Color Blind at Work: Hiring Disparities, Racial Ideology, and the Faith and Work Movement

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In the early 20th century, the Chicago Field Museum commissioned sculptor Malvina Hoffman to produce a landmark exhibit of human figures to be featured in the museum under the title *Races of Mankind*. Hoffman traveled the world in search of pure racial types, capturing these likenesses in bronze, and produced over one-hundred pieces that made their debut as a major installment in 1933. The principle sculpture of the collection, a piece called *Unity of Mankind,* was to depict a "Mongol, Negro, and Caucasian" (Kinkel, 2011), standing back to back around a triangular base, and supporting a transparent globe above their heads. The figures were to hold tools thought to characterize the kind of work their racial type represented. In the initial concept the African would hold a spear, the Asian would hold an axe, and the Caucasian would hold a book. Although the artist replaced the book with a sword in the final product, the episode was a clear manifestation of an ideology that located whites at the top of a racial hierarchy that is entangled with ideas about work. Similar ideas continue to influence vocational prospects for people of color, and the theological structures that either justify or condemn such inequities. The faith and work movement should attend to such theological structures and their entwinement with racialized ideas given the relevance of these issues to the vocational lives of millions of people.

This paper will review key touchpoints in the historical relationship of African Americans to their own labor before reviewing the literature of contemporary race-based hiring disparities. The suggestion will be made that these hiring disparities are continuous with historical experiences of work exploitation and exclusion: Racial mindsets associated with historical experiences of labor exploitation, internalized generationally by majority and minority groups, and institutionalized into societal norms, currently influence racial hiring disparities.

After introducing and briefly defining the Faith and Work Movement, this paper will conclude with a discussion about how the faith and work movement (FWM) can begin seeing and addressing the racial ideologies that undergird racial hiring disparities and other racialized experiences of work.

Historical Touchpoints

This section includes a short review of historical experiences of work by African Americans, seeking to highlight one thread of the intimate connections between race and work in U.S. history. The review will briefly touch on slavery, the origin of mass incarceration and convict leasing, the Jim Crowe era, and the Great Migration.

In his book, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, Klein (2010) highlights a basic point: The Atlantic slave trade and the institution of slavery in the United States had its origin and raison d'etre in business interests and was intimately linked to the labor potential of enslaved people. Northern European colonial powers did not have the infusion of funding the Iberians received by extracting gold from the colonies in South and Central America, but at an early inflection point, they had sugar in the Caribbean and furs in the Great Lakes, along with an attendant need for labor. Other traditional sources of semi-free or slave labor were drying up under Turkish rule in the east; thus, Africa became the most convenient source for cheap labor (Klein, 2010). The ensuing sale of roughly 10 million African people in the North American colonies and the United States over the following centuries was for the sake of exploiting their labor capacity.

While questions about African-American work and social status have been discussed continuously in the United States, they came up in pointed fashion in the years after emancipation. W.E.B. DuBois took issue with Booker T. Washington regarding the best course for the recently emancipated Black population. Washington proposed that Black Americans be

educated in trade schools and accept a supporting role in society. For this, he was willing to let go of aspirations for any kind of higher education for Blacks in the U.S. (DuBois, 1903). DuBois saw this as an unacceptable compromise and wanted to see talented Blacks free to receive a liberal arts education and join the leadership class of the country (DuBois, 1903). This conflict of perspectives has threaded its way through ensuing decades and has contemporary iterations.

In contrast to the standard textbook narrative that slavery ended in 1865 with the defeat of the Confederacy and the passage of the 13th Amendment, Douglas Blackmon suggests an alternative understanding in his book *Slavery by Another Name* (2008). After the Civil War, Southern states passed a series of sweeping laws now called the Black Codes. These codes, modeled on antebellum slave codes that restricted freed Blacks, created the legal pretext for arresting Blacks en masse, especially the prominent and broad vagrancy laws allowing officers to arrest blacks for minor infractions and to induct them into forced labor schemes (Blackmon, 2008). This was the beginning of the convict leasing system in which prisoners were rented to corporations and plantations to work without pay. Blackmon structures his book around a particular case in which Black prisoners were leased to the U.S. Steel Corporation to labor in coal mines in the early 20th century. Given the preponderance of former slaves forced to work for no pay, it is this system that Blackmon characterizes as *slavery by another name*. Convict leasing practices persisted broadly until World War II. As Michelle Alexander has demonstrated, mass incarceration of Blacks in the U.S. has increased dramatically since then (Alexander, 2012).

The 20th century also saw one of the largest, most rapid internal migrations in history, work was a key factor. The Great Migration took place from roughly 1915 to 1970—6 million Black Americans moved from the South to the industrial Midwest, East, and West; Chicago and

Philadelphia were among the primary destinations (Wilkerson, 2010). Repelled from the south

by adversely racist communities characterized by extreme segregation, Jim Crow laws, and the

terror of lynching, and attracted by the prospect of better work elsewhere (there were labor

shortages in northern factories as men left for WWI), Blacks moved en masse (Wilkerson, 2010).

