

The Palgrave Handbook of Antiracism in Human Resource Development

Edited by Marilyn Y. Byrd · Chaunda L. Scott

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Historical Foundations of Racism



CHAPTER 1

De-silencing Anti-Black Racism and Countering the Master Narrative in Human Resource Development and Beyond

Marilyn Y. Byrd

The purpose of this chapter is to expose racism "as an enduring and pervasive social injustice that has become normalized and encompasses the whole of society" (Byrd & Scott, 2023, p. 205). Racism is an illness that has infiltrated workspaces and sites of learning, "as well as those spaces that are frequently occupied each day" (p. 205). It is ubiquitous and uses a swinging door to enter all aspects of work and life. In this chapter, the silencing of racism in sites and spaces of learning and development is problematized. For clarity, it should be understood that learning and development of people occurs across all types of professions, occupations, industries, etc., in accordance with the nature of the work being performed. Specifically, I highlight human resource development (HRD) as a community of scholars, researchers, practitioners, and educators who are dedicated to research, theory, and practice that advances learning for the optimal performance and growth of all organizational members, Ironically race-based research has not been engrained in this mission for development and growth. I pose this as ironic because developing people [should mean] removing barriers so that optimal development and growth is prioritized. However, racism has been silent in the community of HRD because [some] Whites do not see racism as their issue. Regrettably, silencing racism has not prevented racism from showing up, as it is an everyday, normalized practice

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that has been engrained in the historical artifacts of the community (Maltbia, 2022).

This chapter will expose how a White world order can hold the power to devalue rather than support and "tear down rather than build up" (1Thessalonians 5:11, NIV). The chapter is organized as follows. First, the need to do anti-racism work is discussed. Second, anti-racism work being done within the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) will be featured. Third, countering the master narrative will be explained from my lived experiences of racism within the AHRD. Finally, I offer a call to action to the broader field of HRD that challenges the critical consciousness of each individual in whatever capacity they serve in developing human potential.

THE NEED TO DO ANTI-RACISM WORK

Anti-racism work has increased substantially in work settings and professional development communities, particularly after the public murder of George Floyd in May 2020. However, anti-racism work was not initiated from that vicious display of racial brutality, nor did Floyd's murder trigger action to confront racism. Rather, it is the legacies of the people who endured the struggle for racial justice who are the historical voices for anti-racism work.

There are numerous, spontaneous, unpredictable events and situations that can trigger racism or a racially motivated event, some even resulting in death. While all racialized groups experience some form of racism, it is not reasonable to assume the consequences of racism will be experienced in the same way (Pappas, 2002). A racialized group is characterized by sociohistorical experiences conditioned by a racist ideology (Blum, 2010). For example, a classic racist ideological notion that Blacks are inherently inferior to Whites in "mental and other important human characteristics" (p. 299) has historically confined this group to a mindset of inferiority in society. From this sociohistorical account of inferiority, "Whites treated themselves as if they were superior in these respects"...and... "constructed social arrangements (in slavery and the seventy or so year period of Jim Crow segregation) that placed them in superior positions to Blacks and to Asians" (p. 300). In other words, superiority is a self-appointed state of mind.

It is therefore acknowledged that other groups experience some form of racism. However, this chapter will directly address anti-Black racism. Central to anti-Black racism is the "specificity of anti-Blackness ... as an embodied lived experience of social suffering ... in which the [designation of being] Black is the despised thing-in-itself ... in opposition to all that is pure, human(e), and white" (Dumas & Ross, 2016, pp. 416–417). Anti-Black racism, which is linked to US colonization, a slave mentality of Blacks as inferior to Whites, and a history of violence and terrorism against Black Americans, has firmly established the dominant racial dichotomy as Black vs White in this country (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021).

Remembering a Legacy for Racial Justice

In January 1986, Congress declared the month of February as Black History month. Black History month recognizes the thousands of George Floyds whose lives were surrendered in the name of racial *injustice*. However, Black resistance to racial injustice has existed long before Public Law 99–244. This law recognized that:

Black people have resisted oppression, injustice, fear, and persecution from the days of the first slave ships' arrival upon these shores. Slavery was met with many forms of resistance, from outright rebellion to escape (Underground Railroad) to abolition, politics, and, ultimately, civil war. For every triumph, there has been backlash from those in power. Jim Crow laws were challenged in courts, in Washington, D.C. and state capitals through the country, in media and the arts, and the courts of public opinion... The resistance today continues through social media, encompasses the entire world, and shows no signs of diminishing or slowing down. (Lone Star College, 2023)

Then there are the nameless people who died in the pursuit of justice at the Selma Bridge—people who were *not* attacking but being attacked because they dared to challenge racial injustice. These were Black folks (and yes, there were some White allies among them) who were not afraid to oppose the egregious acts against Black Americans and who defied a state of being considered *lesser than* or *not deserving of*. The heart wrenching image of a tearful young Black man in a live recording of the people trying to cross the Selma Bridge is emboldened in courage. The young man's tears seemed to convey a mixture of hurt, anger, and sadness that human beings had to justify their right to sameness of life. But his tears also represented purpose, determination, and refusal to accept defeat despite the "raw racial animus" (Eyer, 2019, p. 1015) being directed toward them that day.

