limits of "acceptable" scholarship in the field.

Primary sources on U.S. slavery provide an empirical base from which HRD researchers can engage with race radical concepts from CRT and Afropessimism. For example, Douglass' narrative furnishes some analytical tools to help us understand the seemingly good intentions of organizational leaders; this is evident in his observation that while some masters were more humane than others, the social relations inherent to enslavement corrupted enslavers, preventing them from being truly "good." In contemporary contexts, some organizations are certainly more "diverse" and "inclusive" than others, and some individual whites may open doors for Black professionals through mentorship and sponsorship (Sisco, 2020). The antiBlack social relations, however, inherent in racialized organizations (Ray, 2019) and neoliberal market ideology prevent prevailing norms within organizations from systemically countering antiBlackness and advancing racial justice. This practice is consistent with Bell's (1992) concept of racial realism.

Additional research regarding enslavement and HRD could include analysis of other narratives of enslavement, etymological history on uses of the terms like "training" and "learning" as used by enslaved Africans and their enslavers. Other work might examine the development of competencies of slave drivers and overseers, analyzing how the exercise of these competencies shaped social relations between laboring slaves and those who managed their work. Furthermore, analysis of the many ways that enslaved Africans violated state regulations, organizational policies, and the trust of individual enslavers through acts of resistance and subterfuge could lead to fruitful theorization of contemporary approaches to resisting white supremacy in the workplace.

Going further, deep and sustained analysis of how slavery continues to shape workplaces and the resistance strategies of the formally enslaved can inspire contemporary antiracist efforts. Future research is needed that internationalizes this discussion by exploring the transnational nature of slavery as well as its ties to colonialism. This research should draw on a broader range of primary sources in its analysis and look to nuance the discussion in terms of gender, disability, and other areas of social identity. Research is also needed which explores contemporary forms of mis-development in the workplace. Additional research should also explore HRD implications from extant literature regarding adult learning in enslavement (Bullock, 1967; Moss, 2010; Williams, 2005) and its implication for adult learning theories such as self-directed learning, informal learning, andragogy, dialogical learning, nonformal learning, and transformative learning.

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