In the early 20th century, 90% of African Americans lived in the south. By the end of the Great

Migration, only half of them remained there. It is by this migration that Blacks, who had largely

been a rural population before the 20th century, became an urban population as they moved to

cities where they could find work in factories (Wilkerson, 2010).

It would seem as though the relationship between African Americans and their own work

has been continuously mediated by exploitation of various kinds and by the legacies of prior

exploitations. The next section will suggest the possibility that that has not changed. Were there

space in this paper, there would be other historical narratives to tell about Asian, Latino, Native

American, and European groups as well, each of which would include work or the exploitation

of work as a core theme.

Contemporary Hiring Disparities

Race-based hiring disparities in the United States have been studied extensively over the

course of multiple decades. Studies appeared in the 1980's (Collins 1989; Dipboye 1982; Shelton

1987), and have continued more recently as well (Cruz, 2016; Darolia et al., 2016). While a

variety of approaches have been taken, the present review will focus especially on what are

called *employment audits*, an experimental approach that compares call-back rates between

racially distinctive job applicants. These audits can include non-face-to-face formats, typically

involving fictional resumes with stereotypically white names and stereotypically Black names. In

one noted study of this type, the names Emily and Greg were used to signify white applicants

and Jamal and Lakisha to signify Black applicants (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). Another study used last names in a similar fashion—Washington and Jefferson to designate Black applicants, Anderson and Thompson white applicants, and Hernandez and Garcia Hispanic applicants (Darolia et al. 2016). Audit studies can also be conducted in a face-to-face mode—this approach is often typified in the use of paired research assistants, one white, the other a member of a racial minority group, who pose as job applicants in live interviews (e.g. Pager, 2009).

This experimental literature speaks to diverse contexts, both to occupations/industries and to unique racial experiences. The experiments included in this review studied hiring across a variety of occupations: sales, administrative support, clerical, customer service, and professional/technical—and industries: service, retail, wholesale, finance, and transportation. Although this literature attends to multiple races when taken as a whole, these studies often focus on a particular race. Bendick, for example, focuses on Hispanics in one study and Blacks in another study (Bendick et al. 1991; Bendick, Jackson, and Reinoso 1994).

Virtually all of this literature reveals race-based disparities at the point of hire, although the degree of disparity differs across geography and industry. In one study, Hispanic applicants received job offers at 54% the rate of equally qualified white applicants in the fine-dining industry in New York (Bendick, Rodriguez, and Jayaraman 2010). In another, white applicants received one-and-a-half times the callbacks as Blacks in sales and clerical industries in Boston and Chicago (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). In another study, resumes were sent in response to 468 job advertisements in the Washington Post and local newspapers in the suburbs (Bendick, 1991). Two applications were submitted for each vacancy, one Anglo and one Latino. To eliminate ambiguity of any results that suggested discrimination, Latinos were given slightly stronger qualifications (60 wpm vs. 45 wpm typing for example). College seniors were selected

and trained to pose as applicants. Out of the initial interviews by phone (282 tests), 64.9% of

Anglos were invited to the next stage vs. 48.6% of Latinos. In another study that tested four

applicant profiles—Black with criminal record, Black without criminal record, white with

criminal record, and white without criminal record—the black applicant without a criminal

record had a lower callback rate than did the white applicant with a criminal record (Pager,

2009).

Table 1 - Audit study in Milwaukee, Pager, 2009; all figures are statistically significant (p<.01)

Applicant profile	Callback rate
Black applicant with criminal record	5%
Black applicant without criminal record	14%
White applicant with criminal record	17%
White applicant without criminal record	34%

While this audit literature is robust in general, it is thin in some places. Virtually all of

these studies focus on urban centers with a little attention to suburbs (articles cited in this review

focused on cities such as Boston, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and Washington D.C.).

While Black and Hispanic populations are well represented in this literature, there is little

attention given to Asian-American, Native-American, and other populations. Finally, this

literature speaks most forcefully to early-stage jobs, less so to senior level job markets where

dynamics may or may not be similar.

These studies leave very little room for interpretive discretion—these disparities arise

from trends in the choices hiring managers make about which applications to advance and which

to pass over. Notice that these studies do not say anything about why this discrimination exists.

They do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that hiring managers are intentional racists, for

example. But they do leave the fact of racial discrimination lying on the table for all to see.

The existence of hiring disparities suggests that the historical legacy of disenfranchisement of racial minorities in the workplace is not over, and of course hiring is only one dimension of contemporary employment—other elements that could also be racialized include compensation, performance evaluation, promotion, training and development, and termination.