Anti-racism work is an enduring search for an idealized state of racial justice. Race scholars often call for eradicating racism. Indeed, that is an idealized vision. However, given that eradicate means to destroy, completely wipe out, and pull up by the roots, eradicating racism also means reversing history and removing events like colonization of the US by slave labor, silencing the atrocities of a brutal period of enslavement, and repressing the stories of countless, extraordinary people who suffered through the journey. Ironically, that is precisely what is occurring by judicial and legislative actions that are seeking to erase the hard-won fight for equal opportunity in employment, education, health care, and other systems that have denied and withheld justice to Black Americans (Collins, 2023). My response to such attempts: *You can erase what was written, but you can never erase the legacy.*

Anti-Racism Work in the Academy of Human Resource Development

Professional development organizations function as a community of practice. The basic shared practice of the community is developing all people—which means being concerned with removing barriers that prevent learning, growth, and development of all (Wenger, 2011). Professional development organizations are the domain for such opportunities to occur. However, many of these bodies that were formed to oversee a practice, profession, or occupation were founded from a White world order dictated by racial politics (Vitalis, 2018) with an assumed mindset of a racial hierarchy (Ponds, 2013). Moreover, given that no one desires to be labeled as a racist, people within these settings assume a race-neutral or colorblind mentality. A colorblind mentality hides behind the pretense that "racial recognition rather than racist rule is the problem to solve" (Lipsitz, 2019, p. 24). Race neutrality, or the silencing of race, seeks to project an image of fairness that all groups are equal and are subjected to the same social and economic opportunities (Skiba, 2014). Race neutrality is a subtle attempt to suppress the persistence of racism. However, race neutrality is, in fact, anti-Blackness and is a denial of the history and the lived experiences of being Black in America (Malveaux, 2022).

Organizations do not become antiracist. Rather, organizations espouse and communicate values that are embraced by and acted upon by racist people who are its affiliates.

Either a person endorses the idea of a racial hierarchy as a racist, or racial equality as an antiracist. One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an antiracist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. (Kendi, 2023, p. 8)

The Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) had its beginnings during a chartering conference in May 1993 (Swanson & Holton, 2009). With a mission aimed at leading the field of human resource development through research, the AHRD was created "to be a true community of scholars that cares deeply about advancing the scholarly underpinnings of the profession and about supporting one another in that journey" (p. 58). While perhaps not intentional, the artifacts for the organization were established at this chartering conference along with the seeds of exclusion. From that point forward, the research topics that advance scholarly underpinnings needed to be inclusive of [all] people as well as the social issues that prevent [all] people from developing equally as members of a supportive community. Supporting one another in their journey ironically suggests that the gatekeepers (who decided what was being published in the HRD journals) were practicing inclusivity in research.

A Shift in Conference Town Hall Conversations

In 2015, the annual conference Town Hall Forum themed, "Enhancing the Frontiers of Diversity and Inclusion in Practice and Research: Performative, Critical, and Radical Perspectives on the Context and Issues of Human Resource Development," established a benchmark for addressing race neutrality in research and practice. The 2015 Town Hall planted the seed for radical, transformational change in the field of HRD that rejects the traditional, historical perspectives which have silenced racism and hence allowed racist practices to thrive. A radical perspective of HRD is both a call to action and a way for marginalized and under-represented individuals and groups to claim voice in a landscape that maintained dominance over what represented HRD (Collins, 2019).

In 2020, a Town Hall Forum, "Leveraging Emerging Methodologies to Challenge Master Narratives in HRD," explored how emerging methodologies can be used to challenge the master narrative in the field of HRD around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The 2020 Town Hall established groundwork for conversations of the master narrative. The master narrative is a hallmark of the enlightenment period and the Western philosophical tradition (Giroux, 1993). A master narrative is script that specifies and controls how some social processes are carried out (Stanley, 2007). The master narrative operates in such a way that it dominates the perspective at hand by defining and limiting what is of value and what is not. By avoiding (silencing) perspectives of a specific discourse, the master narrative becomes the dominant source of information that is considered knowledge. Because master narratives are typically the perspectives of White scholars, who are also gatekeepers of publications, the research of Black scholars has historically been omitted and rendered silent or insignificant (Alfred & Chlup, 2010).