Racial Ideology as Theology

The historical relationship of Black Americans to work has been mediated by the violent, often legal exploitation of their bodies for labor. This oppressive and dysfunctional relationship can be traced through the history of slavery, early and ongoing mass incarceration paired with convict leasing, and sharecropping. These structures were attended by racial ideas and mindsets that cast Blacks as inferior, but useful for certain kinds of labor, ideas that, although various in form and mostly implicit, persist today and manifest, inter alia, in racial hiring disparities. Theologies of various times have been intertwined with these racial ideologies of work to varying degrees.

In his book on the evolution of racial ideology in the West, Jennings argues that the "Christian imagination" received into itself the racial ideas attendant to empire, discovery, and conquest through its intimate connections to these social structures. The same insight—that theology and social structures are intertwined, and that theology often follows social interests— emerges clearly from other sources as well. In his book, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (2006), Noll highlights the enmeshed nature of theology with the institution of slavery in the Antebellum South—certain theological projects provided divine cover and justification for the institution of slavery. Race and theology have continued to be intertwined in the United States since then. It was not long ago that Bob Jones University argued before the highest Court in the

country that its policy against interracial dating was scripturally mandated and theologically rooted (*Bob Jones University v United States,* 1982).

More recent forms of racial ideology that may influence contemporary Christian theologizing in the U.S. are multiple—Bonilla-Silva offers a helpful framework that captures a more implicit version of such ideology. In his book, *Racism Without Racists* (2014), Bonilla-Silva develops what he calls the four frames of color-blind racism. *Abstract liberalism*: Whites support equal opportunity for all individuals without recognizing or acknowledging that the primary problems are systemic, not individual. *Naturalization:* Racial problems are naturally occurring. Segregation is normal, not morally problematic. *Cultural racism*: The culture of racial minorities is inferior and therefore less conducive to economic and social success. *Minimization of racism*: Invalidates the present effects of racism in the lives of racial minorities. Racism is "a thing of the past." Dimensions of this color-blind racism may be apparent in an array of recognizable responses to hiring disparities including "I support opportunity for people of color in the labor market, but don't acknowledge widespread, systemic discrimination" (abstract liberalism); "Self-segregation is natural, so it is probably ok that racial minorities are underrepresented in my company" (naturalization); "Minorities don't tend to get hired in our company because they don't fit the culture" (cultural racism); and "Racism is isolated to rare individual cases" (minimization of racism).

The Faith and Work Movement

There is a loose Christian network of organizations and individuals, mostly in the United States, known as the faith and work movement (FWM) to its members and many of its observers. This network extends beyond the U.S. as well, but this paper will focus on the domestic context. This movement includes organizations with various purposes such as education, production of

resources, and hosting conferences including such organizations as Made to Flourish, Oikonomia Network, Redeemer Center for Faith and Work, Denver Institute for Faith and Work, Mockler Center, Center for Faith and Work at LeTourneau University, Center for Integrity in Business, Theology of Work Project, De Pree Center, Faith and Work Chicago, Denver Institute for Faith & Work, Acton Institute, Nashville Institute for Faith and Work, Center for Transformational Churches, Pittsburg Leadership Foundation, and Opus. National conferences associated with this network include the Redeemer Center for Faith and Work conference, Karam Forum, Jubilee, and Faith at Work Summit. This list is not exhaustive, and the inclusion of the organizations in this list should not be taken to imply that the discussions in this paper about the movement in general applies to any given organization in particular. Leaders from the organizations listed above and other members of the network regularly attend these conferences. Major funders of many of these organizations include the Kern Family Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, and previously, the HE Butt Foundation, and a variety of major and minor individual donors and foundations.

After outlining what he considered to be earlier epochs of the FWM—the Social Gospel era (1890-1945) and the ministry of the laity era (1946-1985)—David Miller (2007) described the third wave, an epoch he called the *faith at work era*. According to Miller, this era, characterized by an increasing desire among Christian laity for integration of their faith with their work, began in the mid 1980s, "built momentum and size through the 1990s, and still continues today with no sign of receding" (Miller, p. 64, 2007). The network described above is certainly a significant part of the movement as Miller describes it, although Miller's scope occasionally ranges across religious expressions and includes a wider denominational scope. In seeking to explain the conditions that led to this era and its characteristic move toward

integration, Miller draws on Nash and McLennan (2001) to highlight the political drama of the

cold war and the increase in mergers and resultant workplace instability in the 1980s as well as

the demographic ascendancy of the Baby Boomers as drivers of the business economy in the

1980s and 1990s (Miller, 2007). He also cites Robert William Fogel, University of Chicago

economist in his explanation of the third wave. Fogel proposes, and Miller picks up on, the idea

that spiritual assets such as sense of purpose, spiritual enrichment, and self-esteem have

increased in importance relative to material assets (Fogel, 2000). According to Miller, this shift

underlies the increasing desire among religious populations for spiritual meaning in their work.

(Miller, p. 64, 2007).

In summarizing the raison d'etre for the FWM—"It is clear that that a quest for

integration is the organizing principle of the faith and work movement"—Miller (2007)

formulates a fourfold framework for better understanding the types of integration the movement

pursues: *ethics, experience, evangelism*, and *enrichment* as the key forms. The *ethics* quadrant

seeks to integrate faith and work at the level of personal virtue, ethical dealings, and economic

justice (Miller, p. 129, 2007). The *evangelism* quadrant integrates faith and work through

expressions of faith in the workplace (Miller, p. 132, 2007). The *experience* quadrant seeks

integration of faith with the substance of the work—it seeks to understand the work itself as

theologically significant (Miller, p. 135, 2007). Finally, the *enrichment* quadrant seeks to

integrate faith and work in the spiritual and interior life of individuals through such techniques as

prayer and meditation (Miller, p. 137, 2007)

The FWM in the United States is largely populated by white people including authors

who write faith and work books, guests who speak at faith and work conferences (although this

might be the most diverse dimension of the movement), directors and presidents who oversee

key faith and work organizations, leaders who sit on steering committees and advisory boards, and who plan national conferences, and indeed, the forefathers who mentored the current leaders of the movement. At the time of writing this paper, out of the 16 faith and work organizations listed above, 15 are led by whites, most of them males. The author of this paper took a tally of the books on sale in the exhibitor area at a recent faith and work conference: 97% of the books in the exhibitor area were authored by white, non-Hispanic writers, mostly male. At the time of writing, a faith and work organization noted above listed their "thought leaders" online: there was 1 person of color out of 10. A recent faith and work conference was planned by a 100% white leadership team. This, in a country where 39% of individuals are people of color and/or Hispanic and where roughly one third of businesses are owned by people of color (US Census, 2018).

Discussion

The above literature reviews suggest several critical problems for the FWM, problems of *credibility, reach*, and *substance*. The racial homogeneity of the FWM likely limits its *credibility* among minorities—given their sharply different historical experiences of work, minority communities may understandably conclude that "that message is not for me." The resulting lack of credibility with these communities may limit the *reach* of the FWM to a racially bounded audience. Of course, there is nothing wrong with an author, a speaker, a leader who is white, but the scenario before us is one of *nearly total white leadership and authorship*. Thus, the movement may be in a racial cul-de-sac, by whites and for whites. Such a situation is clearly an obstacle if the movement aspires to speak broadly relevant words of faith about work, a theme that is universally relevant but experienced radically differently by different populations. In order to begin addressing this problem, the FWM would need to consider how to include people

of color and other groups with different histories and frames of reference at every level of

leadership and influence in the movement, but that may not be easy. As a donor and foundation-

driven movement, gatekeepers who hire center directors are often not part of the movement

itself. People of color who represent disparate relationships to work would also need to be

interested in participating, and it is not clear that this is the case. The current ideological content

of the movement is likely a further impediment to diversification efforts.

Finally, the racial homogeneity of the FWM may limit the thematic *substance* of its

theology by limiting, from the outset, the scope of life experiences and existential concerns of its

leadership and authorship. Theology proceeds from the theological questions asked, and the

questions asked proceed from the experiences of the authors who ask them. It is quite natural

then, that a white-led movement would not attend to race-based hiring disparities: It is simply

not a pain point within the community. On the other hand, it *is* natural that the present iteration

of the FWM seeks to enhance the meaning of "secular work"—it arose from an existential crisis

of largely white Christians discovering the poverty of the sacred/secular divide (Miller, chapter

4, 2007). Thus, our theology is intimately connected to experiences that correspond to the white,

middle-class and upper middle-class experience or work in the United States. While this crisis

was and continues to be real and should prompt pastoral concern and active theological

reflection, as long as that is the basic problem all our theology is trying to solve, our theology

will be thematically limited. The sacred/secular crisis is not the only existential crisis people

experience with respect to their work: The historic and ongoing racial dimensions of the U.S.

workplace give rise to many other such personal crises that would be rich grounds for theological

attention including systemic marginalization, resentment, internalized inferiority, emotional

exhaustion, domestication, and dehumanization. Minorities can experience all of these

disproportionately to the overall population with respect to work (Pei, 2018). In addition to expanding the thematic scope of theology, a more diverse FWM would be better equipped to self-evaluate its current ideological content.

If one wants to think with any level of detail about theological resources to address minority experiences of work, one must largely read outside of the FWM. The movement should work hard to widen its scope of attention to include themes of racial advantage and disadvantage as well as the institutional structures, processes, and values that create the context for these discrepancies in the workplace. In the process of addressing race-and-work challenges, the FWM may enlarge its theological substance, its credibility, its audience, and its influence.

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