Establishment of the AHRD Anti-racism Committee

Anti-racism statements have become a familiar practice across a wide spectrum of organizations, institutions, agencies, and professional development groups. In the spring of 2020, after the public killing of George Floyd, the AHRD, like countless other organizations across the country, adopted an anti-racism statement. Led by then President Dr. Laura Bierema, the AHRD anti-racism statement committed to the following:

We are proud of taking a strong ant-iracist stance, although we recognize that one statement is not enough to address centuries of racism and violence... We want to take this moment to discuss one issue in particular: Rightful disappointment that the [previous] statement focused primarily on the present and immediate issues, without acknowledging instances of past racism within AHRD or presenting a concrete plan for future anti-racist action. (AHRD, 2023)

The AHRD Anti-racism Committee was established during the fall of 2020 as a beginning step toward anti-racism efforts. The 2021 annual conference Town Hall Forum, "I'm not a Racist! Challenging Safe Meta-narratives that Silence and Perpetuate Racism in AHRD," was presented by the Anti-racism Committee and boldly called out racism within the AHRD. It was an effort to uncover and remedy past acts of racism in that organization.

Dr. Chaunda Scott and I were invited to participate in the 2023 annual conference Town Hall Forum, "HRD Research in an Era of Transformation: Status and Future Directions." Our roles on the forum were in conjunction with our membership on the Anti-racism Committee. Naturally, we were interested in highlighting the absence of relevant research of social problems as significant to an era of transformation in HRD research. We submitted the following problem statement to the organizer to indicate how we would develop the idea of transformation:

A compelling problem: Historically, HRD founding scholars effectively excluded the social systems (and consequently social problems emanating from the social systems) from research that has defined the field.

Our proposed problem statement was challenged with the rationale that it did not follow the tone and format of the other panelists. It was further challenged that there was a risk of offending founding scholars who might be present. In this situation, the real issue was embedded in the historical artifacts: protecting White fragility or silencing the harsh reality of lived experience? Black people risk being offended daily, simply by showing up Black. However, White privilege can "lead to blindspots" (Mosley et al., 2021, p. 5). Furthermore, evasion of social problems is a form of resistance and a self-imposed ignorance to keep those problems concealed (Essed & Hoving, 2014; Ghorashi, 2014). Nonetheless, the problem statement for the Town Hall was revised without our permission *or input* and presented as follows:

What exclusions have historically occurred in HRD research, and how have these omissions impacted how HRD is defined?

White scholars continue to control the narrative on racism in HRD and beyond. The controlling tactic is to avoid or intentionally dodge conversations that may lead to discussions on racism. Unfortunately, race-based research is not a topic that is considered a concern in the field of HRD since it does not touch the lives of the dominant racial group. Therefore, race-based research in HRD is most often led by Black scholars, along with a few White scholars who align their research with critical issues in society at large. The lack of race-based research is certainly troubling since the mission of a community of scholars and educators [should be] to embrace a people-centered philosophy and dismantle the belief in a "hierarchy of human value" (McNair et al., 2020, p. 6).

COUNTERING AND SPEAKING OUT

Until the lions learn to speak and write, tales of hunt will be those told by the hunter.

-African Proverb

Racism is sustained by a master narrative or stories that are told by the dominant race. Counter narratives are critical for contesting and objecting the master narrative and giving voice to the reality of racism (Stanley, 2007). Moreover, counter stories "challenge the dominant White and often predominantly male culture that is held to be normative and authoritative" (p. 14). Counter stories unmask what the master narrative has put forth as *truth* and thereby exposes the lie contained within (Taylor, 2007). A compelling feature of the counter story is that it says the master narrative "is neither the only story nor a necessary story" (p. 268). Rather counter stories brings to light the experiences and everyday reality of the racially marginalized, because it is *their* truth.

A Personal Story

I joined the AHRD in 2005 as a doctoral student. My first conference presentation was at the 2006 annual conference in Columbus, Ohio. Although I was new to academic conferences, I was not expecting the reaction I received to my paper, "The Search for Applied Theory that Informs the Effects of Racial Conflict on Organizational Performance." In that paper, I problematized HRD theories as proposed by Swanson (1995) as being inadequate to inform racial conflict. The feedback given during the review process was cynical and abrasive, not commentary and constructive. After several iterations, my paper was approved. The other problem I experienced was that my paper was grouped with papers under the diversity stream rather than theory-related papers as I had designated. My paper not only accentuated an inadequacy, race-based questioning of the foundational HRD theories was boundary crossing (Hermans et al., 2017) into an area that had heretofore remained un-challenged. Furthermore, racial conflict is not a problem of diversity, rather it is a consequence of diversity. During the session that I presented my paper, I was well aware of the hostile energy in the room, but my spiritual energy was empowering! After the session, I was approached by a young Black female who seemed in awe because I had talked about racial conflict. She gave me the impression I had unleashed a taboo topic but nonetheless, I was brave for doing so.

Gaining acceptance of my scholarship within the AHRD as a doctoral student was an unwelcoming experience. My personal, lived experiences as a Black woman, scholar, and researcher are another. I have framed my lived

experiences within three constructs: epistemic exclusion, the outsider within, and interest convergence.

Epistemic Exclusion

Epistemic exclusion is the devaluation of certain topics of scholarship as illegitimate by minimizing the credibility of the scholar (Settles et al., 2021). Researchers have theorized that structural forces and systems can undermine the production and interpretation of academic knowledge produced by marginalized individuals and contribute to inequitable treatment (Dotson, 2011; Settles et al., 2021).

In 2010, Dr. Scott and I were presenting our conceptual model, the Critical Racism Pedagogy model during an AHRD conference session. During the feedback session, the facilitator, a White male, well-known and respected in the AHRD, rudely attacked our research in a demeaning and highly disrespectful manner. There was nothing constructive about his comments. Rather than offering supportive comments on what he believed would make improvements, his comments discredited the model and its usefulness, even saying that the term pedagogy was inappropriate as it related to the teaching of children. His tactic was to tear down rather than build up. In fact, despite our subject matter expertise as the model developers, his attitude implied that his interpretation was *the* appropriate one, and nothing else was considered scholarship.

Critical race scholars have emphasized how White privilege can work to diminish the experiential knowledge of Black scholars and has explained how privilege often acts as a camouflage to elevate the dominant group as being the informing source (Yosso, 2005). Instead, White people resort to criticism of race-related research because they lack an understanding of the depth of racial injustice and cannot relate to the lived experiences of those who have been affected. Scheurich and Young (1997) referred to this resistance to race-based ways of knowing as epistemological racism.

This individual continued to attack our work until another scholar (a White woman who had previously made relevant comments about our research) intervened. Only then did the facilitator appear open to making connections to our model as an educational resource or a training tool. In fact, he actually engaged the White woman in conversation about our model as if we were not present! Furthermore, White scholars in the social sciences and educational research have viewed knowledge production about and by Black researchers as dwelling on the pathological and the sensational (Scheurich & Young, 1997; Stanfield, 1985). However, it would be remiss for me not to acknowledge the anti-racist efforts of White scholars in the early days of my experiences in the AHRD, such as the White woman scholar I mentioned, and their "willingness to question and oppose racism in environments that are often hostile to such efforts" (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 11). The European-derived epistemology of White scholars in AHRD was and still is resistant to a race-based

epistemology that threatens their assumed dominance of knowledge production. Most significant is the lingering, distorted, Eurocentric, hegemonic view of what constitutes legitimate knowledge (Almeida, 2015). The refusal to accept that there are multiple truths that frame reality and the dismissal of Black scholarship as less than equal is, in itself, intellectual racism (Etieyibo, 2023).

The Outsider Within

I did not find the AHRD conference experience a welcoming one in my first few years of membership—which I will add has been uninterrupted since 2005. A feeling of cordiality was present but genuine welcoming was missing. I was asked once, why I remained a member. My response was, "I choose to say when I come and I will choose to say when I leave. If nothing else, my presence will remind folks of their racism, and I will be their constant reminder."

But racism sometimes catches me off guard when it shows up unexpectedly. The 2015 Town Hall Forum experience still resonates with me as, "I don't believe that just happened." I participated on a panel that included several HRD scholars some of whom were firmly established as part of the AHRD White world order. After the forum, while people were still on an emotional high and talking about how well the forum went, I was approached by a White male, a long-standing member of the AHRD. I had never been formally introduced to this individual, but rather than saying anything about the outcome of the forum, his opening comment to me was: "How did you come to be on this panel?" While this may seem an innocent question to some, I have experienced racism enough in my lifetime to recognize its face. What he really meant was, "What makes you worthy to be on this panel?" In addition to intellectual racism, Collin's (2019) outsider within characterization is befitting here. The outsider within is a border identity that directs attention to hierarchies of race. Black intellectuals are strangers among the dominant group of White intellectuals. At the same time, we are sought for our specialized knowledge when it serves the interest of Whites. But we are never truly welcomed into their group unless we are the token Black who fits their justification: I'm not a racist, I have a Black friend!

I coined the term *invite in* during my participation on the Career Development Town Hall Forum during the 2017 annual conference. But a strange thing happened. The phrase was taken from me, until I boldly reclaimed it. In fact, it was done so in an article submitted to *Advances in Developing Human Resources*. I politely informed the author(s) to acknowledge the originator of the phrase. How coincidental is it that the Editor in Chief reviews all articles before final acceptance!

Interest Convergence

I recall an incident during my service on the AHRD Board of Directors. I was called out by name in a meeting by a White woman and challenged for offering my position on a topic (one might even say my vision for a strategic change). This was after parameters for a safe and brave place had been established. Not only was this a humiliating experience, but it was also demeaning because I was addressed in 3rd person, as if I were not there. The non-supportive reaction of those in attendance (by their silence) added to my humiliation. The silence was surprising, but nonetheless revealing because this group had been built up as being a supportive community.

I was challenged and chastised for taking a position that was not that of this individual. Interest convergence holds the assumption that progress for Blacks is prevented when goals are not consistent with those of Whites (Bell, 1980). Moreover, interest convergence emphasizes that racial equality and equity for Blacks will be pursued when these goals converge with the interests, needs, and expectations of Whites (Milner, 2008). A lesson learned for me was that there are no safe spaces for having conversations when interest convergence allows Whites to employ a double standard.

Another incident stems from my role as the first Black Editor in Chief of an HRD journal. My everyday reality of living Black prepared me to encounter racism in this role, and I wondered how racism would show its face. Editors have broad discretion in determining fit as well as need for a proposed manuscript or a proposed special issue as was this specific situation. When I turned down a proposal presented by two White individuals (I even met with them to deliver and explain my decision), I was reported to the AHRD Board. Rather than accepting my role as decision-maker, one of the complainants thought to achieve their purpose by having someone in a position of power (and White like them) confront me about my decision. Surely, my role as journal Editor would be rendered powerless by Whiteness and I would retract my decision! Not one to pull the race card, as Whites often accuse Blacks of doing to hide their prejudice and racist intent (Bloch et al., 2020), my lived experiences have taught me to recognize racist actions for what they are. So, I counter with: why do Whites pull the privilege card? Interest convergence explains how Whites stick up for Whites in situations involving the other (Picca & Feagin, 2020; Sleeter, 1994).

A CALL TO ACTION

The moral dilemma for the field of HRD and its representative agents is having the courage to call out racism—for it is not possible to work against something that has not been called by name (Byrd, 2018). However, answering the call to take a stand against racism goes beyond merely recognition and acknowledgment; it requires a willingness to be a part of new conversations. Racism is affective and traumatizing. It counters principles of learning,

growth, and development by which the field of HRD is grounded. As a representing body, if the AHRD is the people-centered community it claims to be, scholars, researchers, educators, and practitioners will not assume a race-neutral attitude. To assume such an attitude is in itself racist (Kendall, 2012). Few perpetrators who have inflicted acts of racial injustice will admit to being racist; particularly since doing so contradicts their self-image as good, moral human beings (Byrd, 2018; Sue, 2003). However, the *not racist* phenomenon contradicts highly publicized acts of racial injustice and even violence. The pronouncement of *not* racism and the insistence of a post-racist society that accompanies acts and events of extreme brutality against Blacks and other marginalized groups is an expression of a race-neutral mindset and is in itself a manifestation of racism (Lentin, 2018).

There are countless, phenomenal Black scholars whose intellectual and experiential knowledge in race-based research extends beyond HRD and they are impacting a much wider audience which increases their impact on social change. As commended by Scheurich and Young (1997), given that "scholars of color have successfully become epistemologically bi-cultural to survive as scholars is a testament to them – their strength, their courage, their perseverance, and their love of scholarship" (p. 9).

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a candid representation of racism, specifically anti-Black racism, and attempts to suppress its harsh reality. Racism is a tangled web that has been unfolding for centuries and continues through a strange, contradictory process of resistance (for liberation) and resistance (for silencing). The contradiction lies in ways that internalized values of White superiority *gets in the way* of being critically conscious of the deleterious effects of racism. The responses that organizations (including professional development organizations) and institutions are making against racism are promising. But these entities should use opportunities to move beyond performative rhetoric toward taking real action and driving real institutional change (Casellas-Connors & McCoy, 2022). The shifting mindset should then become race consciousness and anti-racism enacted.

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